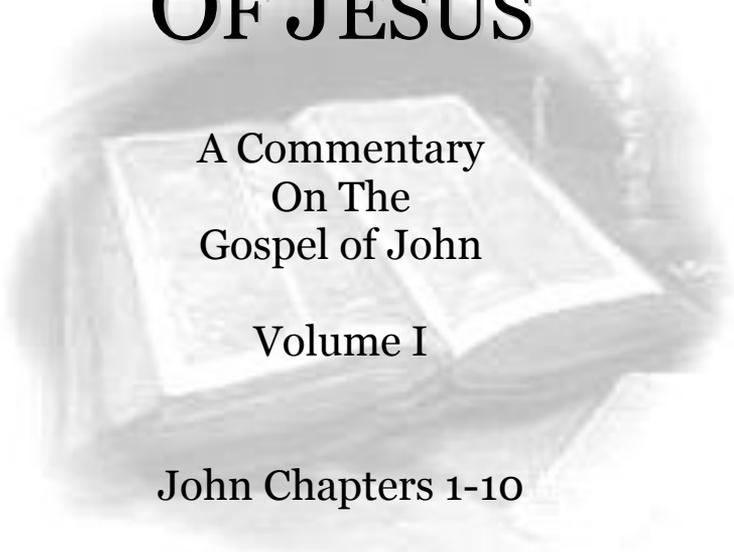


# THE MAGNIFICENCE OF JESUS



A Commentary  
On The  
Gospel of John

Volume I

John Chapters 1-10

by Tom Wacaster

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# FORWARD

A study of the Book of John reveals a variety of attitudes toward Jesus during His earthly ministry. In fact, in at least three separate passages, John records that “there was a division” among the people concerning the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people...So there was a division among the people because of him (John 7:12, 43).

Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet (John 9:16-17).

There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? (John 10:19-21).

As evidenced by these passages, some regarded Jesus as a deceiving, demon-possessed, Sabbath-breaking, sinner (John 7:20; 8:13, 48,52). Ultimately, the Jews rejected Jesus and sought His death on the grounds that He had broken the Sabbath, made Himself the Son of God, and made Himself equal with God (John 5:16-18; 7:1; 8:59; 10:31,33, 39; 11:49-53; 19:7). On the other hand, John writes of some who esteemed Jesus as a good, miracle-working man, who at least deserved a hearing. Remarkably, many of the chief rulers mentally acknowledged that Jesus was more than just a good man. They knew He was the Christ, yet they refused to confess it, because they did not want to incur the wrath of the Pharisees and suffer expulsion from the synagogue (John 12:42-43).

Broadly speaking, the Book of John depicts men and women on both ends of the spectrum concerning their views of Jesus of Nazareth. Some were certain that Jesus was an impostor, while others were absolutely certain that He was precisely Who He claimed to be. This brings us to a vital question: what evidence convinced certain ones that Jesus was the true Messiah, the very Christ of God? Moreover, why did not this evidence convince everyone that Jesus was the Son of God? Still again, what separates the Messianic claims of Jesus from others who claimed (and claim) the same status?

In this modern age, there is still “a division among the people” regarding the real identity of Jesus. Some dismiss Him as an imposter; others grant that He was a good man and influential teacher; there are a few who believe He was a good man, but not just a man. They see Him for Who He really was/is—the incarnate Christ, the Son of God.

How can we convince the modern mind that Jesus is the Christ? The Book of John was written for such a time as this. The things written by John were written so that men might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and by so believing have life through His name (John 20:30-31).

The book you hold in your hand, authored by brother Tom Wacaster, is a truly outstanding lens in seeing a high definition portrait of Jesus Christ as painted by John’s inspired pen. Brother Wacaster points out that John is often called the Gospel of Belief, and appropriately so. However, brother Wacaster also pinpoints the reason why some believed on Christ, and why some did not. Those who believed in Christ did so because they saw His Magnificence! The greatest blessing I received in reading brother Wacaster’s commentary on John is to see the magnificence of Jesus portrayed so vividly on the canvas of John’s gospel record.

If only we could get men and women today to behold truly the magnificence of Jesus, their belief in Him would surely follow! With the Bible in hand as your first and foremost source of Truth, and brother Wacaster’s skillful commentary as a rich depository of study material, you will be awed by the

magnificence of Jesus in much the same way as the characters with whom Jesus interacted in the Book of John.

1. **John the Immerser saw His magnificence.** John regarded Jesus as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36). In fact, John said, “And I saw, and bear record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

2. **Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael saw His magnificence.** Andrew was one of two men who heard John the Immerser’s testimony regarding Jesus. He went and found his brother Simon Peter, and said, “We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:40-41). Having been found by Jesus, Philip, in turn, found Nathanael and said, “We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). Nathanael did not hide his skepticism at such a claim. He retorted, “Can there be any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip invited Nathanael to come and see. After meeting Jesus, Nathanael was convinced, and said, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49).

3. **Simon Peter saw His magnificence.** When many of Christ’s disciples turned and walked no more with Him, He looked at the twelve and asked, “Will ye also go away?” (John 6:66-67). Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And **we believe and art sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**” (John 6:68-69, Emp. mine, BJC).

4. **Martha saw His magnificence.** After the death of her brother Lazarus, Martha heard that Jesus was coming, so she went out to meet Him. As they met, Jesus promised Martha that her brother would rise again. She said unto Him, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world” (John 11:27).

5. **The apostles saw His magnificence.** Jesus praised His disciples for believing that He “came out from God” (John 16:27). As Jesus prayed to the Father, He prayed for His disciples:

Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and **have known surely that I came out from thee**, and they have believed that thou didst send me (John 17:7-8, Emp. Mine, BJC).

According to Jesus, the disciples knew with surety that He proceeded from the Father. They had no doubt as to His Deity.

**Are you ready to see His magnificence?** Whether you are reading this book as one who has never believed in Christ as the Son of God, or as one who has believed in His Deity for decades, you are about to enter an awe-inspiring study. As you journey through John, with brother Wacaster as a ready and able tour guide of the text, get ready for some breathtaking vistas of the Magnificent Messiah!

--B. J. Clarke

# PREFACE

As I set out to produce a commentary on each one of the four “gospels,” one might wonder why I would start with the Gospel of John, as opposed to one of the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, or Luke). There are several reasons why I have selected to focus upon John’s account of the life of Christ at this point in my writing.

First, of all four accounts of the life of Christ, John’s appears to be the most chronological. Luke may run a close second, but there is convincing evidence that John’s account presents the events in the order in which they occurred. There remains in my own mind the question as to whether or not the opening verses of chapter 12 are chronologically correct, but we will address that in our study of that chapter. The same applies to a small portion of chapter 18.

Second, the purpose of John’s gospel is a major factor in my decision to focus upon the gospel of John rather than one of the synoptics. A number of commentators, not the least of whom is Merrill Tenney, consider this gospel as “The Gospel of Belief,” designed to produce faith in the hearts of those who read its contents. Seeing that the Holy Spirit saw fit to produce this biography of our Lord in order to bring men to faith in Christ as the Son of God (20:30-31) it is fitting that we should study this book. I will touch upon this particular feature of John as we develop the study of this wonderful book.

Third, I have had the opportunity to teach the gospel of John on various occasions in local work, preacher training schools, and in the mission field. Consequently I have accumulated a rather large amount of material on John. This two volume commentary is the fruit of many years of study.

Fourth, by developing a commentary on John first, I can avoid the issue of the “synoptic” problems and questions; something that I would have to address immediately were I to begin with Matthew, Mark or Luke. It is not that I want to avoid the questions surrounding those three gospels; it is rather that I

believe a good working knowledge of John will help in dealing with the so-called problems of the synoptics.

Fifth, the sheer beauty of the book of John compels me to produce this volume of work. I like the book of John. This does not mean that I “dislike” any of the other gospel accounts, but were someone to ask me to teach a class on only one of the gospel accounts, it would have to be the book of John. I have often stated, when teaching any book of the Bible, that “this is my favorite book.” I often feel that way because at the moment I am studying or teaching any particular book, it is at that time, and for the purpose for which the book was written, my favorite.

The title of this book, *The Magnificence of Jesus: A Commentary On The Book of John*, reflects what I want to accomplish in this commentary. While John is certainly the “Gospel of Belief” (as Tenney calls it), it is much more than that. This biography of our Lord exalts Jesus Christ in a very unique way. If I can help you to have a greater appreciation by our study of John, and magnify our Lord in the process, then I feel that I will have accomplished my purpose in writing this commentary.

By now you have noticed that this little book is only the first volume in my two volume set. Each volume will be in excess of 450 pages.

On a side note, the passage quotes in this commentary are from the American Standard Version of 1901. Occasionally I may give the KJV rendering, or a more modern English version, but I have found the ASV to be the most accurate of any English translation.

I hope you benefit from the material that follows. If it gives just one person a better understanding of this wonderful book of John, it will have been worth the time, effort and cost of producing this volume.

Tom Wacaster

## DEDICATION

“If a man seeketh the office of a bishop...” So writes Paul the apostle (1 Timothy 3:1). As a small boy, I can remember wondering why in the world anyone would “desire the office of a bishop.” What would motivate a man to serve in one of the most thankless positions imaginable? Why would anyone be willing to submit themselves to the criticism, ridicule, and rigorous demands placed upon someone serving in such a capacity as that of an elder in the Lord’s church? As the years have come and gone, I have come to understand why! And oh, how that understanding has greatly increased my appreciation for each and every elder who serves faithfully in that God-given role for which they have volunteered their services!

I will readily admit that there are a number of men who have served as elders who should never have been placed in that position. In the words of Jude, “The Lord rebuke thee.” But the failure of some to live up to their spiritual obligations is no reflection upon those great and godly men who are diligent in their responsibilities. To these men, we offer our thanks! Godly elders are men who serve in humility and sincerity; men who are willing to go out and search for the sheep that have gone astray; men who love the souls of others, and who are willing to provide leadership in an age of apathy and indifference; men who have never won great recognition, but who continue to plod along, never complaining about the tremendous task that has been assigned to them; men who lovingly and gently continue to carry the load and watch the flock, lest one single soul should fail to make it to heaven; men who take seriously the admonition to “feed the flock of God” (Acts 20:28); men who courageously defend the flock against false teachers; men who take seriously the admonition of our Lord that the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven” are those who serve!

An elder is someone who “stands in the gap,” and offers his services for God and for his fellow Christian. He is someone who serves in humility and sincerity. Here is a man who has spent a lifetime developing the Christian virtues necessary to serve in the greatest work this side of heaven. No wonder the Holy Spirit

directed Paul to tell us that those who “seek the office of a bishop...desireth a good work” (emphasis mine, TW).

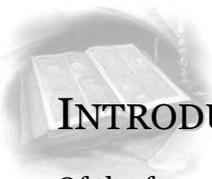
For the past four years I have had the distinct privilege of laboring with one of the finest elderships of my 40 plus years of preaching. It is to these men that I dedicate this book. Thank you Dan Flournoy, Bryan Henderson, Kevin Bielby and Francis Farrar for your labor in the Lord.

Tom Wacaster

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## INTRODUCTION

Of the four gospel accounts, this one sets forth the magnificence of Jesus in par excellence fashion. When the unnamed Greeks approached Philip with the request, “Sir, we would see Jesus,” that desire on their part was conveyed to the Lord. Jesus’ response is most significant: “And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified” (John 12:20-23). While some have seen in John a gospel of belief, it is also a gospel in which Jesus is magnified. It is this magnificence of Jesus, so beautifully presented by the apostle John, that compels us to believe; and no other book displays the magnificence of Jesus better than the gospel of John. Reaching back into the recesses of eternity, John begins with a description of our Lord’s pre-incarnate state. Focusing on only a handful of miracles, and some selected but stately discourses of our Lord, the apostle next shows us the magnificence of Jesus’ earthly life. Every word in every chapter is presented in such a fashion that, had we been present with those Greeks we, too, would have cried out, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” John brings his account to a close in a magnificent fashion when he tells us, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written” (21:25). What other man, past or present, could come close to demanding the respect of so many, while being despised by others? Volumes have been written on the famous and the infamous of earthly men, but eventually all that could possibly be written about any man, whether good or bad, would not come close to the volumes that would be and could be written about Christ if we were to be told of all that He has taught and done. John selects only a few instances, a few discourses, a few miracles, a few days out of His thirty-three year life, a few choice people with whom Jesus came in contact, and he presents a compact, concise, and clear biography of our Lord; and all of this is but a small fraction of all that Jesus accomplished in His life. Yes, dear reader, this gospel presents the “*magnificence of Jesus*,” and because of our Lord’s magnificence, we are asked, yea we are compelled to believe.

So far as the sheer volume of printed material on the book of John, it is unequalled, with perhaps the exception of the book of

Revelation. My own personal study of John - along with the help I have derived from the dozen or more commentaries I have in my library - has been a journey of humility and enlightenment. Having had the opportunity to teach this book in preacher training schools, in local work, and on the mission field, I get a small glimmer of how Moses must have felt when he was told, "You are standing on holy ground." There is something different about John's gospel. It has a form peculiar to itself. Its style marks it as one of the most unique documents of the 27 books of the New Testament. In its construction it is amazingly simple, consisting of a prologue, a series of scenes and discourses from the life of Christ, some details about the closing events of the Passion week with particular emphasis upon His farewell discourse to His disciples, a brief account of the arrest, trials, crucifixion, death and burial, two chapters containing information about His appearance to His disciples following His resurrection, and a beautiful epilogue. Throughout the twenty-one chapters Jesus is magnified in the eyes of John's readers. Any student who takes it upon himself to seriously study, and diligently apply the things contained herein cannot walk away from this book without some change occurring within his soul. After studying this book one will conclude as did the officers sent to arrest Jesus, "Never man so spake" (7:46b). A.T. Robertson paid the following tribute to what he calls, "The Greatest of Books":

The test of time has given the palm to the Fourth Gospel over all the books of the world. If Luke's Gospel is the most beautiful, John's Gospel is supreme in its height and depth and reach of thought. The picture of Christ here given is the one that has captured the mind and heart of mankind. It is not possible for a believer in Jesus Christ as the Son of God to be indifferent to modern critical views concerning the authorship and historical value of this Holy of Holies of the New Testament. Here we find The Heart of Christ (E. H. Sears), especially in chapters 14-17. If Jesus did not do or say these things, it is small consolation to be told that the book at least has symbolic and artistic value for the believer. The language of the Fourth Gospel has the clarity of a spring, but we are not able to sound the bottom of the depths. Lucidity and profundity challenge and

charm us as we linger over it (Robertson, ESword Module).

I'll not spend a lot of time on the background for others have plowed this ground and provided us with an abundance (perhaps an *over*-abundance) of technical information. It is important, however, to provide our readers with a little bit of information that might help in achieving the goal and purpose of this book.

The author of this biography of our Lord is John the Apostle. By comparing John 21:20 with 21:24 we are forced to conclude that this book was written by “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Information within the book itself supplies us with the following about the writer: (1) He must have been a Jew. He appears to have been familiar with the Old Testament as evidenced by 19:24, 28, 36, and 37. He was also familiar with the Jewish life-style as evidenced from 2:6, 3:25, 10:22, 18:28 and 19:31. F.F. Bruce pointed out, “The debates between Jesus and the religious leaders in Jerusalem on the finer points of Jewish legal interpretation, reproduced in the central chapters of the Gospel, could not well have been grasped or recorded in those days by an author who was not himself one of ‘the Jews’” (Bruce, 1). (2) The writer was a first-century Palestinian Jew. This would seem evident from his acquaintance with the first-century religious and political scene, and from his precise knowledge of Palestinian topography (1:28; 2:1; 3:23; 4:5, 6; 5:2, 3; 8:20; 9:7; 10:22, 23; 11:18; 18:1; 19:13, 17, 20). (3) The writer was an eyewitness of Christ. In 1:14 it is plainly said, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among *us*” (emphasis mine, TW). The writer includes himself in the group of those to whom the Lord acquainted Himself. In addition, the writer was present in nearly all of the scenes described and provides details with regard to characters, places, time, and manner of various events that could only have been provided by an eye witness (see 1:39; 2:6; 4:6; 6:9, 19; 12:1, 5, 12; 19:5, 39; 21:8, 11). (4) The writer was also an apostle. The apostles were the only eyewitnesses to certain events (cf. 2:11; 4:27; 11:54; 13:22, 28; 16:17; 20:25). (5) The writer was one of Jesus’ closest associates. Since he is identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), it is natural to seek him among the three comprising the inner circle - Peter, James, and John (cf. Mark 5:37; 9:2; 14:33). Peter is ruled

out as being the writer because he is customarily named in the Gospel. James is eliminated because he was martyred early, before the death of Herod Agrippa I in A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2). This leaves John. The fact that John, unlike the others, is not mentioned by name in the Gospel is further evidence of his probable authorship of this anonymous Gospel. External evidence is abundant in favor of John being the author of this gospel that bears his name. Ignatius, Polycarp, and Eusebius all quote from John. The Muratorian Canon near the close of the second century names John as the author of the Fourth Gospel. Till after the time of Origen no opposition to the Johannine authorship appears outside of Marcion and the Alogi. Robertson concluded, "No other New Testament book has stronger external evidence" (Robertson, ESword Module). We conclude then that the apostle John is the author.

Much could be said about John the apostle of Christ. John and his brother James are the "sons of Zebedee" (Mark 10:35), native Galileans and rugged fishermen (Mark 1:19, 20). Perhaps to designate their impetuous temperaments, Jesus surnamed them Boanerges, "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17; cf. Luke 9:54). Their mother, Salome, is generally agreed to be a relative of Mary the mother of Christ (John 19:25; Matt. 27:56, 61; Mark 15:40, 47). John appears to have come from a relatively well-to-do family. When he decided to follow Jesus, Mark tells us that he left his father "Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants" (Mark 1:20). Among the Twelve, James was the first to die, whereas John ministered the longest. It is believed that John died in exile on Patmos, from which he wrote Revelation (cf. Rev. 1:9), but specific evidence is lacking. John was active in the Jerusalem church (Acts 3:1; 8:14-17) and was ranked by Paul as one of its pillars (Gal. 2:9). Also, John was known to Caiaphas, the high priest (John 18:15). On the cross, Jesus commended His mother Mary to John's care, and from that time John took her into his own home (John 19:26-27), with whom, history informs us, she lived until her death, about 15 years after the crucifixion of Christ. From all this it would seem not improbable that John had owned some property, and was better known than any of the other apostles. James and John, along with Peter, were allowed special favors by the Lord. They were the only disciples who were permitted to witness the raising of the daughter of Jairus

(Mk. 5:37; Luke 8:51), and to accompany the Lord to the mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1, Mk. 9:2). These same three were permitted to be with the Lord at His sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46; Mk. 14:32-42). Of these three disciples, John is known as “that disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 19:26), and is said to have leaned upon the Lord’s bosom at the last supper (John 13:23), evidence of unusual friendship.

Tradition tells us that John spent the later part of his life in Asia Minor, mostly in Ephesus. We do know that at some point he was banished to Patmos “for the word of God” (Rev. 1:9), but the exact time of that banishment is not certain. It is commonly believed that John’s banishment occurred sometime during the reign of Domitian, but in our humble opinion there is more evidence to suggest it was at a much earlier date, possibly during the reign of Nero (see comments in my commentary, “John’s Vision on Patmos,” on the dating of Revelation). At some point following his banishment to Patmos, John was released and tradition says that he resided in Ephesus, and died at a ripe old age. Albert Barnes shared some very interesting anecdotes of John’s life, but there is no sufficient evidence to establish the reliability of what he provides:

Some have said that he was taken to Rome in a time of persecution and thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, and came out uninjured. It has been said also that, going into a bath one day at Ephesus, he perceived the presence of Cerinthus, who denied the divinity of the Saviour, and that he fled from him hastily, to express his disapproval of Cerinthus’ doctrine. It is also said, and of this there can be no doubt, that during his later years he was not able to make a long discourse. He was carried to the assembly, and was accustomed to say nothing but this: “Little children, love one another.” At length his disciples asked him why he always dwelt upon the same thing. He replied, “Because it is the Lord’s command; and if this is done, it is sufficient” (Barnes, ESword Module).

Scholars are divided as to the date of this gospel, and I came across arguments placing the writing anywhere from the early 40’s to the late 90’s in the first century. The most favored dates are somewhere between 80-95 A.D. Irenaeus, one of the church

“fathers,” believed that John wrote the Gospel while residing in Ephesus (66-98), though no definite year was given for its composition. I readily confess my inability to come to any definite conclusion as to the date of its writing, but I am prone to place it before, or close to the writing of the Apocalypse. Since I favor an early date for Revelation, likely the gospel account of John was written somewhere around 68 A.D. Other than that, I can offer no definite conclusion as to the date. In the final analysis, however, it is not important to a study of the book, and nothing hinges upon one’s knowledge of when it was written.

The theme of this Gospel is to set forth the unique nature of Christ as the Son of God, especially to an unbelieving, Gentile world. John’s presentation of our Lord was designed to produce faith in the good and honest heart. Jesus would be magnified as a result. The book is arranged logically, and very systematically. Chapter one serves as a “Prologue.” In that chapter, many of the minor themes which would be developed in the remainder of the book are set forth. Chapter two through eleven contain a number of “signs” which Jesus did during His earthly ministry. Chapters twelve through twenty record the Lord’s passion, and set forth in greater detail than the other Gospel writers the last few hours of Jesus’ life upon the earth. Chapter twenty-one is an epilogue.

There are a number of “minor themes” developed in the book. Some of John’s favorite words are “life,” “love,” “witness,” “believe,” “truth,” “know,” “light,” “darkness,” “world,” and “flesh.” Likewise, John’s Gospel encompasses a wide range of topics. Among the most prominent themes are the following:

*Christology:* Although the synoptics are full of the raw material of Christology, John displays a more intense conviction of the centrality of the Person of Christ. For him the activity of Christ is not understandable apart from the fact that He is the Messiah, the Son of God and God Himself. Note also the seven “I AM” statements of Christ: I AM the Bread of life, 6:35, 41, 48, 51; I AM the Light of the world, 8:12; 9:5; I AM the Door of the sheep, 10:7, 9; I AM the Good Shepherd, 10:11, 14; I AM the Resurrection and the Life, 11:25; I AM the way, the truth, and the life, 14:6; I AM the true Vine, 15:1, 5. By upholding Christ as

the divine Son of God, Jesus is magnified in the eyes of those who read and study John's account of the life of our Lord.

*Pneumatology:* John records more about the promise of the coming 'parakletos' (or "helper") than any of the other writers, and in this the apostle makes one of his most important contributions to the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

*Soteriology:* This particular theme focuses our attention on the redemptive work of Jesus. The history that John records is that of God's saving activity. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and to know Him is to have life eternal (cf. 1:29; 3:16; 17:3).

*Eschatology:* The "sign-miracles," of which there are seven (eight, counting the post-resurrection catch of fish in chapter 21), are an exposition of the nature of eternal life. But there are also themes like the judgment and the resurrection which are developed in this Gospel. The departure of Christ and the promised coming of the Holy Spirit tie together the present realization and the future anticipation of that eternal life a believer enjoys through faith in Christ.

*Truth and Error:* B.W. Johnson noted, "This deep disquisition upon the divine Word, almost too deep for human understanding, was penned by John on account of certain false philosophies which began to creep into and to trouble the church" (Johnson, 26). One of more prominent philosophies that troubled the church in the first two centuries was Gnosticism. This insidious doctrine originated in the fertile mind of a Jew from Alexandria by the name of Philo. His writings consisted mostly of speculation regarding the divine nature. He held that Deity could not come in contact with matter. This in turn led to a denial of the bodily incarnation of Deity in human form. John's record of the life of Christ attacks this false philosophy at its very core.

It is obvious that John's Gospel is somewhat different than those of Matthew, Mark and Luke. Most likely John wrote his account, as someone noted, to "provide a theological and philosophical

interpretation of the Person and work of Christ especially well-suited for a Hellenic audience” (entered into my personal notes; source not recorded). Note the following key differences between the synoptic Gospels and John: John’s content is ninety-two percent unique; therefore, there is a material difference. John has more discourse than narrative and is more philosophical in tone than the other writers. John has few parables and nothing about the demonic realm. John writes more on the Holy Spirit, and the deity of Jesus. John emphasizes events in Judea (south), while the others focus on what happens in Galilee (north). Therefore, there is a geographical difference. John emphasizes Jesus’ ministry in the city to religious intellectuals, while the other three writers emphasize His country ministry to the common people. John alone records for us three or four Passovers. He provides our only information concerning the approximate length of Christ’s public ministry. Therefore, there is a chronological difference (I pointed out earlier that I think John’s account is the most chronological of the four gospel accounts). John builds his Gospel on seven key miracles, and is more thematic in arrangement than are the first three Gospels. Therefore there is a structural difference. Another significant difference between John and the other Gospels has to do with the spiritual meanings attached to the events in Christ’s life. One example will suffice here. All four Gospels record the feeding of the 5,000, but only John gives the Great Sermon On The Bread of Life (John 6). That sermon serves to explain the meaning of the miracle. This may be why John used the word “sign” to refer to that miracle since a “sign” is a miracle that carries a message with it.

The purpose of John’s gospel is clearly stated in 20:30-31: “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.” Notice at least two important truths that emerge from this passage: (1) that Jesus performed many signs which are not recorded in this gospel; (2) that those signs were written for the purpose of producing belief in the hearts of its readers. Moving from unbelief to belief requires that the object of that belief be “lifted up” - magnified, if you will - in the hearts and minds of those who would come to

believe. “And even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). While those words definitely refer to the crucifixion of our Lord, they are symbolical of the exaltation of our Lord. The signs and discourses that John (i.e. the Holy Spirit) selected to record serve to magnify Jesus. The New Testament utilizes several words to refer to the miracles of the Lord: “signs,” “wonders,” and “miracles,” to name but a few. It is curious that John uses the word “sign” to the exclusion of the other words. “John presented the miracles not merely as supernatural deeds nor as manifestations of supernatural power, nor even as exceptions to the usual current of events, but definitely as material witnesses to underlying spiritual truth” (Tenney, 29).

It is also evident from these verses that John was not lacking in finding sufficient miracles to make his case. These signs were done in the presence of the disciples, and these men would serve as eye witnesses of the truthfulness of those things John [and the other inspired writers] recorded.

With the exception of the resurrection and the draught of fishes following our Lord’s resurrection, there are a total of seven miracles recorded by John. It is within each of these seven miracles that John effectively magnifies our Lord, thereby producing faith in the heart of the good and honest soul. Take, for example, the miracle of changing the water into wine as recorded in 2:1-11. Our Lord instantaneously produced that which nature normally takes months to produce, and in addition produced wine that was superior in quality. Having witnessed the miracles of Jesus, Mark tells us that multitudes were “beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well” (Mk. 7:37). As a carpenter, our Lord no doubt produced high quality work; as our Redeemer, Savior, and Lord, we are not left in doubt as to the quality of His work. His superior quality in all that He did magnified Him in the eyes of those with whom He came in contact during His earthly sojourn. The healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54) shows that the Lord could perform miracles over distance and space. He could as easily have healed from a great distance as when He was in the

presence of those whom He healed. Having now ascended to the right hand of the Father, our Lord's power to mediate is not diminished in the least because of distance. The feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15) demonstrates that quantity was no obstacle; His walking on water (6:15-21) demonstrates His power over natural law; the raising of Lazarus (11:1-44) His power over death. "These miracles are preeminently signs because they point to those aspects of Jesus' ministry in which He demonstrated His transcendent control over the factors of life with which man is unable to cope. Quality, space, time, quantity, natural law, misfortune, and death circumscribe humanity's world" (Tenney, 31). Seven miracles, each selected to convey a particular aspect of our Lord's power, but when combined provide us with an astonishing picture of the magnificence of Jesus.

This quite naturally leads us to another matter of consideration. Seeing that a "magnified" Christ leads to faith, it is important that we give at least some consideration to this word faith. The very fact that the design of John's gospel was to produce faith, it is thereby implied that those who read his gospel must possess the ability to believe. The first chapter of this gospel addresses the deity of our Lord. The remainder of the book is taken up with the evidence that proves that truth. It would seem, therefore, that the book would most naturally divide itself around the seven "signs" that John records. Faith, then, is not some blind leap in the dark! Biblical faith is established on credible evidence.

But why have faith in Christ? What is the desired end of the possession of faith? It is that men might come to have life, and more specifically, eternal life. This defines life in the truest sense of the word. Notice in this connection John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Hence, "belief" is the avenue that leads to the greater goal of life itself.

When these three statements, centering in the words signs, believe, and life, are put together, the author's key to the Gospel appears plainly. Around the signs are clustered the teachings which interpret these phenomena in terms of spiritual truth. In belief, and its opposite, unbelief, are seen the actions and reactions within the narration.

Through life and its opposite, death, is expressed the outcome of destiny determined by belief and unbelief ... These three words provide logical organization of the Fourth Gospel. In the signs appear the revelation of God; in belief, the reaction that they ought to provoke; in life, the result that belief brings (Tenney, 33).

Critics have long assailed the gospel of John. Every attempt has been made to discredit the authenticity of this book for the obvious reason that John, more than any other gospel account, sets forth the deity of Jesus in plain and straightforward language. Jesus is magnified because He is divine; discredit His deity, and He is nothing more than an ordinary human being, unworthy of being magnified in the least.

[T]he moment the character of the narratives and their exact statements are examined, the difficulties disappear: The thoughtful Bible student will discover throughout all four Gospel narratives a depth which baffles and defies complete comprehension, and yet which illumines, satisfies, and stirs to profound, lifelong meditation. The reports of all four evangelists are unanimous in showing the profound character of Jesus' teaching, but this is entirely harmonious with the others and merely indicates the independent character of his Gospel" (Foster, 178, 186).

If the reader desires a further study on the complexity of higher criticism with regard to the Gospel of John (or any of the other accounts), we recommend a study of Foster's work, "Studies in the Life of Christ."

A good outline will go a long way toward a proper understanding of any book. An outline is simply a "tool" that aids us in our study. I have taken a number of good outlines and pieced these together to come up with the following. Although I have included an outline here, I do not intend to strictly follow it in each of the different sections that follow. You might call this a "technical" outline. In keeping with the theme of this commentary I have selected to use as a lead in statement for each of the major points in the outline. "The Magnificence of Jesus as manifested in..."

I. His Pre-Incarnate State, 1:1-18

1. The Word and Deity 1:1, consisting of...
  - (1) His Eternality;
  - (2) His Essence;
2. The Word and Creation, 1:2-3, consisting of...
  - (1) Antiquity;
  - (2) Agency;
  - (3) Activity;
3. The Word, Life, and Light, 1:4-9;
  - (1) The Fount of Life
  - (2) The Effect of Life on Men
  - (3) The Power of Light
  - (4) The Scope of Light
4. The Word and the World, 1:10;
5. The Word and Men, 1:11-13;
6. The Word Incarnate, 1:14;
7. The Word Revealing, 1:16-18;

II. His Presentation by John, 1:19-51;

1. To the Jewish Leaders from Jerusalem (1:19-34).
2. To the First Disciples (1:35-51).

III. His Public Ministry, 2:1-12:50;

1. The First Sign: Changing water into wine At Cana, 2:1-12;
2. The Cleansing Of The Temple, 2:13-22;
3. Jesus At The Passover, 2:23-25;
4. The First Discourse: "The New Birth," 3:1-21;
5. Jesus and John, 3:22-36
6. Second Discourse: Conversation with the Samaritan Woman about the living water, 4:1-26;
7. The Harvest of Souls, 4:27-42;
8. The Second Sign: Healing of the Nobleman's Son in Galilee, 4:43-54
9. The Third Sign: Healing the Paralytic, 5:1-18;
10. The Third Discourse: The Credentials of the Son, 5:19-47;
11. The Fourth Sign: Feeding the 5,000, 6:1-15;
12. The Fifth Sign: Walking on the Water, 6:16-21;
13. The Fourth Discourse: The Bread of Life, 6:22-66;
  - (1) Preliminaries, 6:22-25;
  - (2) Food that endures, 6:26-51;

- (3) Eating the Flesh and Drinking the Blood, 6:52-59;
  - (4) Words of the Spirit and Life, 6:60-66;
  - 14. Peter's Confession, 6:67-21;
  - 15. Activity At the Feast Of Tabernacles, 7:1-52;
  - 16. The Woman Caught In Adultery, 7:53-8:11;
  - 17. The Fifth Discourse: The Light of the World, 8:12-59;
  - 18. The Sixth Sign: Giving Sight to the Blind, 9:1-41;
  - 19. The Sixth Discourse: The Good Shepherd, 10:1-42;
  - 20. The Seventh Sign: Raising Lazarus, 11:1-53;
  - 21. Seclusion Near Ephraim, 11:54-57;
  - 22. The Closing Events of the Public Ministry, 12:1-50;
    - (1) The Anointing by Mary of Bethany, 12:1-11;
    - (2) The Triumphal Entry, 12:12-19;
    - (3) Greeks Ask to See Jesus, 12:20-22;
    - (4) Glorification through Death, 12:23-36;
    - (5) A Prophecy, 12:37-43;
    - (6) Jesus, the Light of the World, 12:44-50;
- IV. His Private Ministry To The Disciples, 13:1-16:33
- 1. The Events In The Upper Room, 13:1-14:31;
    - (1) Washing The Disciples' Feet, 13:1-20;
    - (2) Inquiries and Instructions, 13:21-14:31;
  - 2. The Final Discourses, 15:1-16:33;
    - (1) On the Relationship of Jesus to the Disciples, 15:1-11;
    - (2) On the Relationship of Believers to Each Other, 15:12-17;
    - (3) On the Relationship of Believers to the World, 15:18-27;
    - (4) On the Coming and Work of the Holy Spirit, 16:1-33
    - (5) On His Death and Resurrection, 16:16-33;
- V. His Prayer in the Garden, 17:1-26;
- VI. His Passion and Resurrection, 18:1-20:10;
- 1. His Betrayal and Arrest, 18:1-14;
  - 2. The Trials and Denials of Peter, 18:15-19:16;
  - 3. His Crucifixion and Burial, 19:16-42;
  - 4. The Resurrection, 20:1-10;
- VII. His Post-resurrection Ministry, 20:11-21:23;
- 1. His Various Appearances, 20:11-29;

2. The Writer's Purpose, 20:30-31;
3. The Miraculous Catch of the Fishes, 21:1-14
4. The Restoration of Peter, 21:15-19;
5. The Role of the Beloved Disciple, 21:20-23

Conclusion, 21:24-25.

With these thoughts before us we begin our journey through this most wonderful account of the life of "Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

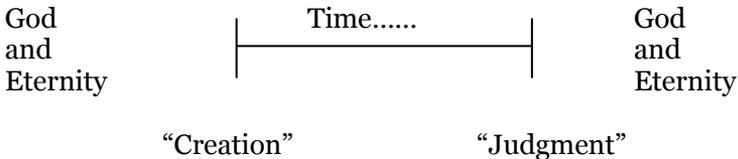
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# CHAPTER ONE

## “IN THE BEGINNING...”

*His pre-incarnate state, 1:1-18*

There is no better way to magnify Jesus than to focus on His pre-incarnate state. This, John does in remarkable fashion. The first movement in this section draws our attention to a time beyond time, “in the beginning,” when Deity stepped out of eternity and created all things that would, from that time forward, be subject to time itself. Foster pointed out that “the essential elements of time are a beginning and an ending. This is true of a second, a year, or a millennium. Time is that which is between” (Foster, 223). Imagine, if you will, a perpendicular line.



On the left side of this perpendicular line we put the words “God” and “Eternity.” We now draw a second perpendicular line parallel with the first and separated by approximately 4 inches. On the right side of this second perpendicular line we again write the words “God” and “Eternity.” We connect these two perpendicular lines with a horizontal line. The beginning of this horizontal line is the “creation,” and the end represents the “judgment day.” Time is that which exists *between* (to borrow a phrase from Foster) the creation and the judgment. In a bold and magnificent statement John introduces this gospel by drawing our attention to both the reality of eternity, and the very essence of time itself. Time, by its nature, is limited; God and Christ (the “Word”) by their very nature are NOT limited.

In the first eighteen verses of this chapter John introduces us to the Word. With but few exceptions, commentators see in these eighteen verses a prologue. I have no objection to the use of that word so long as we recognize that these verses are not some kind of a preface. The structure of this prologue is quite interesting. There are three ‘statements,’ each of which is either preceded or

followed by a parenthesis. Thus we have the following arrangement: Statement #1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is immediately followed by a parenthesis encompassing verses 2-13. Statement #2: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us: full of grace and truth” (1:14). In the middle of that statement we have the second parenthesis: “and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” (1:14b). Statement #3: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (1:18). This is preceded by the third parenthesis (1:15-17). Each of the three statements serves to magnify Jesus in a particular way. We see the magnificence of Jesus in His Deity, His incarnation, and His representation of the Father.

Particular emphasis is placed upon the divine nature of the “Word,” particularly His eternality and His essence. While the other Gospels present a biographical account of the life of Christ, John’s is more of a theological approach. We will take up each of the sub-points set forth in the Bird’s Eye View.

### The Word and Deity

1:1

~~ 1:1 ~~

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God”*

There are two things that John brings to our attention regarding the “Word”: His eternality and His essence. This first verse sets forth three statements regarding the Word:

“In the beginning was the Word”  
“And the Word was with God”  
“And the Word was God”

Within these three statements John brings to our attention the eternality and the essence of the Word. Volumes of material have been written on this first verse, leading some to think that any further investigation might be rather superfluous. There are a

number of things in the verse that immediately capture our attention. Let's take a closer look.

*"In the beginning"* - In the "beginning" of what? The simple language presupposes the non-eternality of matter. John does not seek to prove that matter is not eternal. His audience is made up primarily of Jews, familiar with the account of creation in Genesis 1:1 where Moses, like John, appealed to "the beginning." It is worth pointing out (as others have done) that Moses began with the beginning of the earth and looked forward into history, while John begins with the beginning and looks backward into eternity. While Moses started with the works of God in the creation, John begins with a reference to the One Who performed those works.

It should also be noted that "the beginning" does not refer to the beginning of any specific process, or some definite localized point of time, but to eternity that preceded all time. At whatever point in time that time had its beginning, the "Word" already existed. That being the case, we must conclude that this "Word" of whom John speaks in this chapter cannot be said to have come into being at any given moment; He did not "come upon the scene" at some point following the "beginning" of all things. He has always been. John "not only declares that the Word existed before creation began, but he repeats emphatically that the Word is the Creator of all. 'Creator' and 'created' are mutually exclusive terms" (Foster, 223). A clearer affirmation of the divine nature of the "Word" does not exist! In fact, John "exhausted every means of language to give clear and emphatic affirmation of the deity of Christ" (Foster, 225). In light of this astonishing affirmation it is rather incredible that some would attempt to uphold the foolish notion that Jesus was somehow "created."

*"was the Word"* - Emphasis is given by John to exactly when the Word existed. The Word predates the "beginning," and is, therefore, eternal. The "Word" is Jesus (vs. 14). The "Word" suggests revelation and expression of an idea. Jesus is called the "Word" because He is the complete revelation of Deity (Col. 2:9, Heb. 1:1-3). But what is the purpose for which John (by inspiration we might add) referred to Jesus as "the Word"? A "word" is the means of communication between two parties. It is

an expression of what is on one's mind. J.B. Phillips renders the clause "At the beginning God expressed himself." But that rendering fails to capture the distinction between God and the Word that also appears in this passage. Bruce thinks that "if we understand logos in this prologue as 'word in action' we may begin to do it justice" (Bruce, 29). Admittedly, the "word of God" in the Old Testament often denotes God in action in creation, revelation and/or deliverance. But that does not seem to fit what John is saying here. Greek philosophy (and I don't for a moment think that John was somehow influenced by Greek philosophy) thought the word logos referred to the whole realm of thought, sort of an abstract for all that was concrete. It would be tempting to ponder this thought and provide some personal opinions, but we shall leave the "mystery" of our Lord's eternal nature to the ages to come, and be satisfied with what little bit of information we DO have available to us. As Johnson concluded, "There are mysteries belonging to the divine nature and to the relation between the Son and the Father that we have to wait for eternity to solve" (Johnson, ESword Module).

*"And the Word was with God"* - Literally, "the Word was before the face of God." This phrase has to do with the *personality* of the Word. The Greek preposition '*pros*' translated here by our English word "with," is the same one that is used in Mark 6:3, where the inhabitants of Nazareth expressed their astonishment about Jesus by saying, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?" [emphasis mine, TW]. This preposition implies association in the sense of free mingling with others of a community on terms of equality. When the apostle tells us that the "Word was with God," he was implying that Jesus was on an equal level with God the Father. The "Word" is not some "impersonal" principle, or "force," but is to be regarded as a living, intelligent, and active personality.

*"and the Word was God"* - The Greek properly rendered should read, "and God was the Word." No article appears before the '*theos*' ("God") thus showing that the Word is possessed of the essence or quality of Deity. Danta and Manty point out that the absence of the article here stresses quality rather than quantity. When the article is used, the emphasis is upon quantity and

individuality is stressed. When the article is absent, the emphasis is upon quality or nature. A better rendering would have been, “The Word is divine.” F.F. Bruce made a significant observation:

The fact that *theos* is the first word after the conjunction *kai* (‘and’) shows that the main emphasis of the clause lies on it. Had *theos* as well as *logos* been preceded by the article the meaning would have been that the Word was completely identical with God, which is impossible if the Word was also ‘with God.’ What is meant is that the Word shared the nature and being of God, or (to use a piece of modern jargon) was an extension of the personality of God. The NEB paraphrase ‘what God was, the Word was,’ brings out the meaning of the clause as successfully as a paraphrase can. John intends that the whole of his gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true, the book is blasphemous (Bruce, 31).

We were also impressed with G. Campbell Morgan’s comments on these matters:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Now that, as I have said, is not arresting to us, because our language is not inflected as is the Greek language. The tense in Greek in every case is the imperfect tense, and the imperfect tense suggests not something past, or something present, or something future; but something continuous. The word “was” there suggests a continuous state. “In the beginning was the Word,” a continuous fact; “and the Word was with God” continuously; “and the Word was God” constantly. The imperfect tense thus described an age existence which cannot be measured by what we call time. Time is merely the marking off of eternity, to help finite beings until they reach the glory of eternity. The verb as here employed, takes us into the realm of the timeless (Morgan, ESword Module).

The Word and Creation

1:2-3

In two verses the apostle John will stress the antiquity of the Word, point out His agency in the creation, and conclude with a reference to the full extent of the activity of the Word.

~~ 1:2 ~~

*“The same was in the beginning with God”*

*“The same was in the beginning with God”* - This statement re-emphasizes those things already recorded. The Word was “in the beginning” thus showing reference to time. The Word was “with God” thus showing association or relation. The Word “was God,” thus showing essence or being. But rather than being a mere reiteration of what was written in verse 1, John here states that the Word actually shared a place with God in the beginning of all things. It was precisely this equality with the Father that so enraged the Jews and led to their rejection of Jesus. Of course John is not the only apostle to set forth an argument for the Deity of Jesus. The New Testament abounds with the clear teaching of our Lord’s deity - see for example Philippians 2:5-8 and Colossians 1:14-17.

~~ 1:3 ~~

*“All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made”*

Not a single thing that exists came into being except through the “Word.” This truth is also affirmed in Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2. That He created all things leads logically to the conclusion that He Himself was not created, but eternal. Couple this with the fact that a Jew would know only the God of Genesis 1:2 as the Creator, and you have further evidence of the full deity of Jesus.

*“All things”* - The language involves each item individually considered rather than collectively. It would be better to say, “Every single thing that came into existence was through the agency of Jesus Christ.” All such things “were made,” that is they came into being or existence. According to the sources consulted,

the “tense of the verb (aorist) implies occurrence without relation to elapsed time, an event, not a process” (cf. Tenney, 65). The scriptures also point out that not only is Jesus the CREATOR of all things, but He continues to *sustain all things* (cf. Heb. 1:2-3, 1 Cor. 8:6).

“*and without him*” - That is, in His absence, what John is about to tell us simply could not occur. The first part of the verse stated the activity of Jesus from a positive viewpoint: “All things were made through him.” Here John states the same truth from a negative standpoint.

“*was not anything made that hath been made*” - Every single thing that is in existence was made through the agency of Christ; nothing is excluded and in the absence of His involvement nothing is included. The eternity of matter is thus refuted, and the deity of Jesus is upheld. If everything that has been “made” was “made” through the agency of Christ, then Jesus is not a created being and anyone teaching thus is a false teacher. It is incredible in the light of this verse that some religious groups still insist that Jesus is not divine, but simply a created being. Paraphrased, “And apart from him there came into being not one thing which has come into being and still exists” (Tenney, 66).

### The Word, Life, and Light

1:4-9

Not only did creative power adhere in the Word, but also light and life. The implications are incredible, for only within the divine nature can it be said that life and light exist to such a full and glorious extent as stated here by John. There are no less than four truths that are stressed in these verses: (1) The Word is the source of life - “in him was life” ; (2) the significance of life on men - “and the life was the light of men”; (3) the superiority of light over darkness” - “the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not”; (4) the scope of light” - “there was the true light which lighteth every man, coming into the world.”

~~ 1:4 ~~

*“In him was life; and the life was the light of men”*

*“In him was life”* - Whereas in verses 1-3, John addressed (1) the Word and Deity, and (2) the Word and Creation, here John speaks of (3) the Word and Life. There are two interesting words that are repeated often in the writings of John. One of these is “life.” It is in Jesus that life is given and sustained. It includes spiritual life, but is not limited to that. Jesus came to give an abundant life. There are some who are alive, but they are not “living” in the fullest sense of the word. “Life” as a noun occurs three dozen times in John’s account of the Gospel. Eleven times the word is associated with “eternal life.” It denotes more than mere existence. The truth that life was in the Word will be addressed more in detail in John 5:26. The point to be emphasized here (as well as John 5) is the fact that the Son shares this “self-existent life” with the Father and is thus capable of imparting that life to others.

The other word is “light.” Jesus leads men out of darkness into light. He dispels ignorance, superstition and leads men into the knowledge of God. Life is the consequence of “light.” It is no accident that God first created “light,” and then “life.” The source of light and life is “in him,” two key words that unlock the mystery of where men might find true happiness here and salvation in the hereafter.

*“the life was the light of men”* - Whatever there is in man that might be identified as noble - knowledge, integrity, intelligence, love for God and/or one’s fellow man, wisdom, purity, joy, and true happiness - finds its origin from the fountain of life itself - the Word. Remove the influence of Christ upon the lives of men and the result is a downward path into ungodliness. William McGuffey had something to say regarding this:

If you can induce a community to doubt the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures, to question the reality and obligations of religion; to hesitate, undeciding, whether there be any such thing as virtue or vice; whether there be an eternal state of retribution beyond the grave; or whether there be any such being as God; you have broken down the barriers of moral virtue, and hoisted the flood gates of immorality and crime. I need not say that when a people have once done this, they can no longer

exist as a tranquil and happy people. Avarice, perjury, ambition, and revenge would walk through the land, and render it more like the dwelling of savage beasts than the tranquil abode of civilized and Christianized men (source not recorded).

~~ 1:5 ~~

*“And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not”*

This verse may very well be one of the paramount verses of this book. The light that emanates from the Word is so powerful and profound that the darkness, with whatever power it might possess, cannot overcome that light. John wants us to know that the darkness, while attempting to extinguish the light, cannot overcome the light.

*“The light shineth in the darkness”* - The force of John’s argument can be illustrated with physical light. When light is brought into a dark room it shines - that is the nature of light! As a result the darkness is dispelled. The spiritual application is significant. If the light that emanates from the Word is to dispel the darkness of sin and corruption, it must be allowed to shine in all its purity. The light is made to shine, even in the midst of darkness, when the truth is preached. Those who are preachers of the Word must realize the importance of preaching the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. This is the only way that the light will dispel darkness and lead men to the light of life. Of particular interest is the fact that “shineth” translates the original word which is “linear present active indicative of *phaino*,” thus ‘the light keeps on giving light’” (Robertson, ESword Module). The “darkness” is in the darkness of the sinful world. Darkness is from *skotou*, kin to *skia* which is shadow. Notice 2 Peter 2:17 where the “blackness of darkness” is mentioned. Indeed, the world is filled with darkness. It is what McGarvey calls “an ignorant, benighted world” (McGarvey, ESword Module).

*“the darkness apprehended it not”* - The idea in the Greek is not that of comprehension but restraint or restriction. The American Standard Version uses the word “apprehended it not,” whereas

the King James Version translates it, “comprehended it not.” The word is second aorist active indicative meaning to lay hold of, to seize, to overwhelm, overpower. The same word occurs in John 12:35, and also in 1 Thessalonians 5:4. Thus, the light kept on shining in spite of the darkness that was worse than a proverbial London fog. The darkness did not, nor does it now, have the power to apprehend the light or in any way affect its brilliance. The sun will shine, but there are creatures that hide from the sunlight. By the same token, the light of Christ shines, but those who love darkness more than the light will actually hide from that light and choose to abide in darkness.

~~ 1:6~~

*“There came a man, sent from God, whose name was John”*

Verses 6-8 are a parenthetical statement introducing John as the forerunner of our Lord. Verse 9 is inseparably connected to verses 4 and 5 in that John gives a further description of this “light.” It is curious that John the Baptist is never referred to by the apostle John as “the Baptist” as he is in the three Synoptic Gospels. This does not cast a shadow on the apostle’s accuracy regarding people and places. For example, he takes care to distinguish “Judas not Iscariot,” from Judas Iscariot (14:22). So, why the absence of John’s identifying mark as “the Baptist”? The traditional explanation of the non-mention of any other John in the Gospel is that the only other John in Jesus’ circle, John the son of Zebedee, had a major responsibility for the production of the work. It is difficult to think of a better one.

*“There came a man”* - The author draws a sharp contrast between the “Word” and this “man, sent from God, whose name was John.” The “Word” is divine; the ‘baptist’ was human. The “Word” brought life and light to men; the ‘baptist,’ predicted by Isaiah and Malachi, was sent to prepare the way for the true light. Jesus is the origin and source of light; John could only testify concerning that light. Jesus is the true light; John merely a reflection of that light. “John came (*egeneto*) at a definite point in time in sharp contrast with the Word who evermore (*een*) was” (Woods, 26).

~~ 1:7 ~~

*“The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light, that all might believe through him”*

The role that John the Baptist played in the earthly ministry of Jesus was significant. In all three accounts of the Synoptic gospels the record of the life and ministry of Jesus are preceded by the work of John. It is not surprising, therefore, that this gospel account would place the information relative to John between the record of the incarnate state of our Lord and His earthly ministry, for that is precisely when the work of John took place.

*“The same came for witness, that he might bear witness of the light”* - John came as a witness for the express purpose that he might bear witness of the light. His work, as declared by Malachi, was to be a messenger to go before the Lord (Mal. 3:1). Malachi expressly states that John would be sent by God, and for the purpose of somehow preparing the way for the Lord. He came to prepare the minds of the people to receive the Lord (Matt. 3:1-12) and to reform their lives in expectation of the arrival of the Messiah (Luke 3:1-14). John is thus identified as a “witness” - and what he did was to “bear witness.” It is important, I think, to point out that the only reason why John qualified as a witness was because he was commissioned by God for this purpose. He was God’s spokesman, as were many of the prophets of old, and like those prophets of old, he was “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21) in the fulfillment of his mission.

A second sense in which our English word “witness” might be used is to describe one who had first-hand experience in a matter and is thereby duly qualified to “testify” in a court of law concerning a matter. There is no way that modern day Christians can “witness” for the simple reason that they were not there nor did they see it first-hand. I cannot “testify” of the resurrection of Christ any more than I can “testify” in a court of law about some incident that I read about in the newspaper though not there personally. The Greek word translated “witness” (*marturia*) means “the office committed to the prophets of testifying concerning future events; what one testifies before a judge” (Thayer, ESword Module). The point to be stressed here is that

no man can be a “witness of Christ” in the absence of inspiration. It would be far better to restate those things set forth in God’s word by those men who were indeed “witnesses” in the true sense of the word (cf. Acts 5:32; Acts 1:8).

*“that all might believe through him”* - Though not stated, there is something about the “witness” of John that would cause men to believe. That “something” would be the evidence provided by inspired men, including but not limited to the ‘baptist’s’ testimony. Over the centuries men have recognized the unique character of our Lord. Jesus has been magnified by the preaching of the gospel, and because of our Lord’s magnificence, men have been drawn to Him. One impressive tribute to Jesus Christ was that by Napoleon Bonaparte:

Well then, I will tell you. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded great empires; but upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force! Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions will die for Him.... I think I understand something of human nature; and I tell you, all these were men, and I am a man: none else is like Him; Jesus Christ was more than man.... I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me.... but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present with the electric influence of my looks, my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them, I lighted up the flame of self-devotion in their hearts.... Christ alone has succeeded in so raising the mind of man toward the unseen, that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space. Across a chasm of eighteen hundred years, Jesus Christ makes a demand which is beyond all others to satisfy; He asks for that which a philosopher may seek in vain at the hands of his friends, or a father of his children, or a bride of her spouse, or a man of his brother. He asks for the human heart; He will have it entirely to Himself. He demands it unconditionally; and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of man, with all its powers and faculties, becomes an annexation to the empire of Christ. All who sincerely believe in Him, experience that remarkable, supernatural

love toward Him. This phenomenon is accountable; it is altogether beyond the scope of man's creative powers. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish this sacred flame; time can neither exhaust its strength nor put a limit to its range. This is it, which strikes me most; I have often thought of it. This is it which proves to me quite convincingly the Divinity of Jesus Christ (Napoleon Bonaparte, as quoted by Phillip Schaff, *History of Christianity*, ESword Module).

~~ 1:8 ~~

*“He was not the light, but came that he might bear witness of the light”*

*“He was not the light”* - The complete subservience of John to the Christ is stressed throughout this brief record about the ‘baptist.’ John was not the light, he was not the Messiah, and he most certainly was not the builder of the church.

*“but came that he might bear witness of the light”* - The apostle continues to remind his audience that John only came to bear witness of the light, i.e. the Christ.

~~ 1:9 ~~

*“There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world”*

The apostle took a brief look at John the Baptist, and now he returns his thoughts to the Word.

*“There was the true light”* - Christ is “true” as opposed to that which is false or that which merely reflected the light. The word “true” (*alethinos*) “denotes true in the sense of real, ideal, genuine” (Vine, Volume IV, 158). John’s claim that Christ is the “true light” is a theme that will be developed in more detail in his gospel.

This verse has sometimes been cited as proof of some “inner enlightenment” by the Holy Spirit for all believers, separate and apart from the word. This passage only states the FACT of that enlightenment, and not the MANNER in which that

enlightenment is achieved. Romans 10:17 teaches us that faith comes from hearing the word of God. John himself tells us that these things are “written” to produce faith (John 20:30-31).

*“which lighteth every man coming into the world”* - The difficulty here is exactly what noun this modifying phrase describes. Was John saying, “the true light is coming into the world”? Or was he saying, “every man, coming into the world.” The original will allow for either, so the meaning must be determined largely from the context. The American Standard has placed commas so as to leave the impression that it is the “true light” that is coming into the world. It would be superfluous to say “every man coming into the world,” since it is a given fact that the “true light” was, indeed intended for every man. The first position seems more reasonable, and is more in keeping with what follows in the next few verses.

### The Word and the World

1:10

Whereas this verse addresses the advent of our Lord, verses 11-13 will focus on the reception and/or rejection by the world.

~~ 1:10 ~~

*“He was in the world, and the world was made through him,  
and the world knew him not”*

*“He was in the world”* - The scope of John’s statement deserves at least a passing comment. When John says, “He was in the world,” was John limiting that to the 33 year earthly ministry of our Lord? Or was John seeking to convey the idea that from the time of creation He was in the world? If we take the former position, the “world” who “knew him not” would be the nation of Israel. But if we take the second position, then John was declaring that the whole of humanity, for all practical purposes, failed to keep the knowledge of God in their minds and hearts, Israel included. This would correspond to Paul’s affirmation in Romans 1:18-32 that the whole of humanity was ignorant of God’s purposes and plans. If, however, the reference is to the incarnation of Christ, then this is John’s way of saying our Lord lived in the world and made it His home for 33 years. The phrase

would then be synonymous with the incarnation of our Lord. The more reasonable, and perhaps simpler position is that John is speaking of the Lord's incarnation and earthly sojourn. The next verse seems to support this conclusion.

*"the world"* - This word appears three times in the verse. The first two times are obviously a reference to the physical world, this earthly sphere. It was not this "physical world" that "knew him not," for obvious reasons; hence the "world" that "knew him not" speaks of the inhabitants of the world.

*"And the world was made through him"* - Our Lord descended into the very realm of His workmanship. He actually "entered into the framework of life and has taken an active part in it" (Tenney, 68). It is important to note that the world could not have been made BY Him unless He had been independent of it and prior to it. Hence, once again John implies the deity of our Lord.

*"The world knew him not"* - The world simply did not acknowledge him as Savior. Barnes noted that "the word *knew* is sometimes used in the sense of approving or loving" (Barnes, ESword Module). "And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). There were many of the Jews in that day who knew the Lord, but who refused to acknowledge Him as the Messiah and Savior of mankind.

### The Word and Men

1:11-13

John now turns his attention to the Word and MEN, and more specifically the nation of Israel. We will see the Word's RELATIONSHIP with men, the REJECTION on the part of some, and RECEPTION on the part of others.

~~ 1:11 ~~

*"He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not. "*

*“He came unto his own”* - The ASV footnote translates this, “He came unto his own things.” There is a distinction here in the original language that is not preserved in the translation. It may be thus expressed: “He came to his own land and his own people received him not.” The general consensus is that the apostle was focusing upon our Lord’s ministry to His own people, and that seems reasonable particularly in the context. Guy N. Woods pointed out a distinction between the first and second use of the words “his own.”

There is a distinction in the Greek text between ‘his own’ (*ta idia*) to which he came and ‘his own’ (*hoi idioi*) who rejected him. The former is neuter plural, rendered in the margin as ‘his own things,’ better perhaps ‘his own possessions, i.e., his own country. There, his own people - the Jews - received him not. The word ‘received’ in the phrase, ‘they that were his own received him not’ is translated from *‘paralabon,’* which denotes the idea of receiving that which has been handed down from another. The word not only conveys the idea of rejection, but a deliberate and contemptuous one, thus pointing out the chilling fact that the guilt of Israel in rejecting Christ is even greater than that of the rest of mankind which does not obey him. They not only refused salvation, they treated with contempt him who was their very own and who came to them for the express purpose of giving them deliverance (Woods, 29).

However expressed, the central idea is not difficult to grasp.

*“And they that were his own received him not”* - The idea here is that of REJECTION. Here the words “his own” speak of our Lord’s own people. “It conveys the idea that those who were His own peculiar people connected with His proper surroundings did not accept Him as they might logically be expected to do” (Tenney, 69). This REJECTION of Christ on the part of the Jews is one of the themes that runs throughout the book and is illustrated by the action of the Jews in contrast to others who received the Lord openly and willingly. Following close on the heels of the previous phrase, “he came unto his own,” the idea is that John, as the forerunner of Christ, presented Jesus to the

people of Israel, but they stoutly refused to accept Him as the Messiah.

~~ 1:12 ~~

*“But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name”*

The passage plainly states (1) some would receive Him, (2) such ones were granted “right” (or “power”), (3) such ones were granted “right” to “become children of God,” and (4) those who were granted such right or power are identified as “them that believe on his name.” Here is evidence that “believing” in and of itself does not make one a child of God; it only gives them the power to do so.

*“But as many as received him”* - Whereas the previous verse focused upon the rejection of Christ by the Jews, the idea here is the reception of Christ on the part of those who would follow that light. Here the original word is ‘*elabon*’ and has the idea of “taking something as one’s own possession.” Whereas some “received him not” in that they refused to take what was being presented to them, here were some who willingly “received him” into their lives. Reception is the acceptance of all the terms and conditions set forth by the Word. It includes a willingness to listen to and abide by His teaching.

*“to them gave he the right to become children of God”* - The word “power” (KJV), or “right” (ASV) is from ‘*exousian*’ and means right or privilege; liberty of action. One who believes that Jesus is the Son of God then has the privilege to follow through on his faith and by obedience to thus become a child of God. It should be pointed out that the Greek word translated “power” was used by Pilate when he asserted that he [Pilate] had the POWER to release or crucify our Lord (John 19:10). There is no way you can read this passage and conclude that those who had “received him” were already children of God; they merely had the power to become a child of God. The inevitable conclusion is that the word “believe” in this verse is inclusive. The prospect, at some point in time, comes to “receive” Christ. This is based upon some convincing argument or overwhelming evidence, which evidence an individual mentally and willfully accepts and acts

upon. Such a one then has the “power” to “become” a child of God. He is not yet a child of God; he only has the “power” to become such. The process by which he thus becomes a child of God is summed up in the words, “believe on his name.” To believe on the “name” of Christ is to believe on His authority, rest on His promises, and submit to His commands. Faith and trust in God opens the door to salvation and qualifies one to walk through that door into the Kingdom of God (Romans 6:3-5, James 2:24, etc.). Until he obeys, he is not blessed.

~~ 1:13 ~~

*“who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”*

*“who were born”* - Some of the ancient church fathers preferred a variance in the text which reads, “to him who was born,” making the entire verse a reference to Christ rather than those of whom John was speaking in the previous verse. The context will not allow the variant seeing that John is here further defining who is included in the group of those called “children of God.” Following proper rules of grammar, the antecedent of “who” is the “children of God.” John here introduces the new birth, and further explanation is given in the record of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in a subsequent chapter (John 3:1 ff).

*“not of blood”* - This would be the physical birth; that much is certain. Woods points out “blood in the Greek is plural, bloods, a reference, perhaps to the blood of both parents” (Woods, 30). Another position is that the apostle was talking about the long and illustrious genealogical line in which the Jews placed such importance. They supposed that it was proof of the favor of God to be descended from such an illustrious ancestry.

*“will of the flesh”* - This may be an allusion to the sexual drive. Barnes simply says, “not by natural generation.”

*“nor by the will of man”* - Barnes’ comments were concise:

This may refer, perhaps, to the will of man in adopting a child, as the former phrases do to the natural birth; and the design of using these three phrases may have been to

say that they became the children of God neither in virtue of their descent from illustrious parents like Abraham, nor by their natural birth, nor by being adopted by a pious man. None of the ways by which we become entitled to the privileges of children among men can give us a title to be called the sons of God. It is not by human power or agency that men become children of the Most High (Barnes, ESword Module).

The “new birth” is spiritual and is not experienced in the physical sense. More will be said on this subject in chapter three.

### The Word Incarnate

1:14-15

~~ 1:14 ~~

*“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth”*

This verse is the pivotal statement in the prologue. Having discussed the Word, John now turns his attention to how the “Word” came to dwell “in the world”? The answer is: through the Incarnation.” The recurrence of “the Word” in this fourteenth verse connects it directly with verses one and two. But while verses one and two speak of the eternal nature of the Word, and the relationship that the Word sustained with God, this verse focuses upon the relationship that the Word sustained with men.

*“And the Word became flesh”* - Here is the act of incarnation. God expressed Himself in human form (Philippians 2:5-8), and partook of the human nature with all of its limitations of space and time, along with the ailments associated with the flesh such as sickness, hunger, and suffering. Our English word “became” is from the Greek *egeneto*, and it describes an event occurring at a definite point in time. Please note the order that is emphatically set forth by the apostle: the “Word” - everlasting, “in the beginning,” and “with God,” at some point in time - “became flesh. This occurred when He was begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

Even the most casual of readers must be impressed with the logical and verbal connection between verse 1 and verse 14 of this remarkable chapter. The Word *was* (evermore existed) and *became* flesh (at a specific point in time) and dwelt among men. He who was “with” God became flesh and was with men during his sojourn on earth. Thus, he who was of the very nature of God became man in flesh without divesting himself of his divine nature. He simply took on human nature as well (Woods, 31-32).

The concept presented here is in keeping with other New Testament passages. “A body hast thou prepared for me” (Heb. 10:5). “As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same” (Heb. 2:14). The simple yet profound truth is, “Jesus is come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2). Other passages include the following:

“Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35)

“*and dwelt among us*” - John may have been addressing a popular doctrine late in the first century that Jesus did not literally come in the flesh; that He was a spiritual being, void of any real physical presence. That Jesus was human cannot be successfully denied without impugning the teaching and integrity

of the apostles and Jesus Himself. John makes it clear throughout his book that Jesus was, indeed, human. He noted that Jesus, on one occasion, was tired and thirsty (4:6-7), that He wept (11:35), that He could be troubled in His spirit (12:27, 13:21), and that He died (19:30). The word translated “dwelt among us” (*eskenosen*) literally means that Jesus “pitched His tent,” or “tabernacled among us.” We may never completely understand the dual nature of our Lord. Such things are beyond our comprehension. But because we cannot understand it, we need not reject it.

*“and we beheld his glory”* - John, along with Peter and James, enjoyed a much closer relationship to the Lord than the other apostles. They witnessed some miracles that the other nine did not witness and they alone were privileged to be with the Lord in the Mount of Transfiguration. It is likely that it was that moment on the Mount of Transfiguration to which John refers here (see Matt. 17:1-9 and Mark 9:2). The association of Peter, James and John with the Lord gave them an opportunity to question the Lord, watch Him perform a multitude of miracles, and listen to Him teach and preach. It is no wonder that John could say, “We beheld.” Our English word “beheld” means “observed.” Tenney pointed out that the verb “contains the root of the word ‘theater’ and connotes more than a casual glance. It involves a careful scrutiny of what is before one in order to understand its significance” (Tenney, 71). The original (*theamai*) means “to look closely at” (Thayer, *ESword Module*).

By this word John insists that in the human Jesus he beheld the Shekinah glory of God who was and is the Logos who existed before with God. By this plural John speaks for himself and all those who saw in Jesus what he did (Robertson, *Word Pictures*, *ESword Module*).

There was never any attempt on the part of Jesus, or His followers, to somehow isolate our Lord from open examination. That same openness is apparent in the New Testament. God never sought to conceal these matters.

*“the only begotten from the Father”* - In our estimation the ASV and KJV have properly translated the Greek. Our English words

translate the Greek word '*monogenes*,' of which Woods points out is "an adjective used here as a noun" (Woods, 32). Leon Morris claimed that the Greek word means nothing more than "only," or "unique." In this he, and others who think like he does, are wrong. Brother Woods called attention to the inconsistencies of so called scholars who deny this passage should read "only begotten son," while retaining the use of such language in their references to Jesus.

If Jesus is in truth God's "only begotten" Son and are taught that this is so, it is because of John's reference to Jesus as the *monogenes*. If the word does not mean this then this doctrine is not taught in God's Word! Why, then, do writers who insist that *monogenes* does not mean "only begotten" continue to refer to Jesus as such? They are both wrong and inconsistent. It is by all agreed that *mono* - from *monos*, signifies "only." The rendering, "only son," leaves *genes* untranslated. Whatever its derivation, it means something! Forty-seven scholars who translated the King James' version, thought *monogenes* means "only begotten." One hundred one of the world's ripest scholars who translated the American Standard Version thought it meant "only begotten." Liddell & Scott, in their great classical Lexicon of Greek, give as the first meaning of *monogenes* "only-begotten" (Woods, 32-33).

Before his death, the late Hugo McCord took the position that *monogenes* should be translated "unique," completely eliminating the word "begotten" from his translation of the New Testament on this passage and John 3:16. I had the opportunity to visit personally with brother McCord when he first presented his material at FHU. I told him then that I thought he was wrong. He was gracious and kind to me and seemed interested in what I was saying. I remember that occasion with fond memory, but I was not convinced by his arguments then, and am even less impressed now that I have had the opportunity to study this matter for myself.

"*full of grace and truth*" - Jesus' whole life manifested grace and truth. The close examination implied in the word "beheld" shows that John's scrutiny of our Lord revealed in Jesus the notable qualities of grace and truth. "The 'grace' involved the divine

favor, the ‘truth,’ the instrumentality through which it was made known to the world” (Woods, 33). The word “truth” would prove to be one of the key words in this gospel as well as the epistles penned by the apostle.

~~ 1:15 ~~

*“John beareth witness of him, and crieth, saying, This was he of whom I said, He that cometh after me is become before me: for he was before me”*

*“John beareth witness of him”* - The evangelist John now turns our attention back to the testimony of John the Baptist. The witness of John the Baptist coupled with his faithful life stands as rock solid evidence to the incarnation of the Word.

*“and crieth, saying”* - John was deeply convinced of the truthfulness of his testimony and he delivered that testimony with utmost zeal and enthusiasm. The Greek word here translated “crieth” is an “old verb for loud crying, repeated in dramatic form again for emphasis recalling the wonderful Voice in the wilderness which the Beloved Disciple can still hear echoing through the years” (Robertson, ESword Module).

*“this was he of whom I said, He that cometh after me”* - John was the forerunner of Christ, so chronologically speaking John did come before Christ.

*“is become before me: for he was before me”* - This could only be said if the “he” of whom John speaks and of Whom it is said, “He that cometh after me” is the Word introduced earlier in the chapter. Whereas “He that cometh after me” speaks of our Lord’s physical nature, “he was before me” speaks of our Lord’s divine nature. Of significance also is the fact that John the Baptist repeatedly acknowledged his inferiority to his Lord.

Before leaving this verse a word needs to be said about an apparent disruption of the train of thought in verses 14-16. One moment it is clear that the words are those of John the apostle; the next we have the words of John the Baptist, followed immediately in the next verse by the words of John the apostle. Whereas verse 14 is an obvious statement by the apostle John,

this verse speaks of the words of John the Baptist. In verse 19 the words of John the Baptist appear again, leaving some to conclude that perhaps this verse is out of place. Clarke, for example, in commenting on verse 16, concluded, “This verse should be put in place of the fifteenth, and the 15th inserted between the 18th and 19th, which appears to be in its proper place: thus John’s testimony is properly connected” (Clarke, ESword Module). Any attempt to “unravel” this difficulty proved to be an exercise in futility. Whether or not Clarke’s conclusion is correct makes no difference in the message portrayed by the author. We will leave it to our readers to wrestle with the problem.

### The Word Revealing 1:16-18

With verse 16 the apostle picks up the thought from verse 14. We have borrowed Tenney’s title of this section, “The Word Revealing.” This aspect of John’s prologue is particularly apparent in verses 17 and 18, of which we shall comment shortly. The connection of these three verses to what preceded is not readily visible. Keep in mind that in verse 14 John told us the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. During His incarnation, Jesus was the full manifestation of grace and truth. As the Word incarnate, Jesus was in the position to bestow the fullness of grace and truth to humanity. This He did in a number of ways. For one thing, upon a number of occasions He granted forgiveness to men. Second, He provided a law far superior to the Law of Moses. Finally, He declared the Father to men.

~~ 1:16 ~~

*“For of his fulness we all received, and grace for grace”*

*“for of his fullness we all received”* - In verse 14 John had said that our Lord was “full of grace and truth.” Of that “fullness” John now says he and the disciples had received. “They derived from his abundant truth and mercy grace to understand the plan of salvation, to preach the gospel, to live lives of holiness; they partook of the numerous blessings which he came to impart by his instructions and his death” (Barnes, ESword Module). The means by which the apostles received the fullness of divine grace

was through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which divine grace teaches and instructs men in the way of righteousness (Titus 2:11-12).

*“grace for grace”* - Woods noted that the words “grace for grace” is “a phrase suggestive of the abundance of the outpouring of the divine favor. The supply of grace thus actually increases as we appropriate it and its blessings are proportionate to the use we make of it” (Woods, 34). There may be in this phrase a reference to the authority of the apostles, who having received the message of grace, were then the dispensers of that grace to mankind. This very point is supported by the words of John in chapter 20:22-23 - “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Foster suggests another possible meaning: “As we seek to imitate Jesus for every grace or beautiful virtue in the divine character of Jesus, we gain a like virtue such as love, mercy, righteousness, humility, unselfishness” (Foster, 229).

~~ 1:17 ~~

*“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*

*“For the law was given through Moses”* - The Law of Moses was limited by its very nature. For one thing, it was designed to serve as a “school master” to bring Israel to the Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Law was limited in that it could not provide grace to the offender; it could only point out sin and impress upon the mind of the sinner the need for the grace that could only be given by God and received through Christ (cf. Gal. 3:10, 4:4-5, Rom. 8:2-4, etc). It is erroneous, however, to assume that the Old Testament consisted of all law and no grace, and that the New Testament consists of grace only without law. John’s purpose was to show the *origin* of law and grace, not to limit their operations. Unfortunately ill-informed brethren have concluded that there is no law in the New Testament system, and that there was no grace in the Old Testament system. Consequently, those who call for obedience to the “law of Christ” are often branded as “legalists” by modern day “grace only” advocates. Woods addressed such foolish thinking:

To say that if we must comply with the commandments in order to be saved is legalism is both false and foolish; to urge that justification is received in the act of believing and not on condition of keeping the commandments is contradictory since the act of believing is as much a human act as is either repentance, confession or baptism (Woods, 35).

“grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” - In stark contrast to the Law, Christ brought God’s grace through the gospel (Titus 2:11-12). The gospel is the full revelation of God’s truth. If someone concludes that there was NO grace before Christ, he must conclude there was NO TRUTH either.

~~ 1:18 ~~

*“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him”*

*“No man hath seen God at any time”* - This truth was reiterated by the apostle in his first epistle (1 John 4:12, 20), as well as by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 6:16. Many visions, theophanies, appearances, angelic splendors, in the desert, on the mountain, in the temple, by the river of Chebar, had been granted to the prophets of the Lord; but they have all fallen short of the direct intuition of God as God. These “appearances” were but forerunners of the ultimate manifestation of the Logos. “The Glory of the Lord,” “the Angel of the Lord,” “the Word of the Lord,” were not so revealed to patriarchs that they saw God as God.

*“the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father”* - The association that Jesus enjoyed with the Father is described as being “in the bosom of the Father.” It describes, no doubt, an intimate relationship with the Father that no man could possess. Barnes elaborated:

This expression is taken from the custom among the Orientals of reclining at their meals. Matt 23:6 [sic, probably John 21:20, TW]. It denotes intimacy, friendship, affection. Here it means that Jesus had a

knowledge of God such as one friend has of another - knowledge of his character, designs, and nature which no other one possesses, and which renders him, therefore, qualified above all others to make him known (Barnes, Electronic Notes).

*“the Father, he hath declared him”* - That closeness quite naturally gives our Lord the power and authority to “declare him” unto men.

The word here translated “declared” is the “verb technically used in Greek literature of a declaration or exposition of divine mysteries” (Tenney, 73). A better word might be our English “interpreted” (Woods, 36). From the vast storehouse of our Lord’s knowledge (being omniscient Himself), Jesus has made known the Father and enabled us to become acquainted with Him and His plan for man’s salvation.

This verse, then, ends the prologue. Woods concluded: “This remarkable portion of the sacred writings is without parallel in all literature - a precious and profound picture of the nature and eternal relations of our blessed Lord” (Woods, 36). In eighteen verses John has probed the depths of time and eternity, and brought to our attention not only the eternity of our Lord, but the magnificence of His incarnation and the purpose for which He came. All who read with a respect for the truth which John here sets forth cannot but bow at the feet of our Father and His Son, and with John, declare the magnificence of our Lord.





## CHAPTER TWO

# “BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD”

*Presentation to the Jewish Leaders from Jerusalem, 1:19-34*

The apostle moves from the eternal existence of our Lord to His majestic incarnation. The same personality that was “in the beginning...with the Father” is now seen in all of His humility. From His preexistence with the Father to His earthly sojourn we are quickly made aware that the change is not in His nature, but in His relationship with men. The Word came from heavenly palaces to earthly realms; from the vastness of eternity to time and space as occupied by humans. Simply stated, He was *from everlasting*, manifested in the flesh, eventually to return to everlasting. The brief moment in our Lord’s existence in human flesh was for the sole purpose of seeking and saving the lost. Indeed, the *magnificence of Jesus* shines in this opening chapter of John’s gospel.

The section now before us has three distinct movements in its unfolding and development. First, the apostle will focus on John the Baptist’s presentation of Jesus to the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem (1:19-34). In this section we will see John facing the inquiring Jews (1:19-28). When asked by the priests and Levites if he were the Christ, John would deny, and in deep humility declare that he is only the messenger prophesied by Isaiah, and in turn point them to “the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world!” (1:29). The student cannot read this section without seeing John the Baptist’s exaltation of the Christ. The Lord is magnified in every respect by the forerunner of the Lord.

The second movement in this section calls our attention to John’s presentation of Jesus to the disciples, with particular attention on Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael. Each of these men is invited to investigate. Twice the Baptist invites them to “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (1:29; 1:36). “Come, and ye shall see” echo the simple yet profound invitation of the Lord, inviting these men to come investigate; and investigate they do! Impressed with what he found, Andrew tells his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah.” Philip echoes the words of Andrew, and says to Nathaniel, “We have found him, of whom

Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (1:45).

In the final movement of this section the magnificence of Jesus is demonstrated to Nathaniel in a most remarkable way. Based upon the simple assertion by the Lord that He saw Nathaniel when he “was under the fig tree,” the soon-to-be disciple of the Lord fully grasped the implications of that statement, and readily confessed, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God” (1:49); and the faith of Nathaniel was rewarded with the promise that this young man would “see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (1:51). In fifty-one verses the apostle John has laid the background that would capture the interest of the good and honest heart who longs to know more about the magnificence of Jesus. Let’s take a closer look.

Presentation To the Jewish Leaders from Jerusalem  
1:19-34

In these verses we have (1) John’s encounter with the priests and Levites, 1:19-28, and (2) the actual presentation of Jesus, 1:29-34. We will take these up one at a time.

*Encounter with the priests and Levites, 1:19-28*

No doubt John the Baptist had made a considerable impact upon the community with his preaching in the wilderness. His unique dress and dietary habits may have contributed to the interest on the part of the Jews, causing them to send representatives to inquire as to the self-proclaimed identity of John. His response is characteristic of his humility.

~~ 1:19 ~~

*“And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent unto him from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him, Who art thou?”*

As this verse begins, the copula “and” shows the connection between the remarks of John and the character and nature of Jesus covered earlier. It has been suggested (in a critical way) that John uses the term “Jews” in a sense that is hostile to them, thus in some way discrediting this gospel account. It must be

pointed out, however, John does not use the term in a depreciatory sense, but rather to point out that the nation in general had long ceased to have any “political” existence. That is a fact that is evident in secular writings as well as Biblical.

These men were likely sent out by the Sanhedrin, the supreme religious and civil court of the Jews, in order to determine for themselves what John was like. The Sanhedrin was made up of seventy one members, elders, scribes, and sometimes included ex high priests. There is no early trace anterior to the time of Antipatar and Herod of this body being in existence, but it is possible that the seventy is derived from Numbers 11:16 and Ezekiel 8:11, and could very well have existed prior to this particular time period. They wanted to know more about this “voice in the wilderness.” Essentially they asked three questions: (1) Who are you? (2) What do you say of yourself? (3) Why do you baptize? John’s answer included three negative assertions: (1) He denied that he was the Christ; (2) He denied that he was Elijah; (3) He denied that he was ‘the’ prophet.

“*Who art thou?*” The construction of the question is significant. The pronoun appears first for emphasis. They thus made it clear that they were not asking about his place of origin, nor his parentage, nor his time of birth. They were, in effect, asking, “You, on your part, who do you claim to be?”

~~ 1:20 ~~

*“And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ”*

John made it clearly understood, that he was not the Christ! “Perhaps the double form of statement...was adopted to indicate that John might have been tempted to deny that he was not the Christ. If he had hesitated at all, he would have denied the real Christ, the Son of God, who had been revealed to him by special means” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module). John made it emphatically clear that he was NOT the Messiah, in any sense whatsoever!

~~ 1:21 ~~

*“And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No”*

John was Elijah, but only in the figurative and spiritual sense. As a forerunner of the Messiah he called for a reformation of life on the part of the people in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The “prophet” to which the Jews referred was that one spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18. Peter made it clear that Jesus is that prophet (see Acts 3:22). There was a common belief among the Jews that Elijah would precede the Messiah’s advent. In Jesus’ day the expectation of the return of Elijah existed, and the behavior and dress of John may have contributed to the suspicion that John was, indeed, Elijah.

When Jesus cried out on the cross, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” (Matt. 27:46-47), some standing by thought He was calling for Elijah who was supposed to rescue God’s favored One when in peril.

*“I am not”* - More literally, “I, for my part, am not the Christ.” This implies, not only that the supposition over which they are brooding is unfounded, not only that he is not the Christ, but that he knows more, and that he knows another to be the Christ. If this reading of the text is correct, the Baptist, by his negative reply, gave to the priests more than they asked.

~~ 1:22 ~~

*“They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself”*

The messengers repeated the question. “Who are you? We need an answer. What do you say for yourself?” Their questions probably arose from the three-fold denial of the Baptist in the previous verses. Their purpose in attaining an answer from John was to give an answer to those who had sent them - most likely the Sanhedrin.

*“What sayest thou of thyself?”* - Their desire was to get a positive affirmation from John as to exactly who he was. The negative

response of John would not be sufficient information to take back to the Jewish authorities.

~~ 1:23 ~~

*“He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet”*

John only revealed his mission; he made no comment as to his personal identity. The words of John are a quote from Isaiah 40:3. The imagery is that of someone who comes to prepare the roads for the coming of the King. If the King were to visit a portion of His territory, the land would be prepared so as to provide a smooth journey for the King. John came to prepare Israel for the coming of the King, God’s anointed.

~~ 1:24-25 ~~

*“And they had been sent from the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why then baptizest thou, if thou art not the Christ, neither Elijah, neither the prophet”*

*“They which were sent were of the Pharisees”* - The Pharisees were a group of rigid traditionalists who made void the word of God because of their intent desire to follow the traditions of their fathers. Bruce provided this concise description of this class of religious leaders:

The term ‘Pharisee’ means ‘separated ones’; it has been variously explained, but in practice it emphasized their separation from everything that might convey ethical or ceremonial purity. They built up a body of oral tradition, which was designed to adapt the ancient principles of the written law to the changing situations of later days and thus safeguard those principles against being dismissed as obsolete or impractical. In this they were distinguished from their chief rivals, the Sadducees, who maintained the authority of the written law alone and who also rejected as innovations the Pharisaic belief in the resurrection of the body and in the existence of orders of angels and demons. They banded themselves together in local brotherhoods or fellowships. Josephus, who claims to have regulated his own life by Pharisaic principles from the age of nineteen,

reckons that there were some 6,000 Pharisees in his day (Bruce, 50).

The Pharisees were often condemned by Jesus for their failure to keep the true law of God. See Matthew 23 for Jesus' scathing rebuke of this group of men.

*"Why baptizes thou then, if thou be not the Christ?"* - Brother Woods wrote: "In complete frustration in their effort to induce John to claim identity with Messiah or other eminent personages (which they had undoubtedly expected him to do and which they would have promptly answered with the charge of blasphemy or falsehood), they now sought to convict him of inconsistency" (Woods, 39). Jesus, in his own ministry, pointed to the hardened hearts of the Jews when he drew a contrast between Himself and John. While John came in a life of abstinence, preaching repentance, they accused him of having a demon. But when Jesus came associating with "sinners," they accused him of being a winebibber and friend of sinners (cf. Luke 7:30-35).

~~ 1:26-27 ~~

*"John answered them, saying, I baptize in water: in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose"*

*"I baptize with water"* - John did not deny that he was commissioned to baptize in water; but neither did he claim that he was the Messiah.

*"in the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not"* - Jesus was evidently standing in the midst of that crowd. It is ironic that these Pharisees came to question John but were unaware that in their midst was the prophet foretold by Moses (Deut. 18:18). This elite group of religious leaders did not know the Lord because Jesus had not yet been pointed out by John. Tragically, these same men, for the most part, would never come to know the Lord because of their hardened hearts.

*"whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose"* - John recognized that, although commissioned to prepare the way for the Messiah, his service was subservient to that of the Christ.

Here John emphasizes his own relative unimportance as compared with that of Christ by saying that he was not even fit to perform such a menial task as that of unloosing the latchet of the Lord's shoes. He may have been making an allusion to an old Rabbinic proverb that said, "Every service which a slave performs for his master, a disciple will perform for his teacher, except to untie his sandal-strap" (Bruce, 51). Albert Barnes had this note regarding the menial task referred to by John:

The latchet of sandals was the string or thong by which they were fastened to the feet. To unloose them was the office of a servant, and John means, therefore, that he was unworthy to perform the lowest office for the Messiah. This was remarkable humility. John was well known; he was highly honoured; thousands came to hear him. Jesus was at that time unknown; but John says that he was unworthy to perform the humblest office for Jesus (Barnes, ESword Module).

~~ 1:28 ~~

*"These things were done in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing"*

*"Bethany"* - The KJV reads Bethabara. Why the difference in names?

According to the King James Version (following Textus Receptus of the New Testament) the place where John baptized (Joh 1:28). The Revised Version (British and American) (with Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, The New Testament in Greek following Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Ephraemi) reads BETHANY. It is distinguished from the Bethany of Lazarus and his sisters as being "beyond the Jordan" (ISBE, ESword Module).

McGarvey also provided some helpful information:

Owing to variation in the manuscripts, we may read "Bethany" or "Bethabara," or even possibly "Bethabara in Bathania." Tradition fixes upon the Jericho ford, which is about five miles on an air line north of the Dead Sea, as

the site of Jesus' baptism. But this spot is eighty miles from Cana of Galilee, and hence Jesus, leaving it on foot, could not well have attended the wedding in Cana on "the third day" ( Joh 2:1). We must therefore look for Bethany or Bethabara farther up the river. John the Baptist was a roving preacher (Luke 3:3), and during the forty days of Jesus' temptation seems to have moved up the river Jordan. Fifty miles above the Jericho ford, and ten miles south of the Sea of Galilee, Lieutenant Conder found a ford named 'Abarah' (meaning "ferry"), which answers to Bethabara (meaning "house of the ferry"). It was in the land of Bashan, which in the time of Christ was called Bathania (meaning "soft soil"). This spot is only twenty-two miles from Cana. Being beyond the Jordan, it is not in Galilee, as Dr. Thomson asserts. Conder says: "We have collected the names of over forty fords, and no other is called 'Abarah'; nor does the word occur again in all nine thousand names collected by the survey party" (McGarvey, ESword Module).

*"Beyond the Jordan"* – This is a reference to the wilderness which lay to the east of the River Jordan and just to the northeast of the Dead Sea.

*The actual presentation of Jesus, 1:29-34*

~~ 1:29 ~~

*"On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!"*

*"Behold"* is singular, although used to address a multitude; not an uncommon occurrence. Jesus is called a "Lamb" because He is the antitype of the paschal lamb offered in sacrifice in Jewish worship. McGarvey points out that "a lamb was also the victim of the morning (9:00 a.m.) and evening (3:00 p.m.) sacrifice (Ex. xix.38) - the hours when Jesus was nailed to the cross and when he expired" (McGarvey, 105). His reference to Exodus 19 should be Exodus 29, but the point is rather significant. The original here is 'anon' and is used only four times in the NT: here in verses 29 and 36, then in Acts 8:32 and 1 Peter 1:19. In the latter two instances it denotes a sacrificial lamb. Hence, John was

saying, “Behold, the sacrificial Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”

“*taketh*” is present tense and is used to suggest the perpetual effect of Christ’s sacrifice. The “fountain of his forgiveness never fails. Some seeking to avoid the vicarious nature of Christ’s sacrifice, claim that the Baptist means that Jesus would gradually lift the world out of sin by his teaching. But lambs do not teach, and sin is not removed by teaching, but by sacrifice (Heb. ix .22, Rev.v.9)” (McGarvey, 106). It is also to be noted that John “foresaw and taught the atonement BEFORE it occurred and some liberal expositors deny it AFTER it occurred” (Woods, 41). There is an interesting combination here of a reference to the “Passover Lamb” and the “scapegoat.” The Passover lamb was eaten in memory of God’s passing over Israel (Exodus 12:3-13), while the “scapegoat” was sent into the wilderness, bearing Israel’s sin typologically (see Lev. 16:8-10). Here John speaks of the Lamb (Passover symbol) that “takes away” (scapegoat) the sins of the world.

#### REGARDING SIN

Sin is a universal problem since all men sin and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Sin is man’s worst enemy. It destroys, enslaves, binds, and separates. All of man’s problems stem from sin. When man violates the laws given by God, the “fruit” is one of disappointment and destruction. But what SIN has done, Christ has overcome, thereby making it possible for man to escape the dreadful consequences of sin. Consider the following:

A. Jesus has REVEALED SIN: Although the law has made known sin (Romans 7:6-7), it is the life of Christ that revealed the true nature and consequence of sin. It was sin that nailed Him to the cross. Jesus came to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He took our place upon the cross to show us the terrible consequence of sin (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus has revealed the truth about sin by showing us the alternative - that of life through His precious name.

B. Jesus RANSOMS FROM SIN: Some of the greatest words that can be uttered upon the lips of man are that of “redemption,

propitiation, reconciliation” etc. How wonderful to know that Jesus, by his death, has paid the price for sin. He has bought us and reconciled us with God by his precious blood. Cf. 1 Tim. 2:6, 1 John 4:10, Romans 3:25, 1 Peter 1:18-19, 1 Cor. 6:20, etc.

C. Jesus REMOVES SIN: As a consequence of His redemptive work, sin has been removed. How far? As far as the east is from the west (Psa. 103:12); as far as the depth of the ocean (Micah 7:19); God “laid upon him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). It is the blood of Christ that is able to do what all the oceans and the perfumes of Arabia cannot do: make the guilty innocent and justified in the sight of God!

D. Jesus OVERRULES SIN FOR THE GOOD OF THEM WHO LOVE HIM! Where sin abounded, grace abounded the more! No matter in what state one may find himself, there is NO depth of sin that God cannot overcome, if man will but repent!

E. Jesus REMITS SIN: He forgives sin! This is the “great difference” between the law and the new covenant of Christ. Under the old law the sins were remembered year by year.

~~ 1:30 ~~

*“This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is become before me: for he was before me”*

*“a man who is come before me: for he was before me”* - This is a simple declaration of our Lord’s eternal nature. Any explanation of this verse that does not respect the eternal nature of our Lord is futile and does not provide an adequate explanation of the verse before us.

Regarding the chronological sequence of the statements made by John the Baptist, the Pulpit Commentary has this:

The fact that John the Baptist, in the previous verses, recognizes the Messiah, and that in verses 31-33 he declares that knowledge to have followed the baptism and the sign given to him, makes it obvious that the baptism and the forty days of temptation are now in the past...The baptism of Christ, which was the occasion of the higher

knowledge that John acquired concerning him, as well as the temptation, had been consummated. Of this last it would seem highly probable John had received, in subsequent conversation with the Lord, a full report...This chronological hint appears to me to explain the sudden and surprising utterance of the next verse (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 1:31 ~~

*“And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, for this cause came I baptizing in water”*

*“And I knew him not”* - Our English “knew” translates the Greek ‘*oida*’ of which Thayer gives the following meaning: “to perceive by any of the senses; to see; to turn the eyes, the mind, the attention to anything” (Thayer, ESword Module). Whether John knew Jesus personally before the baptism we have no way of knowing for certain. However, Since Mary and Elizabeth were so close, it is not unreasonable to assume that Jesus and John had at least some acquaintance in childhood; but in view of John’s statement, it may have been quite limited. Another possibility may be that John did not, prior to his call to preach, and prior to Jesus’ baptism, know that Jesus was the Messiah.

*“for this cause came I baptizing in water”* - The “cause” for John’s baptizing in water was that Christ might be made manifest to Israel. John’s work not only prepared the people, but actually blazed the trail for the arrival of the Lord.

~~ 1:32 ~~

*“And John bare witness, saying, I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven; and it abode upon him”*

One purpose of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus was to identify Him as the Davidic ruler of Israel. “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him” (Isa. 11:2).

1The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 2 To proclaim the

acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; 3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified (Isaiah 61:1-3).

At the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit bare witness in the form of a dove, and the Father bare witness with verbal proclamation (Matt. 3:17).

~~ 1:33 ~~

*“And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit”*

It may be asked WHY John was reluctant to baptize Jesus (as recorded in the other gospels) in view of this statement which implies that, at the time of the baptism, John did not know Jesus. It is interesting that very few of the commentaries consulted addressed this problem. McGarvey does give some attention to the problem:

Moreover, when John denied that he knew Jesus as Messiah we must not take it that he was ignorant of the past history of Jesus. No doubt he knew in a general way who Jesus was; but as the official forerunner and announcer of Jesus, and as the heaven-sent witness (John 1:6-7), it was necessary that the Baptist should receive, by personal revelation from God, as here stated, an indubitable, absolute knowledge of the Messiahship of Jesus (McGarvey, ESword Module).

It would seem probable that Jesus, being the cousin of John, the two of them would have had at least a “kinship” acquaintance, if not a more familiar knowledge of one another. By observing the very life of Jesus, His sinless character and His moral stature, John would have come to question Jesus’ coming to HIM to be baptized, since such was designed for those in need of repentance. John’s reluctance to baptize Jesus would NOT,

therefore, be based upon the fact that Jesus was the Son of God. At that point John did not have absolute knowledge of that fact. Another explanation was presented in the Pulpit Commentary:

The knowledge which John had of Jesus was as nothing to the blaze of light which burst upon him when he realized the idea that Jesus was the Son of God. The “I knew him not” of this verse was a subsequent reflection of the Baptist when the sublime humility, the dovelike sweetness, and the spiritual might of Jesus were revealed to him. A blind man who had received his sight during the hours of darkness might imagine, when he saw the reflected glory of the moon or morning star in the eye of dawn, that he knew the nature and had felt the glory of light; but amidst the splendours of sunrise or of noon he might justly say, “I knew it not” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 1:34 ~~

*“And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God”*

The testimony of John ran counter to the popular opinion of Jesus. John actually addressed two errors concerning Christ. (1) The Jews were looking for a Messiah in an earthly sense. They deemed the Messiah’s spiritual excellence to be that of an ordinary prophet. But John emphasized the superiority of the coming Messiah by disclaiming even the right to unlace the Master’s shoe. (2) The Jews were looking for one who would come AFTER Moses, David, and the prophets, and lost sight of the fact that Immanuel would actually be before them, in both time and honor.





## CHAPTER THREE

### “FOLLOW ME”

*Presentation to the First Disciples, 1:35-51*

In this section we have the Lord’s encounter with (1) Peter and Andrew, 35-42, followed by His encounter with (2) Phillip and Nathanael, 43-51. The statement that they were John’s disciples shows that they had received John’s message and been baptized by him.

*Peter and Andrew, 1:35-42*

~~ 1:35-36 ~~

*“Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!”*

“*On the morrow*” would be the third day. The first day the Pharisees had sent the delegation to inquire of John as to who he was. The second day John saw Jesus coming and made the proclamation, “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”

“*John was standing*” - Though only two men made up the whole of John’s audience, McGarvey calls it “a small field, but a large harvest” (McGarvey, ESword Module). The word translated, “looked upon” suggests an “earnest and fixed gaze” (Woods, 43). The day preceding, John had recognized Jesus as the “Lamb of God.” Here he points Jesus out to these two disciples.

~~ 1:37 ~~

*“And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus”*

Johnson suggests the meaning is that “they did not become followers in the religious sense, but literally followed him, possibly from curiosity, possibly from a yearning desire to know more of the Lamb of God” (Johnson, 39). But how could this be a following borne out of mere curiosity? The more reasonable position is that these two disciples followed Jesus out of

commitment and dedication. Verse 43 shows that Jesus was in the process of calling men to “follow” Him, and there is no reason to think He did not do so here. Sufficient evidence would have been provided to enable them to make a wise and knowledgeable choice to follow Jesus.

~~ 1:38 ~~

*“And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? And they said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher), where abideth thou?”*

Interestingly, the Lord takes the opportunity to encourage discussion and investigation. There may have been a hesitance on the part of the two disciples to engage in conversation, prompting our Lord to initiate discussion.

*“Jesus turned and beheld them following”* - Thayer points out that our English word “beheld” translates the Greek *‘theaomai,’* and means “to look upon; to view attentively; of important persons that are looked on with admiration” (Thayer, ESword Module). Jesus evidently took a genuine interest in these two disciples.

*“What seek ye?”* - The original word here is *‘zeteo’* and has the meaning of “to seek in order to find out by thinking, meditating, reasoning; to enquire into” (Thayer, ESword Module). This is the first indication in John’s gospel of the ability of Jesus to look into the heart of someone.

*“they said unto him, Rabbi”* - The two disciples now turned their attention to Jesus. When asked “WHAT” they sought, they responded with a question regarding the WHO of Jesus. The term “Rabbi” was ancient in its origin, and meant “teacher.” Among the Jews there were three degrees: The Rabban, the Rab, and the Rabbi, the last being the lowest.

*“which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher”* - McGarvey makes a most interesting observation on why John would take the time to tell the meaning of the word:

By the way in which John explains Jewish words and customs, it becomes apparent that his Gospel was written for Gentiles as well as for Jews. Some take these explanations as evidence that John's Gospel was written after the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem. They are indeed a slight evidence of this, for it is more expedient to explain a custom which has ceased to exist than one which survives to explain itself (McGarvey, ESword Module).

~~ 1:39 ~~

*“He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore and saw where he abode; and they abode with him that day: it was about the tenth hour”*

*“Come, and ye shall see”* - One interesting feature of divine inspiration is the Holy Spirit's ability to communicate multiple truths by a single statement. “Come and see” may be intended to communicate theological truth which lies beneath the surface of the literal nature of the statement. If one will come to Jesus, then he will see who He really is. Jesus' invitation was one of honest and open investigation. It is somewhat curious that false religion more often than not attempts to suppress investigation rather than encourage the same. Some time back, while doing mission work in South Africa, I met with a Mormon family and their two missionaries from the U.S. being present (May 24, 1989, in Port Elizabeth South Africa), and simply asked that they present evidence supporting their claims of inspiration for the Book of Mormon. I asked for such things as prophecy made and fulfilled, scientific foreknowledge, etc. Their response? “We will not offer that kind of proof...but rather ask that we pray to God and let Him tell us if it is true.” God has never “left himself without witness,” and the claims of Jesus are supported by evidence that is OBJECTIVE (can be examined, etc.) rather than SUBJECTIVE (based upon a feeling that one might have in the heart, as per the Mormon approach).

*“they came therefore and saw where he abode”* - We are not given any information as to the whereabouts of our Lord's dwelling at that precise moment. We do know that He often stayed in the homes of His disciples, but it is not unreasonable to assume that He may have also dwelt in caves in the rocks, or

some other very humble and meager dwelling (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58).

*“and it was about the tenth hour”* - John reckoned time after the manner of the Romans, thus making it about 10:00 a.m. It would seem that had John been reckoning time according to Jewish method, then it would have been 4:00 p.m., and the statement “they abode with him that day” would be insignificant, “that day” having only two hours remaining. But why would John be so concerned with recording the very hour surrounding these events? Coffman points out that the “reason for this was the fact that it was the very day and hour that brought him into the presence of the Holy One of God, a presence that changed John’s life and changed the world.” (Coffman). We tend to remember moments in our life that make a profound impression upon our lives, noting not only the day, but the very hour of the occurrence.

~~ 1:40 ~~

*“One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother”*

The first followers of the Lord were few in number, and of humble origin. Incredibly, that small beginning would blossom into multitudes that would follow Jesus, not only in that generation, but every generation to follow. “This first hesitant and timid approach to Jesus reveals the intimate and personal beginning of that stream of numberless millions swelling the ranks of his disciples in all ages” (Coffman).

One of the two that heard John speak was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” Andrew was the first of the twelve to be called. His name means “the mighty one, or conqueror” (ISBE, ESword Module). Andrew was from Bethsaida of Galilee and his father was John (cf. John 1:42, 21:15).

There are three stages in the call of Andrew to the apostleship. The first is described in John 1:35-40. Andrew had spent his earlier years as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, but on learning of the fame of John the Baptist, he departed along with a band of his countrymen to Bethany. The fact that Andrew called his

brother indicates the dedication of Andrew once he realized that Jesus was the Messiah.

It is curious that John only mentions “one of the two that heard John speak.” Exactly who is this other disciple? Most think it was the Evangelist John himself. This seems likely for the following reasons: (1) The narrative in this place is very particular and graphic, making it probable that the writer was an eyewitness. (2) The writer of such a narrative would have been sure to mention the name of the other disciple, unless there had been some reason for withholding it. (3) The writer of this gospel never refers to himself by name, and the same feeling which led him to withhold his name elsewhere accounts for his withholding it here.

~~ 1:41 ~~

*“He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ)”*

*“He findeth first his own brother Simon”* - The word “own” shows that Simon was not a mere relative (as the word “brother” might mean), but it was literally Andrew’s brother in the flesh. “In finding him, Andrew had made the greatest discovery which it is possible for a man to make” (McGarvey, ESword Module).

*“We have found the Messiah”* - “Messiah” is a significant title of Jesus. John gives us the Greek translation as “Christ.” Both words literally mean “the anointed One.” In the Old Testament, three classes of individuals were anointed as they entered into their respective service: (1) the prophet, (2) the priest, and (3) the King. Jesus fulfills all three offices, Himself being (1) the prophet of which Moses spoke, (2) our High Priest, and (3) King of kings, and Lord of lords.

~~ 1:42 ~~

*“He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation, Peter)”*

In the changing of Peter's name to Cephas, our Lord demonstrated a perfect understanding of Peter's character. McGarvey pointed out:

Cephas is Hebrew, Peter is Greek, stone is English. It means a mass of rock detached from the bed-rock or strata on which the earth rests. The future tense, "thou shalt be," indicates that Peter was to win his name. It is given prophetically to describe the stability to which the then weak and vacillating Simon should attain (McGarvey, ESword Module).

J.C. Ryle, in "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels," has these thoughts:

Our Lord here displayed his perfect knowledge of all persons, names, and things. He needed not that any should tell him who and what a person was. Such a knowledge was supposed by the Jews to be a peculiar attribute of the Messiah. He was to be one of 'quick understanding' (Isa. 11:3). It is a peculiar attribute of God who alone knows the hearts of men. Our Lord's perfect knowledge of all hearts was one among many proofs of his divinity. His same knowledge appears again in his address to Nathaniel (1:47), and in his conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:18) (Ryle, 74).

*Philip and Nathanael, 1:43-51*

From the finding of Philip, to the incredible conversation our Lord has with Nathanael, these closing verses of chapter one capture our attention and give us a glimpse of the compassion of our Lord, and His power to look into the heart and soul of those with whom He comes in contact.

~~ 1:43 ~~

*"On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow me"*

"On the morrow" - This would have been the fourth day after the deputies from the Sanhedrin had interrogated John the Baptist.

*“he was minded to go forth into Galilee”* - Jesus set His mind to head home to Nazareth. This information is provided so as to indicate that Jesus’ encounter with Philip and Nathanael occurred on His way home.

*“and he findeth Philip”* - The name “Philip” means “lover of horses.” Eusebius says that Philip was married and had several daughters. Adam Clarke believes he was the disciple who, when commanded by the Lord to follow Him, said, “Let me first go and bury my father” (Clarke, ESword Module), but there is no solid evidence to support that supposition. Jesus saw in this man the abilities necessary to be a leader.

*“and Jesus saith to him, Follow me”* - The words, “Follow me,” appear for the first time in this gospel, and indicate a tone of authority on the part of the Lord: “The hand on the shoulder and the words to match the action - ‘You come along with me’” (Bruce, 59). Jesus still invites men to follow Him. There is nothing more said about Philip’s response, or exactly what was required of Philip. John simply tells us the fact of the invitation. However, the fact that Philip was later appointed as one of the apostles suggests that he responded favorably here. It is also interesting to note that, whereas Andrew was introduced to Christ by John, and that Andrew in turn introduced Peter to Christ, Philip was called directly by the Lord.

~~ 1:44 ~~

*“Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter”*

This particular Philip should be distinguished from Philip the evangelist who is mentioned in Acts 6, and Acts 8. This Philip would become one of the Lord’s apostles, the later one of the seven who were appointed to serve tables.

Bethsaida: (1) A city East of the Jordan, in a “desert place” (that is, uncultivated ground used for grazing) where Jesus miraculously fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:32ff; Luke 9:10). (2) Bethsaida of Galilee, where dwelt Philip, Andrew, Peter (John 1:44; 12:21), and perhaps also James and John. The house of Andrew and Peter seems to have been

not far from the synagogue in Capernaum (Matthew 8:5, 14; Mark 1:21, 29, etc.).

~~ 1:45 ~~

*“Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph”*

*“Philip findeth Nathanael”* - The name means “the gift of God.” It is generally accepted that Nathaniel is another name for Bartholomew. John never mentions Bartholomew, and the other writers never mention Nathanael. Nathanael would be his chief name, while Bartholomew would be his patronymic name. Jewish names often began with “Bar,” meaning “the son of...” Examples would include Barabbas, Barnabas, Barjonah, etc. The argument that Nathanael’s name being absent in the other gospels would thus put doubt upon the authenticity of John’s record, are simply without any weight. No one of the three tells us that Peter was called Cephas, and only Matthew gives Jude (the brother of James) the name of Labbaeus.

*“We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote”* - It is significant that all that Philip here said of Jesus was true: (1) that Moses and the prophets wrote of him; (2) that he was of Nazareth; (3) that he was the son of Joseph, although only in the legal sense. It must be pointed out that Jesus, through Joseph, was heir to the throne of David. Notice also that Luke, in his account, writes that “Jesus....being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph” (Luke 3:23). Philip’s words are here recorded, not that of the writer. This suggests the possibility that at the time Philip spoke these words he was not aware of the supernatural birth of Jesus.

Evangelistic fervor is evident in both Philip and Andrew. Such men would faithfully fulfill the Great Commission that would be given some three and one half years later.

~~ 1:46 ~~

*“And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see”*

*“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”* - A number of explanations have been offered concerning Nathanael’s question. Of course there were some good men who came out of Nazareth, such as Jonah, Hosea, and Amos; something that Nathanael would have been aware no doubt. Evidently the city was proverbially bad, and had obtained a reputation of being something short of noteworthy. Nathanael’s question was whether or not the long awaited Messiah could possibly come from such a common city as Nazareth. So far as history was concerned, this small remote city never provided great men of history, no king was ever born there, and certainly no world leader ever arose from so insignificant a town. Things have not changed much in two centuries, and even today men find it incredible that a Savior, of all men to walk upon the face of this earth, would have spent much of His life in a place like Nazareth. Horatius Bonar commented on this aspect of our Lord’s earthly sojourn:

In choosing these unknown places for his Son, God showed that it was not former privilege, nor ancient sanctity, nor a venerable name that could avail anything with him, or attract his favor. Christ was sent to new places, where, so far as we know, the foot of patriarch, judge, prophet, or king had never been; showing that no city was so favored as to exclude others, and that all cities, as well as all souls, had a share in his divine regards (*Family Sermons*, by Horatius Bonar; Robert Carter and Brothers, 1863; 49).

*“Philip said, Come and see”* - What great advise for all men: “Come and see...” It is “the only honest and reliable way to settle doubt” (Woods, 46). “The strongest proof that Jesus is the Christ is Jesus himself” (Johnson, ESword Module). “Honest inquiry is a sovereign cure for prejudice” (Bruce, 60).

~~ 1:47 ~~

*“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”*

Jesus, able to look into the heart of an individual, thus knew that Nathanael was honest, pure, and open to truth. No doubt Jesus was well aware of the trickery of Jacob and his descendants.

Nathanael was quite a contrast to that man who was privileged to see angels ascending and descending to heaven. A really honest, sincere Israelite had become such an exception that at the appearance of Nathaniel Jesus exclaimed, ‘Look, truly an Israelite in whom deceit does not exist.’

~~ 1:48 ~~

*“Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee”*

*“Whence knowest thou me?”* - There is, in this query, an abruptness of blunt sincerity. Jesus would reply with an observation regarding something in Nathanael’s life that would be most profound and quite convincing so as to produce great faith in the heart of this would-be disciple.

*“Jesus answered...Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee”* - It is possible that Jesus made this statement in view of what Nathanael was doing under the fig tree. It was common for one to retire under a fig tree and thus meditate and pray. We can only speculate, but this we shall do. Perhaps Nathanael had been reading of Jacob’s dream of angels ascending and descending, and has wondered why Jacob, so full of guile and deceit, had been privileged to enjoy the blessings of God. With these words Jesus let Nathanael know that He knew more about him than the man knew about himself.

~~ 1:49 ~~

*“Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel”*

At first Nathanael addressed Jesus in a straightforward manner. At that point Nathanael was not convinced Jesus was the Messiah. But the ability of Jesus to see Nathanael from afar, and even to observe the disciple’s most private moments, was quite convincing. Nathanael confessed, “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel,” and with that statement whatever doubts Nathanael may have had were now gone.

~~ 1:50 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee underneath the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these”*

What were the “greater things” that Nathaniel would see? Coffman suggests the following:

(1) He had seen an example of Jesus’ penetrating supernatural knowledge; but, in the future, he would see that knowledge employed in the achievement of human redemption, a far greater thing. (2) He had seen the truth that Jesus is the Son of God; but, in the future, he would see Christ also as the Son of man and the achiever of reconciliation between God and all humanity. (3) He had seen Jesus as King of Israel; but, in the future, he would come to know that Christ is not merely King of Israel, but King of all creation, King of kings, and Lord of lords (Coffman, 53).

The blessings and privileges granted to Nathanael were granted to the entire body of the twelve apostles. “For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not” (Matt. 13:17).

~~ 1:51 ~~

*“And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”*

“*Verily, verily*” always implied a solemn and emphatic statement of some great truth that was about to be spoken. The literal translation is “amen,” and it is significant that no other New Testament writer ever used this solemn double “amen.”

“*Ye shall see the heaven opened*” - There is an allusion to the vision that Jacob received (Gen. 18:12). There is nothing recorded in the New Testament of this promise ever having been granted to Nathanael, but we have no doubt that such occurred. John was privileged to see the “heavens opened” when he

witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16). Stephen saw the “heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

*“and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man”* - This is a metaphor taken from the custom of dispatching couriers or messengers from a prince to his ambassador in a foreign court. The apostles were “*ambassadors on behalf of Christ*” (2 Cor. 5:20). The promise of Jesus to Nathanael was a promise of the role that the man would serve in the office of apostle.

### **Lessons and Observations**

1. The best reply to the honest doubter is to invite him to “come and see.” If he wants to argue or quibble, it is useless to talk to him. If he is seeking the truth, the simple invitation to “come and see” should interest him enough to at least examine the evidence.

2. Regarding the “Son of man,” Johnson had this note: “The phrase is not an equivalent to the word ‘Messiah,’ or Christ, but one that expresses the universal humanity of our divine Lord. He describes himself, not as the Son of Mary, nor as the Son of Abraham, but as the Son of man. He appeared upon earth, not as the kindred of the family of Nazareth, or of the Jewish nation, but as the kindred of humanity. He is the brother of the Greek, the Roman, the Gaul, the American, the African, as well as of the Jew” (Johnson, 43).

3. This entire chapter is an amazing presentation of the magnificence of our Lord. No other man can lay claim to an eternal existence; no mere man can take away the sins of the world; no man comes close to demanding, and getting, the kind of allegiance expected of His followers; no mere man can look into the heart of a man as did Jesus with regard to Nathanael. This is because Jesus is more than a man - and it is this deity and all of its inherent qualities that declare that Jesus Christ deserves to be magnified in the eyes of men.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# “FROM WATER POTS TO WINE VESSELS”

*The First Sign: Changing water into wine at Cana, 2:1-12*

With the selection of the four disciples in the previous chapter, the apostle has paved the way for the introduction of Jesus to the public. In an effort to produce belief (20:30-31), John would now present Jesus to his audience, focusing upon a handful of selected signs, important dialogues, and some major events during the brief ministry of Jesus. In these eleven chapters (2 thru 12) the apostle records eight discourses of our Lord and seven signs for our consideration. Keep in mind, however, that Jesus did “many other signs...in the presence of his disciples” (20:30-31). Why then did John [i.e. the Holy Spirit] choose only seven signs? It must have been because the Holy Spirit felt that these seven signs would provide enough information to adequately exalt the Savior and magnify Him in the eyes of those who would read and study with an open and honest heart. Individually, each discourse and each sign speaks volumes about the majesty of our Savior. But collectively, these signs and discourses magnify Jesus in amazing fashion.

### *From Water Pots to Wine Vessels*

The miracles of Jesus were designed to prove His deity and confirm the message that He presented. At the same time there is an amazing parallel between what He did physically in demonstrating His power, and what He can do spiritually with that same divine power. The Christian life is, without doubt, the best life a man could pursue and practice. The promises of God, the peace that is granted, and the practicality of the Christian religion puts it head and shoulders above anything else offered to moral man.

From the divine standpoint the church and Christianity is flawless, perfect in every respect. If you doubt that, take the time to read and study the book of Ephesians, especially the first three chapters. A proper understanding of the church as God intended it will help one have a deeper appreciation for the “manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). This is not to say that the Christian

life is without any challenges. Quite the contrary! There are times when we become frustrated with the challenges and temptations that might come along. Add to that the reality that we occasionally sin, and one comes to realize that being a “wine vessel” in the Lord’s kingdom often eludes us. Growth may be gradual, and often imperceptible. But growth is inevitable if we keep moving forward. Paul wrote these words to Timothy: “Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honor, and some unto dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master’s use, prepared unto every good work” (2 Timothy 2:20-21). It is obvious on the very surface that Paul was using the word “vessel” in a figurative sense. So, what kind of “vessel” are you? Are you simply a “water pot”? Are you content with standing on the side lines watching the game of life pass you by? How would you like to be a “wine vessel”? The miracle of Jesus at Cana provides us with a wonderful lesson on how we can grow from being water pots to wine vessels in the Lord’s “great house.” Before we take a closer look it is necessary to consider the background of the miracle itself.

The first act of any public figure usually sets the tone for the remainder of that person’s tenure in whatever capacity he might be serving. Consider as an illustration of this fact the following true story about Admiral Nimitz:

On Sunday, December 7th, 1941, Admiral Chester Nimitz was attending a concert in Washington D.C. He was paged and told there was a phone call for him. When he answered the phone, it was President Franklin Roosevelt on the phone. He told Admiral Nimitz that he (Nimitz) would now be the Commander of the Pacific Fleet. Admiral Nimitz flew to Hawaii to assume command of the Pacific Fleet. He landed at Pearl Harbor on Christmas Eve, 1941. There was such a spirit of despair, dejection and defeat; you would have thought the Japanese had already won the war. On Christmas Day, 1941, Adm. Nimitz was given a boat tour of the destruction wrought on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. Big sunken battleships and navy vessels cluttered the waters everywhere you looked. As the

tour boat returned to dock, the young helmsman of the boat asked, “Well Admiral, what do you think after seeing all this destruction?” Admiral Nimitz’s reply shocked everyone within the sound of his voice. Admiral Nimitz said, “The Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attack force could ever make, or God was taking care of America. Which do you think it was?” Shocked and surprised, the young helmsman asked, “What do mean by saying the Japanese made the three biggest mistakes an attack force ever made?” Nimitz explained: Mistake number one: the Japanese attacked on Sunday morning. Nine out of every ten crewmen of those ships were ashore on leave. If those same ships had been lured to sea and been sunk; we would have lost 38,000 men instead of 3,800. Mistake number two: when the Japanese saw all those battleships lined in a row, they got so carried away sinking those battleships, they never once bombed our dry docks opposite those ships. If they had destroyed our dry docks, we would have had to tow every one of those ships to America to be repaired. As it is now, the ships are in shallow water and can be raised. One tug can pull them over to the dry docks, and we can have them repaired and at sea by the time we could have towed them to America. And I already have crews ashore anxious to man those ships. Mistake number three: every drop of fuel in the Pacific theater of war is in top of the ground storage tanks five miles away over that hill. One attack plane could have strafed those tanks and destroyed our fuel supply. That’s why I say the Japanese made three of the biggest mistakes an attack force could make or God was taking care of America. The Admiral’s response to the situation set the tone for his service during the war. Assuming command at the most critical period of the war in the Pacific, Admiral Nimitz successfully organized his forces to halt the Japanese advance despite the losses from the attack on Pearl Harbor and the shortage of ships, planes and supplies.

The miracle at Cana drew back the curtain from an otherwise obscure life and gave the public the opportunity to witness firsthand the magnificence of our Lord. The miracle at Cana, and what immediately followed, set the tone for the three and a half years of our Lord’s earthly ministry. Let’s take a closer look.

~~ 2:1-2 ~~

*“And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was bidden, and his disciples, to the marriage”*

Cana is located about 9 miles north of Nazareth and is the home of Nathanael (21:2). Likely the “third day” is counted from the last one mentioned in 1:43, thus allowing the time for the journey to Cana.

*“there was a marriage”* - A “marriage” would include the wedding feast, often lasting for several days. Jesus and His mother were bidden to the feast, indicating that they were in some way acquainted with the bride or the groom. Jesus came, not as an ascetic, but as a person who was sociable. He also placed His stamp of approval upon the institution of marriage by so attending this wedding feast.

Another lesson emerges from this episode, one that runs somewhat contrary to the normal concept of what Jesus’ public life must have been like. Our Lord was not an austere individual. He appears to have enjoyed sharing in the happiness of others. There are some who seem to think that a religious person cannot manifest joy and happiness; quite the contrary, they expect the Christian to be somewhat “strait-laced,” and the more religious he is, the more sober he ought to be. Barclay shared some rather humorous quotes along this line:

“Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans.” “I know brethren who from head to foot, in garb, tone, manner, necktie and boots are so utterly parsonic that no particle of manhood is visible.... Some men appear to have a white cravat twisted round their souls, their manhood is throttled with that starched rag.” “An individual who has no geniality about him had better be an undertaker, and bury the dead, for he will never succeed in influencing the living.” “I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls; not levity and frothiness, but a genial, happy spirit. There are more flies caught with honey than with vinegar,

and there will be more souls led to heaven by a man who wears heaven in his face than by one who bears Tartarus in his looks” (Barclay, *Daily Bible Series*, ESword Module).

“*and the mother of Jesus was there*” - Whether she was there as an invited guest, or as a relative to either the bride or groom, is not known. Mary’s association with the family must have been quite close as indicated by the fact that she instructed the servants on this occasion. Mary is mentioned three times in John’s gospel; here, 19:25-27, and alluded to in 6:42, and never is she mentioned by name.

“*and Jesus also was bidden*” - The curious thing about this verse is this little word “also.” Tenney suggested that the word “carries a slight connotation that Jesus and His followers were extra guests, invited because of their connection with His mother” (Tenney, 83). The presence of Jesus and His disciples may also have contributed to the shortage of wine, especially if they were unexpected. The fact that Jesus attended the wedding feast shows that He not only approved of the institution of marriage, but at the same time He distanced Himself from the sect of the Essenes who disdained marriage.

~~ 2:3-4 ~~

*“And when the wine failed, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. And Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come”*

At some point in the marriage feast, it is said that “the wine failed.” Socially speaking, for the wine to run out would have been regarded as an insult to those present, and would have humiliated the host and hostess. Mary immediately surmised the family’s situation, and approached Jesus. This would suggest that, in some way, she was aware of His supernatural abilities.

“*Woman, what have I to do with thee?*” - The English translations do not convey the respect and tenderness that are contained in the original. Johnson pointed out that “the term woman was so respectful that it might be addressed to the queenliest, and so gentle that it might be spoken to those most

tenderly loved” (Johnson, 45). The same word was used when Jesus, while hanging on the cross, commended the care of Mary into the hands of John. There is also the possibility that Jesus was trying to communicate to His mother that the time had come when He was no longer under her authority. In effect he was saying, “Leave the matter to me; let me handle it in my way” (Woods, 50). Jesus may very well have wanted to wait until the entire supply was exhausted before performing the miracle.

The veneration of Mary has been a long standing practice in the Catholic Church, with special emphasis upon the role she plays as an intercessor for the saints. If Mary was rebuked here for attempting to direct Jesus in the days of His flesh, it is even more absurd to suggest that she might somehow influence our Lord upon the throne of His glory. Mary appears only twice in the fourth Gospel - here and at the cross (19:25ff.). This is peculiar in view of the prominence that the Catholics give to her. This entire incident shows us that there is not, nor has there ever been, any mediatorial role played by Mary.

*“Mine hour is not yet come”* - This has been variously interpreted: “They are not yet completely out of wine,” or “it is not time for me to step in yet,” or “it is not yet time for me to show my glory.” The meaning seems to be something along the line of these various paraphrases. John will provide a number of occasions when some reference was made to the “hour” that was to come. At this point in the ministry of our Lord it was not time for the full manifestation of Jesus as the King of Israel. Some have argued that “mine hour” refers to the hour of His death, but it seems that the more reasonable position is that Jesus was speaking of the entire process by which salvation would be brought to man. The repeated reference to the “hour” throughout John is an indication that Jesus was focused on the very purpose for which He came to this world, and that He was acting according to a set schedule by which the events of His life would unfold, leading eventually to the sacrifice He would make on the cross. If we jump forward in John we will notice that in the seventh chapter our Lord said “My time is not come” (7:6). In the same chapter it is said, “No man laid his hand on him because his hour was not yet come” (7:30). Moving forward one chapter we read, ““No man took him; because his hour was not

yet come” (8:20). Then in chapter 12, as the end was drawing near, we read that when the Greeks came to see Jesus that our Lord said, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified” (12:23). When we get to 13:1 it is said, “Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father.” Finally, in chapter 17, while praying to the Father, Jesus acknowledged, “Father, the hour is come” (17:1). Our Lord never lost sight of the fact that He had come for a definite purpose.

He saw his life not in terms of his wishes, but in terms of God’s purpose for himself. He saw his life not against the shifting background of time, but against the steady background of eternity. All through his life he went steadily towards that hour for which he knew that he had come into the world. It is not only Jesus who came into this world to fulfill the purpose of God. As someone has said: “Every man is a dream and an idea of God.” We, too, must think not of our own wishes and our own desires, but of the purpose for which God sent us into his world (Barclay, Electronic Notes).

~~ 2:5 ~~

*“His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you do it”*

These words reveal several things about Mary: (1) First, she did not understand Jesus’ previous words as some kind of rebuke from her Son. (2) Second, she evidently anticipated that Jesus’ commands might seem unreasonable to the servants, and thus told them to do ‘whatever He tells you.’ (3) She was more than just an ordinary guest, since it would seem improbable that the servants would obey the commands of an ordinary guest.

*“Whatever he saith unto you, do it”* - A simple yet profound piece of advice. If it was important to do exactly what the Lord instructed here in order to receive intended blessings, how much more important it is to heed our Lord’s words when it comes to our soul’s salvation. Yet multitudes today ignore the Lord’s simple statement in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

Here, then, is the first lesson consideration: If you would be a “wine vessel” for the Lord *you must first learn the lesson of submission*. Failure to obey every command of God, even the least, will rob you of eternal life. Strict obedience does not make you a legalist, but it will open the door for great blessings from your Father.

~~ 2:6 ~~

*“Now there were six waterpots of stone set there after the Jews’ manner of purifying, containing two or three firkins apiece”*

The “firkin” was approximately 9 gallons. The pots were said to contain from two to three firkins each, thus the capacity of the pots would be anywhere from 18 to 27 gallons each, or somewhere around 120 gallons - an abundant supply for the guests.

~~ 2:7 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim”*

Our Lord could have instantaneously made wine appear in the empty water pots. Who would doubt it? Jesus *could have* simply made wine appear in the vessels on this occasion; it was certainly within the scope of His power. But there was a lesson to be taught. It is rather interesting that Jesus did not touch the jars or the water with His own hands. The reason may have been to bely any accusation that the supposed miracle was nothing more than a “sleight of hand.” By refraining from handling the pots, and allowing the men to take care of all such arrangements, there could be no accusation that Jesus had “tricked” the multitude into thinking that a miracle had taken place.

Here is our second lesson for consideration: Jesus’ instructions for them to *“fill the waterpots with water”* has a wonderful spiritual application for us. If men would be changed from “water pots” to “wine vessels,” *they must put into their lives those ingredients with which our Lord can work*. Far too many fill their lives with those things that satisfy the lust of the flesh and expect God to work in their lives to bring salvation out of a

life that has been wasted in riotous living. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:7-8).

Each of us is a free moral agent. The direction of our life is most often determined by the disposition of our heart. God cannot work with hardened hearts. Lukewarmness, indifference, and apathy place a barrier between us and God. In order for God to effectively use us we must put something *into* our life that God can then use to develop our character and shape us into wine vessels for His cause. Perhaps the Proverb writer was addressing this very point when he recorded these words: “For as he thinketh within himself, so is he” (Pro. 23:7). In order for our God to use us effectively we must put something into our lives that will allow Him to do so. We must also take some things *out* of our lives that will hinder our becoming a tool in His hands; this is the meaning of repentance. This may be what the Lord had in mind when He told the following parable in Matthew 12:43-45:

But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man cometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation.

What are you putting into your life when you view pornography? What about the subject matter you watch on television, or what kind of reading material do you feed upon? There is a famous scene in Peter Pan. Peter is in the children’s bedroom; they have seen him fly; and they wish to fly too. They have tried it from the floor and they have tried it from the beds and the result is failure. “How do you do it?” John asked. And Peter answered: “You just think lovely, wonderful thoughts and they lift you up in the air.” The same is true for the believer. The only way to defeat evil

thoughts is to begin to think of something else. And the only way for God to mold you into a wine vessel for His house is for you to put something into your heart that He can use in the process.

*“fill them to the brim”* - John’s note that they “filled them to the brim” makes us believe that the servants may have suspected that something unusual was about to occur. When we fill our lives to the “brim” with that which is good there is no room left for evil.

~~ 2:8 ~~

*“And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the ruler of the feast. And they bare it”*

The instantaneous nature of the miracle is suggested in that immediately upon the water pots being filled, Jesus instructed them to “draw out now, and bear to the ruler of the feast.”

Here, then, is the third lesson: If I would be a “wine vessel” in God’s great house *I must be willing to give of myself unto others.* The hypothetical water pot might have complained: “Oh, no! Wait a minute. Get the water/wine from someone else. Leave me alone; I don’t want to get involved!” What about you? Are you content to be a water pot and let others be the wine vessel? The key to successful Christian living is summed up on the word ‘*service.*’ “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11). In the depiction our Lord gives of the great judgment day in Matthew 25 those who were granted entrance into heaven were the ones who willingly gave of themselves unto others. A couple of examples are noteworthy.

John Brodie, former quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, was once asked why a million-dollar player like him should have to hold the ball for field goals and points after touchdown. “Well,” said Brodie, “if I didn’t, it would fall over.”

The life of George Washington Carver is a good example of this Biblical truth. Carver was born near Diamond Grove, Missouri, the son of slaves. His father was killed, and young George kidnapped, along with his mother and another child. His mother was never located again, but the sickly child was bought back by their “master” in exchange for a \$300 horse. As a youth, Carver

developed a keen mind and sharp intellect, and against overwhelming odds he attained bachelor's and master's degrees. Because of his ability, Iowa University offered him a teaching post. It was a coveted position, more so since a black man had rarely before attained such an honored berth. Then the letter arrived. Signed by Booker T. Washington, it invited Carver to join him in educating the black man in the South. It was a pioneering endeavor. He was to head the newly organized Department of Agriculture at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. The future was uncertain, the salary considerably less than what Iowa offered. But what awaited the young scholar was a people and a region that desperately needed him--an eroded, exhausted and parched farmland devastated by poor cultivation practices. He traveled southward for a lifetime of sacrifice and years filled with insult from those who refused to accept a black man in their region, regardless of his genius. But he was where he belonged, in a place of service, lifting up a people and a region in desperate need. Carver's contributions were legion. He developed ways to add life to the soil through restoration of mineral content and crop diversification. He discovered that peanuts and sweet potatoes produced impressive yields in the Alabama soil. With that knowledge, his next step was to find over three hundred ways to utilize these products. In doing so, he revolutionized the economy of the South. Carver, for his servant efforts, became a legend in his own time. Thomas Edison offered the teacher a huge salary--especially in that day--of \$100,000 a year and a beautiful new laboratory in which to continue his research. Industry wooed him to engage in various enterprises for increased prestige and monetary gain. Carver shunned them all. Even Booker T. Washington offered to raise his meager starting salary of \$1,500 at Tuskegee. Carver turned it down.

The epitaph on Carver's grave reads: "He could have added fame and fortune but cared for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

If you would be a "wine vessel" for God's great house, you must give yourself unto others.

~~ 2:9-10 ~~

*“And when the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and knew not whence it was (but the servants that had drawn the water knew), the ruler of the feast calleth the bridegroom, 10 and saith unto him, Every man setteth on first the good wine; and when men have drunk freely, then that which is worse: thou hast kept the good wine until now”*

*“the ruler of the feast tasted”* - Whatever conclusion this ruler might have drawn was based upon first-hand experience. He did not know the source of the wine, but he did recognize its excellent quality. The servants, on the other hand, were aware of the source.

*“the water now become wine”* - A great number of so-called Bible scholars read the word “wine” with some pre-conceived notion that our English rendering of ‘*oinos*’ [i.e. “wine”] meant precisely what it means in our day and age - “intoxicated liquor.” We stand amazed that anyone would interpret this passage as meaning that Jesus had turned the wine into the highest quality of intoxicating liquor possible. The student must keep in mind that among the Greeks and Romans there were three kinds of wine: (1) Fermented wines, which were very unlike our modern day strong liquors. This fermented wine, weak in its initial state, was then diluted with two or three parts of water, and had no intoxicating power unless used in very large quantities. (2) New wine was the fresh juice of the grape, perhaps somewhat like our cider. This had no intoxicating power. (3) Wine that was boiled thereby stopping the process of fermentation.

*“Every man setteth on first the good wine; then that which is worse”* - Why some commentators insist that the “good wine” is highly intoxicated wine remains a mystery to this student. Burton Coffman departs from his usual scholarly treatment of the scriptures and joins the rank and file “theologians” who think it illogical to deny the intoxicating nature of this “good wine.” I make this point for the simple reason that I often quote from brother Coffman, in full agreement with what he has written on a given matter; but in this I completely disagree with brother Coffman. In his commentary on these verses he wrote:

The opinion of the ruler of the feast that the wine Jesus made was superior in quality to that they had drunk earlier, supports the conclusion that it was not merely pure grape juice. This is not to say, however, that the wine Jesus made was supercharged with alcohol like some of the burning liquors that are marketed today under the label of “wine”. THAT we emphatically deny; but to go further than this and read WINE as GRAPE JUICE seems to this writer to be a perversion of the word of God (Coffman, Electronic edition on this passage).

Whether or not my conclusions are a “perversion of the word of God” remains to be seen. But before we acquiesce to Coffman’s conclusion that the “wine” here is “not merely pure grape juice,” we ask that you give at least some consideration to the “other side” as we seek to set forth a defense for this being non-intoxicating wine. The question as to whether Jesus changed the water into intoxicating or non-intoxicating wine centers around a number of words and phrases in the passage. For example, we need to discern the difference between the “good wine” verses “that which is worse.” Included in this discussion must be a consideration of the words, “*drunk freely*.” We will address the words “*drunk freely*” first.

“*drunk freely*” - The NIV butchers these verses with its “mis-translation” of the text. It reads, “Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, ‘Everybody brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.’” The more reliable American Standard Version reads, “When men have drunk freely.” The King James Version reads, “When men have well drunk.” While the Greek word (*methuo*) can mean “to be drunken” (Thayer), “to drink to intoxication” (Mickelson), McGarvey points out, “The ruler was no disciple of Jesus, and he speaks in the merry spirit of the world. He gives his own experience as to the habits of feasts, and his words give no indication that those present indulged to excess” (McGarvey, Four Fold Gospel, Electronic edition). Just because the ruler of the feast makes such a statement, other factors must be considered before drawing the conclusion that the wine served at

this wedding feast, or the wine produced by Jesus, was intoxicating to any degree whatsoever.

As mentioned above, the claim advanced by so many is that the words always denote intoxication. It is interesting that the English translations that I consulted denote quantity rather than quality. Even the NIV to which I referred earlier reads, “after the guests have had too much to drink” - quantity rather than quality. In their lexicon, Liddell and Scott say that the Greek word ‘*methuo*’ expresses the idea of being drenched with moisture.” That may, or may not mean intoxication. It could just as easily mean “filled.” W.D. Jeffcoat’s observation is noteworthy: “Various commentators and lexicographers along with Anstadt view the term as meaning “well wineed, after they had drunk wine, as much as they wished, till they were satisfied with wine, whether it was much or little” (Jeffcoat, 42). The Septuagint repeatedly uses this Greek word ‘*methuo*’ in its primary sense, meaning “to fill” or “filled up.” For example, Psalms 23:5, “my cup runneth over.” A.T. Robertson had this significant observation:

“When men have drunk freely” - Indefinite temporal clause with first aorist passive subjunctive. The verb does not mean that these guests are now drunk, but that this is a common custom to put “the worse” wine last (Robertson, ESword Module).

We think this is sufficient to dispel the notion that “drunk freely” always means intoxication. It does not; and the overall context must determine the full meaning of the phrase. In answer to the argument that the phrase “drunk freely” always denotes intoxication or drunkenness, we point out that there is nothing in the passage that would even remotely suggest that the Son of God sanctioned the consumption of intoxicating wine as a beverage.

“*good wine...that which is worse*”- We turn our attention next to the meaning of “good wine.” The word that is translated here “good” is not ‘*agathos*’ but ‘*kalos*.’ Jeffcoat points out that

the term was applied by the Greeks to everything so distinguished in form, excellence, goodness, usefulness, and eminence, as to be pleasing; at times the term had to do with that which was beautiful to look at; at other times it indicated that which was good, excellent in nature and characteristics, and therefore adapted to its end, or superior to other kinds (Jeffcoat, 44).

The point to be emphasized here is that “good wine” is simply that which is superior and not that of a higher intoxicating content. Jeffcoat noted that “Pliny indicated that good wine was that which was destitute of spirit. Among the ancient Orientals and Romans, such an idea [intoxication, TW] was not universally attached to wine. In fact, according to various Roman Classical writers, their best wines were not fermented” (Jeffcoat, 44).

The situation at Cana was not that of some kind of drunken party; it was a marriage feast. The family was likely poor and could not afford the best and costliest wine for their feast. The wine which Jesus made was far superior, had a greater quality, and a far superior taste than that which the guests had experienced so far. That being the case, the “ruler of the wedding feast” was making a comparison to what men generally do when it comes to serving the best. Men usually provide their guests with the best they might have, and if that happens to run out, then they break out what is worse in order to avoid being embarrassed due to lack of quantity. At this feast in Cana the host had provide what they had - a lower quality wine, but the best they could afford. It is obvious from the very flow of the passage that the wine Jesus produced was of better quality than that which the host had initially served. When the ruler of the feast tasted the water now become wine, he was immediately impressed with the superior taste, and thus the illustration.

We turn our attention next to a consideration of the immediate and remote context with regard to heaven’s instructions and attitude regarding intoxicating drink. Those who hold to the view that Jesus turned the water into intoxicating wine and somehow sanctioned social drinking subscribe to what brother W. D. Jeffcoat calls “an illogical and self-contradictory theory.” I agree! Any position that implies a false conclusion is a position that is

false in itself. Those who claim that Jesus supplied a large quantity of intoxicating wine to people who were already drunk face an insurmountable dilemma. For sake of argument, let us assume for just a moment that the “ruler of the feast” was making the following argument: “Every man sets out first the highly intoxicating wine; and when men have gotten drunk, then that which is worst and less intoxicating; but you have kept the highly intoxicating wine until now!” The conclusion that men seek to draw based upon this biased rendition of the passage is that our Lord produced intoxicating wine and thereby sanctioned the imbibing of alcoholic beverages. Consider the following “if-then” argument:

If excess of intoxicating beverage is wrong and that excess constitutes drunkenness;

And if it is the case that “drunk freely” means to “get drunk or become intoxicated;

Then it follows that Jesus provided a large quantity of intoxicating wine to people who were already drunk.

That being the case, advocates of “social drinking” at the wedding at Cana are forced into a dilemma. Either Jesus was guilty of sin in contributing to drunkenness (something that would be contrary to a number of NT passages such as Hebrews 4:15 and 1 Peter 2:22-24); or Jesus was not guilty of sin, thus leading to the conclusion that it is NOT a sin to contribute to drunkenness. To put it another way: If Jesus supplied intoxicating wine to the wedding at Cana, then He contributed to further intoxication and/or drunkenness; and if intoxication is sinful, then our Lord sinned!

Going still further, it is impossible that the wine created by Jesus at Cana was something upon which the scriptures place a strong condemnation (Pro. 20:1, 23:31; Isa. 22:13; Hab. 2:15). As for those who insist that the wine Jesus produced was intoxicating, the burden of proof lies squarely on their shoulders to prove beyond a shadow of doubt that the wine was, in fact, intoxicating; and in this author’s estimation they have not proven their case, nor can they.

It is from the 10<sup>th</sup> verse that we draw our fourth and final lesson. If you would be a “wine vessel” for God’s house *you must recognize that God’s methods are far above the methods of men.* Notice in verse 10 that according to the ruler of the feast, our Lord has reserved the best for the last. The general philosophy of the world is summed up in six words: “Grab all the gusto while you can.” Delayed gratification is often wiser, and sometimes it is the best course of action. Stan Mitchell had some words of wisdom along this line:

Delay is not denial. Waiting for the right time is neither idle nor empty. Anticipation is the best preparation for the moment of fulfillment. I remember the first time I took communion. I was twelve years old, and it was the Sunday after I was baptized. What a very special moment that was! Delayed gratification is not popular in our culture, but there are times when it is important. Waiting to make a purchase until one saves enough money is better than buying on credit and paying interest (Proverbs 21:20). Waiting till marriage for sexual fulfillment avoids many problems and pleases God (Hebrews 13:4).

If you doubt the truth of what we are saying, consider God’s method. As great as the church is, and as wonderful as fellowship with God’s people here in this life, it is but a foretaste of what awaits us in heaven. Indeed, God has saved the best for last.

~~ 2:11 ~~

*“This beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed on him”*

As a result of this miracle it is said that Jesus “manifested his glory.” The result, at least on the part of the disciples, is that of belief. The four gospels make it certain that early faith of the disciples was weak, at best. But at this point their belief in Jesus has progressed beyond the theoretical to the empirical. They had now seen with their own eyes the power of this One Whom John had declared was the “Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world.” Who would deny that at least so far as the apostles were

concerned, Jesus was magnified in the eyes of those men who would carry the message to a lost and dying world?

~~ 2:12 ~~

*“After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples; and there they abode not many days”*

The fact that Joseph, the husband of Mary, is not mentioned in this trip or the wedding feast suggests at least the possibility that he is now deceased.

*“went down to Capernaum”* - This was one of the principle cities on the Sea of Galilee and the scene of a number of Jesus’ greatest works. Jesus pronounced judgment upon this city because of their unbelief (cf. Matt. 11:23). Coffman noted that “This curse on Capernaum has been fulfilled in such a way that the very site of the place is hardly known today” (Coffman, 68). It was in this city that Jesus raised Jarius’ daughter (Mark 5:22), healed the centurion’s servant (Matt. 8:5-13, Luke 7:1-5), and cured the son of a certain nobleman (John 4:46). Yet in spite of all of these wonderful miracles, there was very little fruit that came forth from that city. It is important to note that just because someone is taught the truth is no indication that he will receive that truth.

Many evangelists, especially young ones, seem to believe that given the proper methods, reinforced with zealous and attractive personnel, just about any city or province may be taken for the Lord. Such determination and zeal are commendable so long as it is remembered that each community and every man has the final word on whether or not it or he will serve the Lord, and that no method, personality, system, or anything else can win the whole world for Jesus Christ, bind it in golden chains, and lay it at the Redeemer’s feet, the insurmountable obstacle being what it has ever been, i.e., the stubborn will of sinful and unregenerated men. The intangible factor in evangelism is the people themselves, every individual one of them, each having the power to oppose the heavenly will if he so decides (Coffman, 69).

Capernaum is a good example of this very truth.

One more observation before we take up the next section of verses. Please note how brief and succinct the inspired writer recorded these events. Someone reporting on the marriage feast and the miracle that took place there would have spent pages, if not an entire book, on the miracle and the effect it had upon the crowd. John, like all of the other inspired writers, was restrained from extensive elaboration upon the event, recording only the facts.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### “ZEAL FOR THINE HOUSE”

*The Cleansing Of The Temple, 2:13-22*

No doubt the news about the miracle at Cana spread like a prairie fire across a west Texas plain. With the miracle fresh on the minds of His mother, His brethren, and His disciples, what followed in Jerusalem was a natural outpouring of the divine nature that was exhibited in that first miracle. The miracle established the basis upon which our Lord authoritatively cleansed the temple, for without the divine qualification of our Lord any attempt to do what He did here would have been arrogant and/or foolish. With a scourge of cords our Lord cast out not only the sheep and oxen that were on display, He drove the money changers out of the temple and overthrew their tables as well. Such action would magnify this “man” (if He dare be called a man) in the sight of all. The *need* for the cleaning lay in the hostile environment in which our Lord found Himself in this city so far removed from Cana. Here in Jerusalem our Lord...

[E]ncountered a public different from that of Galilee. The disciples of John the Baptist, Jesus’ first followers, were predisposed to believe in him. The “Jews” of Jerusalem, whom the writer of this Gospel represented as a hostile group, were suspicious of His claims and jealous of His prowess. Their suspicion and jealousy were revealed through His cleaning of the temple, which Jesus’ protest against the commercialization of the spiritual heritage of Jerusalem...Jesus’ act in cleaning the temple presupposed authority as the representative of God (Tenney, 83-84).

The cleansing of the temple was the first public act by which our Lord manifested His divine authority. The Jews may have been blind to the implications of this cleaning; but they were true nonetheless.

What occurs in these verses take on rich meaning when we keep in mind that this is the Lord’s first visit to Jerusalem following

His entrance into the public ministry. Another significant point that will be borne out is the undeniable fact that the cleaning of the temple was not only a declaration of the Lord's authority, but a clear message to the Jewish leaders that the Holy One of Israel had arrived.

~~ 2:13 ~~

*“And the passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem”*

Regarding the “*passover of the Jews,*” the apostle John never refers to the Passover as a feast of God. Instead it is “the Passover of the Jews.” This may be due to the corruption of that divinely ordained feast as it was mixed with man's innovations, eventually becoming nothing more than a “commandment of men.”

“*Jesus went up to Jerusalem*” - Seeing that Jerusalem lay to the south of Galilee, the reference here is to the elevation of the city rather than the locality. Whenever the Bible utilizes geographical facts, it is always 100% accurate.

~~ 2:14-16 ~~

*“And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables; and to them that sold the doves he said, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise”*

It was a common practice in those days for the money changers to make sheep, oxen and doves available to the people so that the necessary animals could be purchased for sacrifice. Johnson noted that “at the Passover 200,000 paschal lambs were required, and as the vast throngs who came from distant parts could not bring them it was necessary to buy them in Jerusalem” (Johnson, 51). Consequently, the traffic in this ludicrous business was great. The shame of it all was that these animals were being sold in the Temple rather than in the local stock yard, all under the watchful eye of the “priesthood” authorities. As Johnson

noted, “The Court of gentiles, designed as a ‘house of prayer for all nations’ (Mark 11:15-19), was converted into cattle stalls, filled with their ordure, and noisy with their lowing and the din of traffic” (Johnson, 51). Exorbitant prices were charged for the purchase of these animals. Added to this was the practice of exchanging necessary currency so that those from out of the country would have proper coinage with which to make their purchase. This, of course, was accompanied by a charge for such exchange. “An exchange for money was also set up, where Jews were ready to furnish, on usurious terms, the proper coin, the sacred half-shekel, in which form alone was the temple-tax received from the provincial visitors or pilgrims from distant lands. No coin bearing the image of Caesar, or any foreign prince, or any idolatrous symbol then so common, would be allowed in the sacred treasury” (Pulpit Commentary, AGES Electronic Edition). Thus “with the temple concessionaires having the only supply of animals and the only supply of money by which they could have been purchased, the suffering people were gouged unmercifully” (Coffman, 71). It was without doubt, “big business.” What was supposed to have been a worship activity had been turned into an occasion for “a shameful filching operation” (Nichols).

*“make not my Father’s house”* - In Malachi 3:1 ff. it is written: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.” Also, from Zechariah 14:21: “Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.” Literally, the last portion of the passage reads: “And in that day there shall not be a trader in the house of Jehovah of Hosts any more” (E-Sword, Literal Version). It may very well be that Malachi and Zechariah foresaw this very event, and if so, then what Jesus did in the temple was a declaration of His Messiahship. Based upon these two Old Testament passages, Bruce made this observation:

What Jesus did is best classified as an act of prophetic symbolism. If he had Zech. 14:21 in his mind when he protested against his Father's house being turned into a supermarket, we may recall that the preceding verses of Zech. 14 tell how all nations will go up to Jerusalem to worship. The only place within the temple precincts which was open to people of 'all nations' was the outer court (something called the 'court of the Gentiles'); if this area were taken up for trading it could not be used for worship. Jesus' action reinforced his spoken protest (Bruce, 75).

*"a house of merchandise"* - The Greek word *'emporion'* refers to a place of trade. It denotes the secularization of the system of worship. We get our English word *'emporium'* from this word. It should be noted that Jesus "still looks with indignation upon the desecration of his Father's house. How often still it is converted into a house of merchandise!" (Johnson, ESword Module). Noah Hackworth made this observation:

To the money changers and sellers of oxen, sheep and doves, the temple had obviously become an ordinary thing. Though they knew it was holy, because it was God's house, they nevertheless profaned it with their activities. This being the case, New Testament Christians can also be guilty of religious profanity if they treat the ordinances of the house of God, the church, as cheap, ordinary things (Hackworth, Firm Foundation Lectures on John, 48).

An unknown poet wrote:

I counted dollars while God counted crosses.  
I counted gains while he counted losses.  
I counted my worth by the things held in store.  
But he sized me up by the scars that I bore.  
I coveted honors and sought for degrees,  
He wept as he counted the time on my knees.  
And I never knew till one day at a grave,  
How vain are the things that we spend life to save.

We were also impressed with Johnson's application of this grievous sin of these merchants:

The Master still looks with indignation upon the conversion of the Temple into a house of merchandise. It is still done by a corrupt priesthood, a greedy ministry, or a membership who try to make gain by professed godliness. When a priesthood sells its offices, makes its set charges for absolution, extreme unction, the burial of the dead, masses and indulgences; or in Protestant churches the ministry become a set of hirelings, in the market for the highest bidder; or the membership convert the house of God into a place for shows, festivals, raffles, etc. the Father's House is made a house of merchandise. There is need of the whip of small chords to scourge out the traffickers (Johnson, ESword Module).

*“and he made a scourge of cords, and cast all out of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen”* - Modern critics accuse the Lord of being overbearing when using such force on the animals. Such so-called “theologians” have probably had little if any experience in moving sheep and oxen about in a busy street. I had occasion at my first local work to associate with farmers who regularly had to corral hogs and cattle, and unless the animal was willing to cooperate, it took a great deal of force, and patience, to make the beast move. Another important observation was made by Bruce: “Whatever the degree of force that was used, the action took on nothing of the riotous character that would have attracted swift and sharp intervention from the Roman garrison in the Antonia fortress, which overlooked the temple area on the north-west and communicated with the outer court by two flights of steps (Bruce, 75).

~~ 2:17 ~~

*“His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for thy house shall eat me up”*

*“His disciples remembered”* - Precisely *when* His disciples remembered that Old Testament passage and made the connection between it and this incident is not certain. The aorist tense of the word “remembered” makes the point in time uncertain. Nichols concluded, “While it is possible that this Psalm came immediately to their minds as they witnessed the event, it seems more likely that it was remembered by them at

some later time before John wrote these words” (Nichols, Denton, 83).

“*zeal for thine house*” - The word for “zeal” is used for “consuming emotions.” Thayer says the word (*zelos*) means “excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit” (Thayer, E Sword Module). The same word is sometimes translated “jealousy.”

The implications of what Jesus did also had an immediate impact upon the priests, because in the next verse John tells us they asked for a “sign” to authenticate what Jesus had done. We should also point out that there were two cleansings of the temple. The second cleansing occurred near the close of our Lord’s ministry and is recorded in Matthew 21:12. On that occasion He used, in place of “house of merchandise,” the bitter description, “den of robbers.” “This first act was reformatory of a gross abuse; the later was judicial and condemnatory” (Pulpit Commentary on John, 89). Shortly after that second cleansing, Jesus made it clear that it was no longer “my Father’s house,” but “your house” (Matt. 23:38).

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“FERVENT IN SPIRIT, SERVING THE LORD”

by Tom Wacaster

The New Testament often addresses the importance of zeal. For example, “Let love be without hypocrisy; in love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another...in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:9-11). Great things have been accomplished because of the zeal and fervency of an individual. Many of the Old Testament characters are remembered for their zeal for God: Gideon, Samson, Moses, to name but a few. Please observe the following truths relative to zeal:

First, zeal is OBSERVABLE: Like the bright sun that shines in the morning sky, zeal is self-evident. The prophet Jeremiah demonstrated his great zeal for God with these words: “And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up

in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain” (Jer. 20:9). Volumes have been written on the heroic deeds of the Jews who made their mark on history during the two centuries leading up to the coming of John the Baptist. Perhaps the most well known event in the uprising of the Jews was that final epic battle at Masada where Eleazar ben Yair, along with 960 men, women and children, took their own lives rather than subject themselves as slaves to the Romans. From the slaying of Stephen by the religious enemies of the cross, through the ten waves of persecutions by the likes of Nero, Domitian, Trajan, and Diocletian, the church marched forward with great fervency of spirit. Under the terrible reign of Marcus Aurelius “some of the martyrs were obliged to pass, with their already wounded feet, over thorns, nails, sharp shells, etc. upon their points, others were scourged until their sinews and veins lay bare, and after suffering the most excruciating tortures that could be devised, they were destroyed by the most terrible deaths.” Germanicus was one of those martyrs who “behaved with such astonishing courage that several pagans became converts to a faith which inspired such fortitude.” God’s people are to be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). The consequence of steadfast determination and zeal was stated so eloquently by the Psalmist: “He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psa. 126:6). Yes, zeal is observable.

Second, zeal has an OBJECT: By this we mean zeal is channeled in some particular direction; it has a particular aim or goal in mind. Saul of Tarsus was zealous, but his zeal was based on ignorance. In order for zeal to have lasting value and purpose, it must be channeled in the proper direction. Our Lord’s cleansing of the temple was not for personal popularity; it was to glorify the Father. It is doubtful that anyone is completely devoid of zeal. The greater one’s zeal for any particular purpose the more manifest it will be, and the more consequential its application.

Third, zeal must be OPERATIVE: In other words, zeal, more often than not, takes the offensive. Jesus was not passive; He did not negotiate. Consider the following sub-points relative to the operative nature of zeal: (1) James reminds us that faith and zeal must be *active* (Jas. 2:14 ff.); otherwise, without works, it is

dead. (2) Then, faith must be *aggressive*; it must take the offense when necessary. I do not remember who made this observation, but it is worth repeating: “Zeal can no more remain long in the presence of evil without attacking it, than a hungry lion in the presence of his prey, or a powerful army in the presence of the foe.” (3) Next, zeal is *sweeping in its demands*. Everyone understands the importance of accuracy in phone numbers. Why are we surprised that God desires accuracy in our worship (cf. John 4:24-26). (4) To be operative, zeal must be *courageous*. Timidity has no place in the heart of the Christian soldier. (5) Zeal must be *self-sacrificing*. Our Lord purified the temple at great risk to His own life, and finally gave Himself as a sacrifice for all mankind. (6) In order to be operative, zeal must be *properly governed* (Rom. 10:2). One has properly noted, “Knowledge without zeal is a living corpse! On the other hand, zeal without proper knowledge is a volcanic glacier erupting in one sporadic belch after another, covering the church under the lava bed of confusion, instability, and righteousness of man rather than God” (source not preserved). There is a difference between genuine zeal and pseudo-enthusiasm. The later may fill auditoriums, but it is the former that accomplishes great things for the Master. One brother noted:

If the opposite of indifference and passivity is enthusiasm, let us grant that enthusiasm is called for. But let us thoughtfully ask whether enthusiasm, in this sense, invariably manifests itself with slaps on the back, wide smiles, ‘Praise the Lords,’ and bursts of applause. Is it not more fitting that enthusiasm begin with thoughtful insight, penitent self-examination and carefully planned and executed efforts? And, is it not possible that ‘Praise the Lords’ and rousing orations may so dull sensitivity to prayerful [sic] study and quiet communion with the Lord, that piety is somewhere lost in the rush? (Duane Warden).

Fourth, zeal will OVERCOME: In the final analysis Jesus was triumphant. Even from the beginning of time it was prophesied that the devil would bruise the heel of Jesus, but that the “seed of woman” would crush the head of the devil. The same zeal that characterized our Lord, and ultimately overcame, will provide for

us the ultimate victory in Christ. But why is it that zeal will overcome?

First, zeal will conquer by its own inherent strength. Someone has noted regarding zeal, "Its voice is thunder, its deeds are lightening, its words are two-edged swords, and its chariots and horses are of fire. Its march is majestic, its consciousness of success is supreme, and, should a cloud appear in its firmament, it must soon vanish before its dazzle."

Second, zeal will overcome because of the justice of its cause. Right is stronger than wrong, good greater than evil, and truth more brilliant than error. Ralph Waldo Emerson is credited with saying, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm. It can spread throughout a congregation and cause Christians to 'shine as lights in the world holding forth the word of life' (Phil 2:15). It is a basic axiom that you cannot kindle a fire in any other heart until it is burning within your own. May our epitaph read like another's: "Here rests a man who never rested here." Let us be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

~~ 2:18 ~~

*"The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?"*

Throughout John's account we see repeated demands for some "sign" from Jesus. The astonishing thing about their request is that Jesus DID show them signs - by the dozens - and yet they still did not believe nor did they accept His authority. Indeed "many other signs did Jesus" (John 20:30), and these disbelieving Jews never accepted a single one of them as verification or authentication of anything. Never were hearts so hardened, and eyes so blind. Brother Hackworth made this observation: "The Jews were extremely gifted in the art of misunderstanding. They often confused 'this' with 'that'" (Hackworth, 44).

Jesus understood the full consequences of His action, and used the occasion to foretell His coming death and resurrection. The fact that Jesus, by Himself, could successfully clear the temple of

these money changers suggests that they may have already recognized something about the authority of Jesus.

~~ 2:19 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”*

*“Destroy this temple”* - The passage is a remarkable prophecy of our Lord’s death and resurrection. The Jews misunderstood (again) our Lord’s use of the word “temple.” This is obviously a prophecy of the death and resurrection of Jesus. But there is also contained in the words of Jesus a clear indication that the old order would give way to the new. Coffman picked up on this, and quoted Hunter:

Destroy is a prophetic command meaning, ‘Go on as you are doing and you will bring this temple down in ruins (at the hands of Rome); but in a brief time (three days) I will raise up another center of worship.’ Jesus is predicting that through his work there will arise a new spiritual building in which the new Israel, the Church, will worship God’ (Coffman, 73).

There is something else. Whereas the word for “temple” in 2:14-15 is *‘hieron,’* denoting the whole complex of buildings that make up the “temple grounds,” the word here in verses 19-21 is *‘naos’* and denotes the sanctuary or the holy place. It was the *‘naos’* rather than the *‘hieron’* that was regarded as the dwelling place of God. The fact is, that physical temple was rendered null and void and replaced by the church, the true temple of God. Less than four decades later the physical temple would be completely destroyed, leaving only the spiritual temple, the church.

~~ 2:20 ~~

*“The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?”*

*“forty six years”* - This is one of the most important chronological data by which we can date not only this gospel account, but the remainder of the New Testament. According to Josephus, Herod commenced rebuilding the temple in the

autumn of the eighteenth year of his reign, or 20-19 B.C. Adding 46 years to that date brings the time of this first cleansing to 27-28 A.D. This would mean that this cleansing took place in the early part of Jesus' ministry.

~~ 2:21 ~~

*"But he spake of the temple of his body"*

John's interpretation of the words of Christ serve to explain the meaning of the prophecy of His death. Jesus was not speaking of destroying the "Jewish temple," or raising up the "Jewish temple." He was talking about His crucifixion and resurrection.

~~ 2:22 ~~

*"When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said"*

This incident would provide opportunity for Jesus to instruct the disciples pertaining to the spiritual nature of His kingdom. They were slow to grasp this point, and it would appear that the full realization of that truth did not come until sometime after our Lord's death and resurrection. Brother Woods noted:

If to us the Lord's disciples so often seem to have been without assurance and conviction regarding his ultimate death and future life beyond the grave we must ever keep in mind that deep within them was the view that Messiah would be an earthly king, over a temporal kingdom and exercise sovereignty from a literal Jerusalem; such concepts simply did not allow for the suffering and death he often mentioned but which they seemed not to perceive (Woods, 57).

John provides us with little statements that guide us through this spiritual development of the disciples. "These quiet 'asides' and reflections of the biographer on the mistaken ideas which he cites and corrects, are of consummate value, as pointing out the stages by which the most stupendous ideas that have taken human spirits captive dawned on the most susceptible minds" (Pulpit Commentary, 92).

*“his disciples remembered”* - The fact that the disciples remembered this incident at some later point is an indication that the event must have made a favorable impression upon them. On a side note, brother Woods made this interesting observation:

This evidences the fact that it is always good to store up scripture in our hearts though we may not fully grasp the significance at the moment... Lessons today taught to impressionable youngsters may germinate into practical lessons of conduct years later, and after the teacher has gone to be with the Lord (Woods, 57).

*Jesus At The Passover, 2:23-25*

In these verses we are told:

- (1) That it was the time of the Passover;
- (2) That many “believed on his name”;
- (3) That this belief came as a result of their “beholding his signs which he did”;
- (4) That Jesus did not “trust himself unto them”;
- (5) That Jesus “knew all men”;
- (6) That Jesus did not need that anyone should bear witness of Himself; and
- (7) That He knew what “was in man”;

~~ 2:23 ~~

*“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on his name, beholding his signs which he did”*

*“many believed on his name”* - The purpose of the miracles was to produce belief in the hearts of the multitude. Unable to deny the reality of the miracles, many came to “believe,” but they would not let that belief move them to confess the name of Christ (John 12:42). Great expectations with reference to a coming Christ had been excited in the breasts of tens of thousands by John the Baptist’s fiery ministry. The result was that men now flocked to Jesus in greater numbers than they had to John (3:26,

30). Unfortunately, their faith was not deep enough to bring forth obedience.

*“beholding the signs which he did”* - Though the signs are not identified, we learn that Jesus performed a number of miracles early in His ministry.

~~ 2:24 ~~

*“But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men”*

*“Jesus did not trust himself unto them”* - The word “trust” in verse 24 is the same as that translated “believe” in verse 22. “He had no faith in their faith, and consequently did not open to them more of his nature; still less did he assume, as they would like him to do, an immediate and outward Messiahship of political revolt” (Reynolds, Pulpit Commentary, 93).

*“for he knew all men”* - The Greek is *‘ginowskein’* and suggests a perceptive and continuous process. He “kept on knowing men,” suggestive of our Lord’s divine nature. “He penetrated their thoughts, discerned their character, saw the meaning of their faith, the burden of their wishes, the real passions that consumed them - he knew all” (Reynolds, 93). And because He knew all, He knew the kind of men it would take to further the gospel, and declare Himself to men.

Jesus knew human nature. He knew the fickleness and instability of the heart of man. He knew that a man can be swept away in a moment of emotion, and then back out when he discovers what decision really means. He knew how human nature hungers for sensations. He wanted not a crowd of men cheering they knew not what, but a small company who knew what they were doing and who were prepared to follow to the end (Barclay, ESword Module).

The magnificence of Jesus is seen in His omniscience in this entire incident. Albert Barnes had this note: “There can be no higher evidence than this that he was omniscient, and was therefore divine. To search the heart is the prerogative of God alone (Jer. 17:10); and as Jesus knew what was in ‘these

disciples,' and as it is expressly said that he knew what was in MAN-- that is, in 'all people'-- so it follows that he must be equal with God" (Barnes, ESword Module).

Here we are face to face with something arresting. His signs produced a belief, but it was not a belief to which He could commit Himself. They committed themselves to Him in a certain way; but He could not commit Himself to them. Their belief was shallow. It was based on wonder. The things that were necessarily arresting, startling, spectacular, were all they wanted. Belief that is based upon the spectacular is always shallow and evanescent. If belief is nothing more than admiration for the spectacular, it will create in multitudes applause; but the Son of God cannot commit Himself to that kind of faith (Morgan, ESword Module).

~~ 2:25 ~~

*"and because he needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for he himself knew what was in man"*

*"bear witness concerning man"* - The meaning is that Jesus did not need anyone to tell Him what was in the hearts of men, or what their nature might be. Reynolds suggests that the definite articles "may restrict the meaning to the men who happened one by one to come under his searching glance" (Reynolds, 93). The idea is that Jesus knew the nature of man, something only God could know. No one had to inform our Lord about the lack of genuine faith on the part of those present; Jesus already knew that for the simple reason that, being divine, "he himself knew what was in man."

He who is the Word incarnate has immediate apprehension of the mysteries and complexities of human nature. He does not depend on spoken words as the index to inward thoughts and feelings; the hidden depths of every heart lie open to his penetrating insight. This is revealed in one conversation after another in the following chapter. In each case he goes straight to the root of the trouble (Bruce, 78).

It is truly tragic that they saw the signs, and even believed. But from this point forward they were unwilling to allow that faith to move them to loyalty and obedience. They were more committed to Jewish tradition than to the word of God.

#### LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS

##### *“Let’s Be Consistent”*

by Tom Wacaster

One of my favorite radio stations is 98.5, a station dedicated to playing old favorites from the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s. Of course, these tunes are favorites to those of us who were growing up during the 50’s and 60’s, and listened to old time hits by such stars as Buddy Holly and the Crickets, The Four Preps, Dion and the Belmonts, Del Shannon, and a host of others. The D.J.’s occasionally comment on odds and ends of interest and a few days back their attention turned to “abnormalities.” They asked, for example, “Why is it we call the hot water tank, the hot water heater? It does not heat hot water, it heats cold water.” I received these via E-mail (that marvelous technological invention that enables us to tie up our telephone lines for hours on end so you can avoid those telemarketing calls that interrupt your family life): “What’s another word for synonym?” “Why isn’t there mouse-flavored cat food?” “Why do they report power outages on TV?” “Is it possible to be totally partial?” “Would a fly that loses its wings be called a walk?” Well, you get the idea. A number of years ago two hunters shot and killed two bears that were hibernating in their den. The Department of Natural Resources had been trying to encourage the establishment of these bears in the area, and consequently their work had been set back some three years by this irresponsible act of the hunters. Now here is the kicker. Autopsies revealed that, between them, the two bears were carrying seven unborn bear cubs. A representative of the DNR stated, “What we have is nine dead bears. That’s all there is to it.” Public opinion agreed that what had occurred was the murder of nine unborn, baby bears. Ask the same public about abortion of a human fetus, and it is not murder, only “choice.” Now before we get upset at such lack of consistency, let’s take a look at ourselves. Here are a dozen of

religious inconsistencies that deserve our close attention. What think ye about the man who.....

- (1) Professes faith in God, but lives as if God does not exist;
- (2) Believes Jesus to be the Son of God, but then ignores the Lord's absolute authority;
- (3) Believes the Bible is God's word, but never takes time to read or study it;
- (4) Professes to believe in the authority of the Scriptures, but balks at the command to be baptized;
- (5) Claims to love and adore Jesus, but forsakes the assembly of the saints;
- (6) Protests the use of habit forming drugs and alcohol, but is a slave to tobacco;
- (7) Condemns pornography, but will dress immodestly;
- (8) Protests men who wear their hair like women, but never say a word about the women that wear their hair like men;
- (9) Despises violence, but attends R rated movies wherein is violence and vulgarity gone amuck;
- (10) Desires that the church grow, but will not give as he has prospered or tell a friend about Jesus;
- (11) Is quick to punish his child for vulgar language, but allows them to attend the movies rated PG and PG13.
- (12) Sits in the pew and sings, "take the world but give me Jesus," but will miss a service to watch a ball game, or make an extra dollar.

I suppose one of life's great mysteries is why some pretend to be religious, but do not live their Christianity. Sure, we all sin from time to time. But there is a far cry difference between the man who is trying his best to live the faithful Christian life, and that man who merely professes to be a Christian, but lives inconsistent with his calling. Think about it.

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This closing part of chapter two binds this chapter to the next. Though the Lord did not "trust himself unto" men, there was one to whom the Lord *would* make Himself known in a most remarkable way. Knowing what "was in man," our Lord now demonstrates His magnificence by revealing His interest in individuals. Jesus was a *people* person, and it is unto the people

He will go, beginning with a visit by night from a most unsuspecting source.



## CHAPTER SIX

### “HE CAME BY NIGHT”

*The First Discourse: “The New Birth,” 3:1-21;*

This section provides us with the first of eight discourses that John has selected in order to magnify the Lord in the eyes of his readers. This episode has three movements. The first is the *encounter*. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. His honesty is exemplary, for he acknowledges that “no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him” (verse 2). The conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus consists of reproof and revelation. This leader of Israel is reproofed for his inability to grasp the greater spiritual truths contained in our Lord’s words. On the other hand, Nicodemus is provided the opportunity to hear words about the *new birth* - a birth not of Abraham physically, but spiritually. That, dear reader, was quite a revelation to Nicodemus, as well it would have been to any Jew who, like this “ruler of the Jews” had his mind fixated on being a descendent of Abraham as a basis for heavenly blessings.

The *encounter* gives way to *explanation*. “How can these things be?” asks this inquiring Pharisee. The explanation is brief, but plummets the depths of spiritual things, and when properly grasped will help one to appreciate the magnificence of our Lord to a much greater degree.

The final movement in this section contains additional *enlightenment* provided by the inspired writer, John. The great love of God is presented in one simple verse: “For God so loved the world...” From that love flows the means for salvation (“whosoever believeth on him”), the danger that threatens all men (“perish”) and the blessing promised to all who obey (“everlasting life”). But God will not force men to come to the light; and tragically, men so often “loved the darkness rather than the light,” and by refusing that light, they refuse to see the magnificence of our Lord, and that to their own destruction. Let’s take a closer look.

These verses can be further divided into three distinct parts: (1) The New Birth discussed (3:1-8), (2) Questions concerning the

New Birth (3:9-12), and the Consequences surrounding the New Birth (3:13-21). One author sees in these verses “the world’s greatest tragedy, 3:1-10, the world’s greatest truths, 3:11-15, the world’s greatest text, 3:16, and the world’s greatest test, 3:17-21” (Phillips).

The “New Birth” is a matter of much discussion among religious commentators, and common laymen alike. The necessity of the New Birth is denied by none, but understood by few. Its essentiality is acknowledged by most so-called theologians, but beyond that it remains a “mystery” to many; needlessly, we might add.

*The New Birth Discussed, 3:1-8*

~~ 3:1-2 ~~

*“Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; the same came unto him by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him”*

Exactly why this ruler of the Jews came to Jesus by night is not revealed. Did he fear what his fellow Pharisees might do? Was he simply too busy with his religious duties during the daytime? Or was it that he wanted a private session with the Lord that could only be granted in the late hours of the night when the Lord was more easily accessible? We may never know the answer to these questions. We can, however, draw some lessons from this first discourse of our Lord recorded by John.

The first thing that captures our attention is the word “Now.” The Greek *‘de’* could as easily be translated “but,” suggesting not only a contrast, but a continuance from the closing remarks of the previous chapter. John was linking the story of Nicodemus with that which had immediately preceded it. While our Lord may not have been able to trust Himself to some men, there was a man to whom He could trust Himself - that man’s name was Nicodemus.

Here was *“a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews.”* The Pharisees were the elite religious leaders of that day, and for the most part they were hypocritical in their religion. The name “Pharisee” means “separated.” This religious group may have taken the term to identify themselves and to indicate their strict adherence to the Law of Moses. The fact that Nicodemus was a “ruler of the Jews” suggests that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. It is refreshing, therefore, to find a man of Nicodemus’s position showing so much interest in spiritual matters. This ruler of the Pharisees could not ignore the evidence; the signs were convincing evidence that this Man called Jesus was truly “from God.” “Nicodemus may have been deficient in comprehension, but at least he was not blinded by prejudice, like those leaders whose reaction to the words and works of Jesus was to put them down to demonic activity” (Bruce, 81).

*“Nicodemus”* - This man is mentioned three times in this Gospel alone. In this chapter he comes to Christ to investigate this “teacher come from God.” In 7:45-52 he speaks out in behalf of the defense of Jesus. In 19:39 he brings “a mixture of myrrh and aloes” to prepare the body of Jesus for burial. Interestingly, in each instance it is noted (in the KJV) that he came to Jesus “by night.” William Barclay provided the following “conjecture” which we found interesting:

The rabbis declared that the best time to study the law was at night when a man was undisturbed. Throughout the day Jesus was surrounded by crowds of people all the time. It may well be that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night because he wanted an absolutely private and completely undisturbed time with Jesus (Barclay, Daily Bible Series, Electronic edition).

*“we know that thou art a teacher come from God”* - The confession of Nicodemus is quite astonishing. He readily admitted what some of his fellow Pharisees continued to deny. The evidence was too overwhelming. It was not a matter of conjecture, or guess, but of assurance and confidence. The words “we know” are significant. Rather than “I know,” Nicodemus says “we know.” Was he using a literary term? Or

were there others, perhaps even among the Pharisees, who had drawn the same conclusion he had drawn? The miracles of Jesus had seemingly convinced a small core of Jewish leaders that Jesus was a teacher come from God, even if they would not admit it openly.

The miracles performed by Jesus and/or His disciples were designed to “confirm” the word which was spoken (Mark 16:20). Once a thing is confirmed, it is forever confirmed. It is difficult to image the degree to which the hearts of this religious sect were hardened, seeing that they believed, but did not have the courage to act upon that belief.

~~ 3:3 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God”*

The words “born anew” in the ASV are rendered “born again” in the KJV. In this verse the absolute necessity of the New Birth is summed up in this single word “except.” Were we to place this into a positive affirmation we might say, “The way, and the only way, for men to enter into the kingdom of God is to be born again.” While some may disagree with our conclusions which follow regarding the *elements* of the New Birth, it is impossible to miss the *essentiality* of being born again.

As previously noted, the words “*Verily, verily*” are designed to give emphasis to an unusually solemn and weighty declaration. This double “*verily*” appears 24 times in John. Nicodemus may have, like many other Jews, supposed that all who were born of the seed of Abraham would, by virtue of their ancestry, be citizens of the Kingdom. Jesus, on a number of occasions, rejected this idea and denounced the claim of such special privileges simply because they had Abraham for their father. Nicodemus seems to have had his breath fairly taken away by the declaration that no man could see the Kingdom unless he was born anew. This must have been quite a blow to the pride of those religious leaders to contemplate that they were no exceptions, and that they stood on the same footing as the despised Gentiles.

The concept of a “new birth” or “new beginning” is not unique to the New Testament. The doctrine that a man could bury his old sinful life and start over was foreshadowed in Old Testament. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18). “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith Jehovah: I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33). “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19).

The doctrine of a “new birth” is more pronounced in the New Testament, as it should be. “But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom. 6:8). “Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as shall walk by this rule, peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:15-16). Of course the words “new birth” are not mentioned in any of these passages, but the truth expressed is precisely the same.

~~ 3:4 ~~

*“Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”*

The key word in this verse is “*how*.” Some have suggested that Nicodemus may not have thought it impossible, as much as he doubted the necessity of it. After all, the man had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and believed some kind of a “new birth” was not beyond possibility. It would seem, however, Nicodemus’ questions were focused more on the “*why*” and the “*how*.” He did not understand HOW a man could enter into his mother’s womb and be born again. This was because of Nicodemus’ lack of the full understanding of spiritual things - he was thinking on a physical plane rather than the spiritual. Johnson pointed out

that some semblance of a “new birth” was evidently observed by the Jew in the practice of receiving proselytes into the Jewish faith. Johnson has also pointed out that “the Jews were wont to admit Gentile proselytes to the Jewish religion and to speak of them as born again. They even insisted that the proselyte was no longer kin to his old relations and might marry his nearest kin without offence, because old relationships were destroyed by his new birth” (Johnson, 56). This being the case, Nicodemus was asking Jesus “How is it that a Jew, who has already been born of the seed of Abraham, be born again? Is it physical?”

~~ 3:5 ~~

*“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!”*

It is precisely at this point that the denominational world loses all sense of reason, and seeks to explain away what the passage clearly says about the New Birth. To be “*born of water*” speaks of baptism for remission of sins. We recognize that much of the religious world does not accept this position. But this is the only explanation that makes any sense at all. It might surprise some of those reading this commentary that the denial of what we affirm here is relatively new, and that many of the main line denominations accepted this position in times past; and the not-too-distant past at that. T. W. Brent acknowledged that “The religious world, with one voice, from the days of Christ until quite recently, has ascribed this language to water baptism” (Brents, 490). He goes on to quote Dr. Wall as follows: “There is not any one Christian writer of any antiquity in any language, but what understands it of baptism” (Brents quoting from Walls History of Infant Baptism, 490). Burton Coffman has supplied us with the following two quotes addressing this subject, both from prominent denominational preachers: (1) First, John Boys, Dean of Canterbury, has this notable comment regarding the interpretation of this passage.

Some few modern divines have conceited that these words are not to be construed of external baptism; because, say they, ‘Christ taketh water here by a borrowed speech for the Spirit of God, the effect whereof it shadoweth out; and

so water and the Spirit are all one!’ To this interpretation answer is made: first, that it is an old rule in expounding of holy scripture, that where a literal sense will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonly the worst (Coffman, 81).

(2) Second, Alford had this note:

There can be no doubt, on any honest interpretation of the words, that *‘gennethenai ek hudatos’* (born of water) refers to the token or outward sign of baptism, *‘gennethenai ek pneumatos’* (born of the Spirit) to the thing signified, or the inward grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts to get rid of these two plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices, by which the views of expositors have been warped (Coffman quoting Alford, 82).

I recognize that quotes from “scholars” do not constitute authority; they simply provide evidence that the position I hold forth here regarding the new birth is not a position unique to members of the church of Christ. Keep in mind that the fact of the new birth is given in verse 3. This verse is simply an elaboration upon verse 3, providing us with the elements that make up that new birth. My conclusion is based upon the simple fact that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. To “enter the kingdom,” and to be “saved” are the same thing (cf. Acts 2:38, 47; Col. 1:13-14). What it takes to obtain one is obviously necessary to obtain the other. To be saved one must believe, repent, confess and be baptized for remission of sins. But to enter the kingdom, one must be “born again.” It follows, therefore, as surely as night follows day, that to be born of water and the Spirit is to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. The element of “water” is essential to salvation; it is most certainly included as part of the process for entrance into the kingdom. If Jesus was not speaking of baptism here, then I am at a loss as to the precise meaning of His words. Any attempt to nullify or somehow remove water (literal water) from the equation places a person in a position where words would be difficult, if not impossible to interpret. “Concerning ‘born of water’ I agree with Alford that it refers to baptism, while ‘of the spirit’ refers to the inward change. He adds: ‘All attempts to get rid of these two

plain facts have sprung from doctrinal prejudices by which the views of expositors have been warped” (Johnson, 57).

~~ 3:6-7 ~~

*“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew”*

The question of whether or not a man could enter into the womb and be born again demonstrated Nicodemus’ inability to separate being born of flesh and being born of the spirit. It is as if Jesus were telling Nicodemus, “No Nicodemus - your illustration will not do! The spiritual birth does not apply to the physical man; it is impossible that man can be born of flesh twice. That which is born of flesh is flesh; but I am speaking of being born of the Spirit.” It seems rather superfluous to remind ourselves that physical birth is the consequence of physical procreation - flesh begets flesh! On the other hand, that which is born of the Spirit is NOT physical, but spiritual. Spiritual procreation takes place by the implanting of the Word of God - i.e. the word of the Holy Spirit - in the heart of man. This produces the birth of a child of God. Peter so affirmed when he wrote these words in his first epistle: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:22-23).

*“Marvel not, ye must be born again”* - Why should it so astound Nicodemus (or anyone for that matter) that a man must be “born again”? Seeing that the result of the New Birth is entrance into the “kingdom,” and that the “kingdom” is spiritual in nature, it follows as sure as night follows day that the birth into that kingdom must be spiritual and not physical.

~~ 3:8 ~~

*“The wind bloweth where it will, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”*

Those who desire to find in the passage some mystic or mysterious working of the Spirit are sure to find it, regardless of the facts in the case, the clear teaching of the passage itself, or other New Testament passages. The general explanation of this verse, even among commentaries written by our brethren, is that Jesus is setting forth an illustration something akin to the following: "You cannot see the wind; but you CAN observe the effect of the wind, i.e. trees bending, leaves rustling, etc. So also it is with the New Birth. You cannot see (with the physical eye) the Spirit as He affects the soul; but you CAN see the results of it in the consequent behavior of the one who is 'born of the Spirit.'" This, in my opinion, presents more problems than it solves. For one thing it leaves us wondering exactly HOW the Spirit goes about acting upon the soul. Calvinism teaches that the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the heart, something which we vehemently deny. This position makes Christ to say, "The wind blows where it will, so is everyone born of the Spirit." But what is the point of the illustration, if indeed it be an illustration at all? In what way is the person born of the Spirit like some wind that blows where it will? Let us take another look at the passage and its context and observe exactly what is said, and how it relates to the new birth. J.W. McGarvey cautioned:

Whatever is the meaning of this verse, it must be extracted from the rendering which the Revisers have strangely placed in the margin, viz.: "The Spirit breathes where it will, and thou hearest," etc. It teaches that a man is born of the Spirit, breathing as he wills [i.e., as the Spirit wills, TW] through inspired men. It is equivalent to Paul's maxim that faith comes by hearing the word of God (McGarvey, ESword Module).

If we translate the Greek '*pneuma*' with the English "Spirit," as in the latter part of the verse and elsewhere in the New Testament, the difficulty will vanish. "The Spirit breathes where it pleases Him, and you hear the voice thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes nor whither it goes. Those who are born of the Spirit likewise hear His voice." The meaning, then, becomes clear: "The Spirit breathes where it wills and you recognize its manifestation by its voice; by the words spoken by men of God as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance (2 Peter 1:21). You cannot

tell whence the Spirit comes or goes, but you can hear its voice when it does come. So, by listening to the voice of the Spirit, is every one born of the Spirit.” Those born of the Spirit have heard that word, and been obedient to it. “Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abide” (1 Pet. 1:23). This passage serves as a wonderful commentary on our text under consideration. The Spirit, “blowing or breathing” is equivalent to the gift of inspiration (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16, literally, “God breathed”). Thus, to be “born of the Spirit” is to be born as the Spirit directs in His word. Or, as Marion Fox put it, “This refers to the Holy Spirit’s work in inspiration [as He revealed the New Covenant that brought about a change in the spirit {disposition} of men]. All those who have been born of the spirit were born in this same manner, which is by hearing [by synecdoche = obeying] the voice of the Spirit” (Fox, 154).

*Questions Concerning The New Birth, 3:9-12*

~~ 3:9 ~~

*“Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?”*

Uncertain of the meaning of the words of Jesus, Nicodemus responds with questions concerning this “new birth.” His question, “How can these things be,” shows Nicodemus to be an honest man, and certainly humble in his inquiry. Sobered and awed by the power of Jesus, he now seeks to obtain a better understanding of the subject now under consideration. We might note that, whereas the first question of Nicodemus seemed to focus on whether or not such things can be, this question takes it to a higher level - “How CAN these things be?” Or, “What is the process?”

~~ 3:10 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou the teacher of Israel, and understandest not these things?”*

I don’t think Jesus was necessarily rebuking Nicodemus. One thing we know about our Lord is that when an honest soul inquired as to spiritual matters, the Lord was patient. No doubt

the prophets spoke of our Lord's patient demeanor as attested by Matthew's record of the Lord's application of such a prophecy to Himself: "A bruised reed shall he not break, And smoking flax shall he not quench, Till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matt. 12:20). As a Pharisee, Nicodemus would have been familiar with the law and the prophets; he would have already known about the coming Messiah. Our Lord may have been challenging Nicodemus to take the things he already knew as a Pharisee and make application. He was gently guiding this man toward the same conclusion He desired of the two on the road to Emmaus. Luke told us regarding those two men, "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Here Jesus was essentially saying to Nicodemus, "You are a Pharisee! You know the law - now look at the law and see what it says!" But like the two men on the road to Emmaus, Nicodemus was slow to learn; thus the need to take him a little further.

~~ 3:11 ~~

*"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that which we know, and bear witness of that which we have seen; and ye receive not our witness"*

*"We speak that which we know"* - The difficulty here is exactly who the "we" includes. Three possibilities exist: (1) Jesus and John the Baptist; (2) Jesus and the Father; (3) Jesus and the entire prophetic class of inspired men, including the prophets of old and the apostles. Others are of the opinion that Jesus is simply using the accommodative "we" to refer to Himself exclusively. The more reasonable position is that the "we" refers to Jesus and the entire prophetic class of inspired men. This position is strengthened when we consider the plural "ye" as opposed to "you" in the later part of the verse. The "ye" is the ruling class of the Jews who were ignorant of these things; the "we" refers to Jesus, the prophets, and perhaps those who had, or would be, "born of the Spirit." Whereas the obedient know the things of God, the disobedient do not know. The Lord was pointing out that, as a class of religious teachers, the Jewish Rabbis simply did not receive their witness - they had rejected the prophets of old along with John the Baptist, and were in the process of rejecting Christ. Their failure to "receive...our witness"

is a failure to be obedient to those things spoken, and hence, failure to experience the new birth.

~~ 3:12 ~~

*“If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?”*

*“If I told you earthly things”* - This would include matters involved here on the earth. Heavenly things would include such things as the new birth, the kingdom, the church, etc. The “heavenly things” were matters beyond the realm of the senses and which could only be known by divine revelation (Eph. 3:3-5). Nicodemus had difficulty grasping these things. One can appreciate his difficulty if he keeps in mind that the Jews had a misconception of the coming Messiah and His kingdom. As a result, matters such as the new birth, the spiritual kingdom, etc. would be most difficult to understand. The inability of the Jews to grasp spiritual truths because of their apparent misconception of the coming kingdom was demonstrated by the apostles themselves just prior to Jesus ascension. Luke records the question from those men who had spent so much time with the Lord, and who still perceived of the kingdom as physical. “Lord, doest thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

*“how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things”* - Jesus was telling Nicodemus that if he were unable to comprehend matters illustrated by and pertaining to the material experience, he would not be able to grasp truth for which there was no analogy.

### *Consequences Surrounding The New Birth, 3:13-21*

Verses 13-21 contain the inspired words of the apostle John. The conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus ends at verse 12 as is evident from a careful examination of this verse, and verses following. In this verse, the words, “even the Son of man, who is in heaven” show that Jesus had already ascended back into heaven, and thus could not have been the words of Jesus, but that of someone writing about Jesus’ *present* status when the book was written. Second, the absence of personal pronouns such as “me,” “I,” and “my” are conspicuously absent in verses 14-21. In contrast, the exchange of words in the conversation

itself recorded in verses 1-12 contain an abundance of personal pronouns on the part of both Nicodemus and Jesus.

~~ 3:13 ~~

*“And no one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven”*

*“And no one hath ascended into heaven”* - Did not Enoch “walk with God” (Gen. 5:23-24)? Was not Elijah caught up “by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11)? The context suggests a part of speech known as an ellipsis, wherein certain words might be supplied to capture the thought. “No one hath ascended into heaven and returned to bear witness of the things in heaven.” Notice the implication here that men find their origination here, and then, upon faithful obedience to the Father, later ascend into heaven. Mormon doctrine teaches that men originate in the spiritual realm, and then “descend” to this earth. In this they are obviously wrong.

*“but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man”* - Unlike John who was a man sent from God, our Lord “descended from heaven,” and was sent by the Father. This, of course, would qualify Him to bear witness of heavenly things. John’s declaration that Jesus first descended out of heaven is a clear affirmation of our Lord’s deity - a fact that John introduced in the very beginning of his gospel.

*“who is in heaven”* - These words have presented some difficulty to commentators who hold that verse 13 is still a part of the Lord’s conversation with Nicodemus. Some have sought to clear up this manufactured difficulty by simply declaring they are not a part of the original text but inserted by some scribe. F.F. Bruce addressed this problem:

The clause at the end of verse 13, ‘who is in heaven,’ is absent from our oldest manuscripts of John and from the leading representatives of the Alexandrian text, but its presence is supported by an impressive array of other witnesses. If it was present in the original text of the Gospel, one can understand how a scribe or editor omitted it on the ground that the Son of Man was not in heaven

but on earth as he spoke these words. If, on the other hand, the clause was not part of the original text of the Gospel, it is difficult to see why anyone should have added it (Bruce, 87-88).

The more reasonable explanation is that these are words recorded by John, penned AFTER Jesus had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven.

~~ 3:14-15 ~~

*“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life”*

The reference here is to Numbers 21:4-9. When applying the analogy, one must be careful that he does not disregard other passages and read into the passage what is not there. Tenney, for example, makes a parallel between that Old Testament incident and our salvation from sin, and says “the sufferers did nothing but look at the serpent” (Tenney, 88). The key words in these two verses are “lifted up.” The comparison is between the lifting up of the serpent by Moses in the wilderness, and the lifting up of the Son of man in this dispensation. When connected with the previous verse, we have the Son of man descending out of heaven in order that He might be lifted up for the salvation of all men. Man’s obligation then rests upon his faith in the One lifted up. Caution must be exercised that we do not allow this verse, or that which follows, to serve as an exhaustive treatment of what is involved in man’s obligation regarding salvation.

*“that whosoever believeth”* - Saving faith is faith that acts in obedience to God’s commandments. A careful study of Hebrews 11 will show that those men and women of old acted on their faith. James 2:20-26 repeatedly affirms that “faith without works is barren” and that “by works a man is justified and not only by faith.”

*“may in him have eternal life”* - Yes, the man who believes may have life! This is precisely what John had declared earlier: “But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name” (1:12).

Belief qualifies a man to become a child of God, but it does not automatically make him such. This is a truth that most of the Protestant world seems to have forgotten (or ignored). It should also be noted that those who believe may “in him” have eternal life. That is precisely where eternal life is located - “in him.” The way to get “into him” is to get into His body, the church. This is accomplished through baptism as declared by the apostle Paul in Romans 6:3-5.

~~ 3:16 ~~

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,  
that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have  
eternal life”*

More has been written on this one verse in the book of John than any other single verse in this gospel, perhaps all the gospels combined. It declares the love of God, the object of His love, the extent of His love, the mission of that love, and the recipients of that love. Here is the “gospel in miniature,” what some have called the “golden text.” In it we are told of the greatest GIVER (God), the greatest GIFT (the Son), the greatest MEASURE (gave), the greatest OBJECT of God’s love (the world, i.e., the precious souls in the world), and the greatest BLESSING (eternal life). The verse refutes atheism (by stating and affirming the existence of God), Calvinism (by extending God’s blessings to all who believe), Universalism (by pointing out the consequence of rejecting Christ, “perish”). The religious world has zeroed in on this passage to the exclusion of all others with regard to man’s salvation. It is often argued by those who reject the necessity of baptism for remission of sins that this passage says nothing about baptism, but that salvation is offered to those who simply believe. By the same token, however, one would have to reject repentance as a requirement for salvation, for neither does John 3:16 say anything about repentance. If it is the case that John 3:16 in some way “negates” passages teaching the importance of baptism, then on the same basis it must “negate” any and every passage that speaks of repentance as a condition of salvation. If not, why not?

*“for God so loved the world”* - Volumes have been written on the magnificent love of God for His creation. Consider a sampling of comments addressing the love of God:

Sometimes Christianity is presented in such a way that it sounds as if God had to be pacified, as if he had to be persuaded to forgive. Sometimes men speak as if they would draw a picture of a stern, angry, unforgiving God and a gentle, loving, forgiving Jesus. Sometimes men present the Christian message in such a way that it sounds as if Jesus did something which changed the attitude of God to men from condemnation to forgiveness. But this text tells us that it was with God that it all started. It was God who sent his Son, and he sent him because he loved men. At the back of everything is the love of God (Barclay, Daily Bible Study, Electronic Edition).

“God loves each of us as if there were only one of us” (Augustine)

“God is love. He didn’t need us. But he wanted us. And that is the most amazing thing” (Rick Warren).

“God is love. Therefore love. Without distinction, without calculation, without procrastination, love” (Henry Drummond).

*“that he gave his only begotten son”* - Here is the manifestation of God’s great love for humanity. The offering of His Son was an act of selflessness, a demonstration of love, and a declaration of commitment and dedication to the divine purpose of saving man.

*“that whosoever believes on him”* - The word “whosoever” stresses the universal availability of salvation. So far as concerns the *who*, salvation is offered to all. On God’s part, the offer is sufficient. God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). The majority of men will be lost for the simple reason that they did not accept the offer of salvation from God the Father.

*“should not perish”* - The apostle did not say that those who believe on Him WOULD not perish, but SHOULD not perish; and there is a vast difference between the two words.

~~ 3:17 ~~

*“For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him”*

Unfortunately this verse, like the one previous, has been distorted to teach something other than that intended by the Lord. To use this verse as some sort of a “proof text” that men will not face God’s judgment is simply an abuse of the passage. The word “judge” here means to “condemn.” Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world for the simple reason that the world stands condemned already. Jesus came to save the world from the condemnation all humanity has brought upon itself.

~~ 3:18 ~~

*“He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God”*

*“He who believes...”* - Literally, “keeps on believing” (Woods, 68). Notice the contrast. Those who “believe” will not face the judgment of condemnation. “He that believeth not” has already been judged because that individual “hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

~~ 3:19 ~~

*“And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil.”*

*“And this is the judgment”* - The specific judgment under consideration in these verses is that which a man brings upon himself because of his own stubborn and sinful heart. The passage must not be construed to mean that there would be no judgment whatsoever. The fact is there was a judgment taking place even as Jesus spoke - a judgment “precipitated by the dramatic appearance of the Messenger of the Covenant who had suddenly come to his temple. It was a judgment required by the

dazzling Light of all nations in the first advent of our Lord. As men reacted to that Light, their fate was sealed” (Coffman, 99).

*“men have loved darkness rather than light; for their works were evil”* - The problem with unbelief is not due to a lack of intellectual enlightenment, but to spiritual rebellion. The majority of humanity will be lost because they simply did not want to come to the light that condemns their evil deeds. The Bible is neither unreasonable, nor incapable of being understood. The problem lies in the hearts of men. The whole of this passage teaches us that if men are lost it will be due to their own rebellion.

~~ 3:20 ~~

*“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved.”*

*“He that doeth evil hateth the light”* - Wicked people are essentially night operators, being afraid of the light which could expose them. Most crimes are committed in darkness, and the police force is always busiest at night. Spiritually, the same principles hold. Wicked people stay as far as possible away from any study or discussion of God’s word, “lest their works should be reproved.” This is the reason for the avoidance of contact with truth. The light of God’s word will reveal sin for what it is and reprove those who practice such.

Throughout the scriptures darkness is used as a symbol of sin, of wickedness and of error. Those enamored by sin do not wish to be exposed and they thus avoid the light which reveals the true nature of their actions. Light dispels darkness and the truth drives out error, but those who prefer error to truth and wrong-doing to righteousness reject the light because they do not want their works reproved (condemned). This perversity of heart keeps multitudes from obeying the gospel. (Matt. 13: 13-15) (Woods, 68).

~~ 3:21 ~~

*“But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God”*

*“He that doeth the truth cometh to the light”* - The meaning of these words were expressed by Coffman and Johnson: “The man who loves the truth takes the initiative. And he keeps on seeking. The light does not need to seek him; he seeks the light and shuns the works of darkness” (Coffman, 100). “Truth is not an abstract idea; it is something that must be lived. Many a life is a false one, a lie; many a life is a true one, an illustration of the truth” (Johnson, 60). The act of “coming to the light” is synonymous with “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33).

*“That his works may be manifest”* - The good and honest heart is anxious and ready to test his behavior by the light of God’s word. Tenney may have captured the essence of our Lord’s words here:

Judgment is the logical consequence of unbelief. As the man who turns his back to the sun deepens by his own shadow the darkness in which he walks, so the unbeliever intensifies the darkness of his own soul by his unbelief. His unbelief is in itself an admission of sin, since he will not come to the light to have his deeds made manifest and evaluated (Tenney, 90).

It is obvious that those who love the truth will seek out the light and find great pleasure in the process for the simple reason that it reveals that their life is in harmony with God’s will and pleasing to the Father. “These have no fear of the light because they know that the light will reflect the true character of their conduct and this they are not afraid for anybody to see” (Woods, 69). I have had the following in my files for more than 30 years, and have used it on a number of occasions. It is worth repeating here:

Give Me the Truth  
(author unknown)

If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations above my salvation. Do not think that by ignoring my sins, you can

help me. Do not think that being blind to my sins will prove yourself charitable. However I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it, give me the truth. For the truth, and only the truth, can make me free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness, and lead me to heaven's joy. If I am wavering, weak, lukewarm, indifferent, neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass; if I have been drawn into the pleasure of the world; if I have left my first love; if I have been led astray by error; or if I have done none of these, but simply need to grow in the knowledge and be edified, Give Me The Truth.

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### What Does The Bible Say About Baptism? by Tom Wacaster

So far as this author knows the generally accepted position among the protestant denominations is that baptism is an act of obedience that follows salvation rather than one that precedes salvation. In other words, most religious folks who claim to be of the "Christian faith" have come to believe the commonly held position that they were saved at the point of faith, and then, at some convenient time to both candidate and preacher, they were then baptized as a "symbol" of their salvation already received at the point of faith. But the question we want to raise in this article is this: "What does the Bible say about baptism?" More specifically, what does the Bible say with regard to the purpose and design of baptism? Closely associated with this question is another one: "Must a man believe the truth, and obey the truth, with regard to this subject, if his baptism is to be accepted by God?"

I want to address this second question first. Must a man believe the truth, and obey the truth, with regard to the matter of baptism in order for his baptism to be accepted by God? In this connection, please consider the words of our Lord: "If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31 -32 ASV). We learn (1) that being a disciple involves abiding in the word of Christ. Those who teach error concerning baptism are not a disciple of Jesus. But notice carefully the next verse: "Ye shall

know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” In light of our Savior’s words, can a man believe error, embrace error, and then obey error and expect to be free from his sin? If so, then error is as powerful as truth in accomplishing the desired end. Does that make sense to you? Yet there are some who will tell you that it makes no difference why you were baptized so long as you were baptized. The Bible is clear in teaching that it is essential that my obedience to the Lord be what He says to do, in the manner in which He says to do it, and for the purpose He said to do it.

We come, then, to our second question: “What does the Bible say about baptism?” More specifically, what is the relationship of baptism to forgiveness of sins? I will focus on just one scripture, enough to convince any honest soul as to the importance of baptism and its purpose. That scripture is Mark 16:16: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Please notice the following: The simple subject is “He.” The predicate is “shall be saved.” The qualifying demonstrative pronoun is “that” - setting forth the characteristics of the “he that shall be saved.” The “he that shall be saved” is the “he that believes and is baptized.” It does not say “he that believes shall be saved”; neither does it say “he that is baptized shall be saved”; but “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” The language simply could not be any clearer.

Each responsible person reading this article must now consider the impact of our Lord’s words upon their individual situation. Please consider the following three sentences, each of which represents a definite theological doctrine, none of which can be harmonized one with the other.

“He that is baptized and saved, shall [later] believe” - this represents those who hold to infant baptism. The infant child is baptized and thus saved from “original sin” [a false doctrine in itself], then later comes to believe.

“He that believes and is saved shall be baptized - this represents the majority of the protestant denominational world, i.e. one is saved at the point of belief and at some point in time subsequent to his belief and salvation, is baptized.

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” - This is the truth so stated by our Lord. Such a one believes, obeys by being baptized, and thereby is saved from his alien sins upon completion of both belief and baptism. This squarely places baptism between an individual and remission of his sins.

You, dear reader, fall into one of these three categories so far as what you believed and/or did regarding the act of baptism. Did you believe and obey truth? Or did you believe and/or obey error? It is unfortunate that the religious leaders of our generation have denied the very thing our Lord commanded in order to receive salvation. If you were baptized as an infant, you were not baptized according to truth (option #1 above). You had no sin for which to be forgiven, nor did you believe, a prerequisite to baptism as per Acts 8:36-37. If you were baptized because you had already been saved, you believed a lie, and you obeyed a lie (option #2 above). If you have not yet been baptized for remission of sins (Acts 2:38), then we plead with you to believe the truth of Mark 16:16, and submit to its teaching. There is too much at stake to do otherwise. Our Lord’s command is clear and concise. May we have the courage to obey in loving faith, for only “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” It really is that important.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### “HE THAT COMETH FROM ABOVE”

*Jesus and John, 3:22-36*

The relationship of John the Baptist and Jesus are presented in these verses. “He must increase, but I must decrease” are among the most notable of any words John the Baptist ever spoke. John was a servant in the truest sense of the word, for it was his intention to point the way to Christ; not to overshadow Him. John’s work was to prepare a people for the Lord. To this end he preached the coming of the kingdom; and to his message the multitudes responded. Like the best man to the bridegroom, so John is to Jesus. “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is made full” (3:29). From this point forward John the Baptist will fade into the background until his life is cut short by the wicked Herod who imprisoned and beheaded this great forerunner of our Lord. There can be no doubt that John the Baptist magnified the Lord in his life, and in his death at the hands of Herod. Let’s take a closer look.

In this section we have the following: (1) Jesus and John baptizing disciples, 3:22-24; (2) questions regarding the baptism of John and Jesus and matters of purification, 3:25-26; (3) John’s answer, 3:27-30; (4) the apostle’s testimony regarding Christ, 3:31-36. We will take these up one at a time.

*Jesus and John baptizing disciples, 3:22-24:*

~~ 3:22 ~~

*“After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized”*

*“After these things”* – “These things” refers to our Lord’s discussion with Nicodemus. The Lord traveled in the area of Judaea, the province of which Jerusalem was the capital. It is said that He *“tarried with them,”* and when compared with 4:35 we can conclude that Jesus evidently spent April to December in

that vicinity since the Passover was held in April and he referred to “four months until the harvest.”

“*and baptized*” - Jesus himself did not baptize; His disciples were actually the ones who performed the baptism (John 4:2). We think that Johnson is correct in pointing out that “His baptism at this time was preparatory like John’s” (Johnson, 61). Both John the Baptist and Jesus prepared the material that would be “set in the church” and form the beginning nucleus to which the souls would be “added” on the day of Pentecost and thereafter.

~~ 3:23 ~~

*“And John also was baptizing in Enon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized”*

John’s work involved activity in three prominent places. (1) The wilderness of Judaea, (2) Bethany, and (3) Aenon, near Salim. It is significant that the Holy Spirit chose to point out exactly WHY John selected to baptize in this place - “because there was much water there” - something essential to the act which John performed. This is a strong indication that baptism was by immersion since “much water” is not needed in either pouring or sprinkling.

~~ 3:24 ~~

*“For John was not yet cast into prison”*

This is a historical note supplied by John to let us know that these things occurred shortly before the imprisonment of John the Baptist. John’s note also helps us to know that the work of John and Jesus were, for a time, contemporary, a fact not revealed in the other gospel accounts.

*Questions regarding the baptism of John and Jesus and matters of purification, 3:25-26*

~~ 3:25 ~~

*“There arose therefore a questioning on the part of John’s disciples with a Jew about purifying”*

This “Jew” is not identified. Most likely he was not a follower of Jesus or John, but rather a member of the Pharisees. Evidently he had noticed that both Jesus and John’s baptism was somewhat similar to the purification rites of the Jews, and his question was in connection with this.

~~ 3:26 ~~

*“And they came unto John, and said to him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him”*

“And they come to John” - John’s disciples approached him concerned about the fact that Jesus, of whom John “hast borne witness,” was baptizing. What may have concerned them the most was the fact that “all men come to him.” John’s disciples were concerned that John’s popularity was waning and that his reputation might very well be threatened.

*John’s Answer, 3:27-30*

It is clear from the context that John’s disciples were concerned that men were abandoning John for Jesus. John’s response to their concerns demonstrates a heart of humility on the part of this great “voice” who paved the way for the coming Messiah. Let’s take a closer look at John’s response.

~~ 3:27 ~~

*“John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from heaven”*

First, John tells his disciples that his subordinate role had been given to him from heaven. John was the “man” under consideration here. Jesus, as Deity, could claim as His right whatever He might choose. We are provided a glimpse into the heart of this great man of God who prepared the way for the Lord. It has been said that only the truly great in spirit are willing to walk in the shadow of others. John was willing to be eclipsed by his Lord; no wonder our Lord said there was no prophet greater than John. William Barclay concluded:

It would ease life a great deal if more people were prepared to play the subordinate role. So many people look for great things to do. John was not like that. He knew well that God had given him a subordinate task. It would save us a lot of resentment and heartbreak if we realized that there are certain things which are not for us, and if we accepted with all our hearts and did with all our might the work that God has given us to do. To do a secondary task for God makes it a great task. As Mrs. Browning had it: "All service ranks the same with God." Any task done for God is necessarily great (William Barclay, ESword Module).

*"A man can receive nothing, except it have been given him from above"* - It should be pointed out that John did not enter into their 'party spirit.' He came to honor Jesus and consequently rejoiced at the success of the Messiah.

~~ 3:28 ~~

*"Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but, that I am sent before him."*

Second, John reminded his disciples that his subordinate position had been proclaimed from the very beginning of his ministry. John had pointed out earlier that he was NOT the Messiah (1:19-23). Those Jews who were present at that time were instrumental in bearing witness of John's denial. The fact that he (John) was baptizing fewer disciples than Jesus should not, therefore, have surprised them. The immense popularity that John had received from that occasion when he first denied being the Christ, up to this point in time, may have provided a strong temptation on John's part to become haughty. But in this whole incident John manifests a humble spirit. As Johnson noted, "John, in the spirit of his mission, rose to a sublime superiority over carnal weakness" (Johnson, 63).

~~ 3:29 ~~

*"He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is made full."*

*“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom”* - The New Testament pictures Jesus as the groom, and the church as His bride. A good study of Ephesians 5:23 ff will make this evident.

*“but the friend of the bridegroom”* - In our culture the “best man” would be the “friend” of the bridegroom.

*“standeth and heareth him”* - As the best man is subservient to the bridegroom, so John acknowledges his subservience to the Lord. But more than that, John confesses that such submission was “my joy, made full.” John never lost sight of his role as a voice in the wilderness; in that he found great joy.

~~ 3:30 ~~

*“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

Brother Robert Taylor commented on this marvelous jewel of Holy Scripture:

Verse 30 is a marvelous, magnificent declaration. John’s attractive assessment is that the Christ must increase but he (John) must fade the scene of prominence. As Messianic harbinger his work was nearly completed. Properly and permanently, the limelight must be the Lord’s. John knew how to take second place gracefully. Such evades most of the race. Even those who have to yield first place and take second place usually do it reluctantly - not graciously as did John (Taylor, 47).

As the light of the moon fades out before the rising sun, so John must decrease before the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness.

*The apostle’s testimony regarding Christ, 3:31-36;*

Whether these verses are the words of John the Baptist or comments added by John the apostle makes no difference. I admit that the “flow” of the text from verse 30 into verse 31 might leave the impression that this is John the Baptist’s words. But upon closer examination, I must agree with others that these

are the words of John the apostle. Previously the apostle had added his comments to the words of Jesus. Here John the apostle adds comments (inspired we might add) to the words of John the Baptist, which come to a close in verse 30. This section is the apostle's attestation that the things Jesus did were done under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accord with the very words of the Father. It is also a clear affirmation that what John has written is an inspired account of the life of Jesus.

~~ 3:31 ~~

*“He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaketh: he that cometh from heaven is above all.”*

“*He that cometh from above*” is, without doubt, Christ. John (the apostle) alludes to the divine nature of Christ, the very truth with which he began this amazing book (John 1:1-3). It is clear that John presents a contrast between the origin and work of Jesus and that of those who had their origin in this world. It is plainly pointed out by John that those confined to earthly limitations can only speak that which is “*of the earth.*” 1 Corinthians 2 sets forth precisely the same argument with regard to the “spiritual man” and the “natural man.” In my personal notes on 1 Corinthians 2:14 I recorded the following observation:

The “natural man” is sometimes understood as the unregenerate man. But this, it seems to me, fails to consider the context, and presents more problems than it solves. The other view, and the one which I accept without reservation, is that the “natural man” is the “uninspired man.” Paul was trying to point out that those doctrines which God has given unto us pertaining to salvation, redemption, the scheme of redemption, etc. cannot be received by natural means. Those things can only be learned by revelation, or by the study of those things revealed. This is enforced by Paul's words in Ephesians 3:3-5. George DeHoff has this excellent comment in his book, *Sermons On First Corinthians*: “Paul means that ordinary man cannot receive or give a revelation from God, because God has not selected him and filled him with the Holy Spirit. Only the apostles and certain other writers of the NT were so selected and guided.” We are forced to conclude with Dehoff, Coffman, Duncan, and others

that the “natural man” in this chapter is the “uninspired man,” not the sinful, unregenerate man of the world. Brother Franklin Camp has an excellent treatise on this matter in his book, *The Work of the Holy Spirit In Redemption*, beginning on page 201. Here is a portion of what he wrote: “Not with wisdom of words,’ (1 Corinthians 1:17) - this phrase is contrasted with Paul being sent to preach the gospel by inspiration. Thus, you have one commissioned and inspired to preach the gospel in contrast with false teachers who were neither commissioned by Christ, nor inspired. Paul’s preaching was in word and power, that is, miraculous, while the false teachers had nothing but speeches and words (1 Corinthians 4:19). The inspired preaching of Paul set forth the cross as the means of salvation. The false teachers used only the art of human wisdom and words to set forth their doctrine” (Camp, 204). “The natural man [is] the man guided by his own wisdom, the wisdom of the world, uninspired teaching, the false teachers in Corinth, the man teaching without any revelation” (Camp, 207). Brother Camp then concludes: “The spiritual man of 1 Corinthians 2 is the inspired man, and particularly the apostles. The natural man was the one that sought to teach (before the New Testament was written) without being inspired by the Holy Spirit. His teaching had its origin within his own heart, came from his own uninspired mind or faculties, and is aptly described as natural” (Camp, 208).

*“he that is of the earth is of the earth”* - Those who find their origin in the earth (i.e., “of the earth”) are “of the earth” in that they speak earthly things. Without divine revelation man is limited to that which is earthly, i.e. of human wisdom. But He “that cometh from heaven” [Christ] speaks those things that come from God, namely divine wisdom.

~~ 3:32 ~~

*“What he hath seen and heard, of that he beareth witness; and no man receiveth his witness”*

*“What he hath seen and heard...”* The message Christ brought was that which “cometh from heaven.” The statement that “no man receiveth his witness” is not to be taken absolutely. The very next verse shows that the writer did not intend to suggest that there was no acceptance of Jesus whatsoever. It should be

noted that when John penned this gospel, the world in general STILL rejected Christ. Such has been characteristic of the world's attitude toward Christ and His word, even to our day and age. Barnes noted: "Though multitudes came to him, drawn by various motives (John 6:26), yet few became his real disciples, Matthew 26:56; Matthew 7:22" (Barnes, ESword Module).

~~ 3:33 ~~

*"He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true"*

*"He that received his witness"* - There is some difficulty identifying who the "he" is here. Some commentators have applied this to anyone and everyone who accepts the truth of God's word. Johnson seems to have taken this position: "A few, comparatively, had received his testimony, and these thereby demonstrated their conviction that God is true; that his promises have been fulfilled in Christ. To attach a seal to a document is to confirm it" (Johnson, ESword Module). There are two things I see wrong with this position. First, the application is too wide. The same "he" that hath "received" is the "he" that hath "set his seal" to something. Johnson does not define exactly how the "he" that "received his witness" goes about setting a "seal" to the fact that God is true. Second, the immediate context will not allow this, as we will see later.

A second position is that the "he" is John the Baptist. The difficulty here is, again, identifying what is meant by "hath set his seal to this, that God is true." I will admit that this position is a little more tenable than the first, for John's "seal" could be his declaration, "Behold, the Lamb of God" which was confirmed to him by his witness of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus.

A third position, and the one which I take, is that the "he" is John the apostle. Taking this position, the entire passage opens up a wonderful truth that is both astonishing in its import and clear in its affirmation. Let's take a closer look at some of the words in this verse.

“received” - The original word here translated “received” (*lambano*) has a wide variety of meaning. Consider, for example, Thayer’s definition of the word:

1. to take (a) to take with the hand, lay hold of, any person or thing in order to use it; (b) to take in order to carry away; (c) to take what is one’s own, to take to one’s self, to make one’s own; (d) to associate with one’s self as companion, attendant; (e) to take.
  
2. to regard any one’s power, rank, external circumstances, and on that account to do some injustice or neglect something (a) to take, to choose, select; (b) to take beginning, to prove anything, to make a trial of, to experience;
  
3. to receive (what is given), to gain, get, obtain, to get back (Thayer, ESword Module)

John is declaring that, unlike so many of his contemporaries who rejected Christ, he received the “witness” of Christ as true. The reason why John believed and received the Christ had something to do with the signs performed by the Master, and the teachings of Jesus. Having “received” Jesus, John, along with the other apostles, “set his seal” to the fact that “God is true.” All that remains is that we determine what is meant by the words, “set his seal to this, that God is true.” Our English word “seal” translates *‘sphragizo,’* and here it has the meaning of “confirming” or “attesting” something to be true. Thayer points out that the word is used in reference to a “written document.” John the apostle was referring, no doubt, to his written record (the gospel of John) of the witness that Jesus bore as to His deity and Messiahship. The Lord’s miracles and teachings bore unmistakable witness to the fact that He is exactly Whom He claimed to be: the Son of God! The very book we are now studying is John’s “seal” to the truthfulness of that which John himself had received. This parallels the apostle’s introduction to his first epistle wherein he makes essentially the same argument (see 1 John 1:1-4).

“*God is true*” - One of two meanings may be attached to these words, neither of which does harm to the overall message of the

Bible, or the statement here made by John the apostle. First, John may have been saying that the words of Christ are the words of God. In this case, the word “God” would refer to God the Father. This would correspond with John 8:26: “I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you: howbeit he that sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him these speak I unto you.” The second possible meaning may be that they are a declaration of the deity of Christ, and the word “God” refers to Christ. Thus, when John wrote, “God is true,” he was saying in essence, “Christ is true, since He is Himself, God!” In view of what we have in verse 34 the first position seems more plausible. The verses to follow will provide the very reason why Christ could, and did, speak the words of God, namely that God had given the Spirit without measure unto the Son. We turn our attention now to the next verse.

~~ 3:34 ~~

*“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure”*

The facts are these: (1) Christ bore witness to the fact that He is the divine Son of God. This He did by signs and wonders, designed to confirm truth (John 20:30-31; Mark 16:20); (2) for the most part, men had rejected that witness of Jesus; (3) but John has set his “seal” (by divine inspiration we might add) to the truthfulness of God’s message, “This is my Son, hear ye him”; (4) Jesus is “he whom God hath sent”; (5) being sent by the Father, Jesus “speaketh the words of God”; (6) the reason Jesus was able to fully, completely, accurately and authoritatively speak the “words of God” is due to the fact that God “giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” The KJV inserts the words “unto him,” and correctly we might add. Brother Woods noted:

The context requires that the ‘he’ of the clause, ‘for he giveth not the Spirit by measure,’ to be understood of God, the Father; and he to whom the Spirit was not given by measure of Christ. The King James’ Version at this point has a clearer and more accurate rendering: ‘God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him’ (Woods, 74).

*“by measure”* - The “measure” is not some measure of an amount of the Spirit, but a measure of the POWER which the Spirit exercised through men.

Before moving on please note that in verses 31-34 we have a reference to all three members of the Godhead, and an indication of the role that each played in the process of the scheme of redemption. God (the Father) sent Jesus Christ, Who in turn was provided the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit in unlimited measure.

~~ 3:35 ~~

*“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand”*

*“The Father loveth the Son”* - Literally, the Father keeps on loving the Son. Jesus never did or said anything that would disappoint the Father. He was obedient, even unto death (Phil. 2:8). And though tempted in all points as we, He was without the slightest hint of sin in His life (Heb. 4:14-15).

*“and hath given all things into his hand”* - This particular verse confirms our position that these are the words of John the apostle rather than John the Baptist. All authority was given unto Jesus after His resurrection and prior to His ascension (Matt. 28:20).

~~ 3:36 ~~

*“He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him”*

Careful attention should be given to the phrases “believeth on the Son” and “he that obeyeth not.” They stand in contrast one to the other and imply that saving faith is inclusive of obedience. To believe on the Son is to obey Him; to disobey is to disbelieve. “One who truly believes will not scoff at the duties which are before him, nor will he seek to avoid them; on the contrary, he will find pleasure in doing them, knowing that he is thereby pleasing the Lord” (Woods, 75). Or as Johnson put it:

Faith is the mightiest power of earth to move men to action, and faith in Christ moves to the life that is needful to become the sons of God. He who believes with a heartfelt, obedient faith, a faith that trusts all and surrenders all to the will of Christ, is born again and 'hath eternal life,' while the unbeliever remains in disobedience and abides in death. It is not 'faith alone' that gives life, but 'faith made perfect' by obedience. See James 2:22 (Johnson, ESword Module).

*"eternal life"* - He "hath" that life in potential. The obedient believer enters into the spiritual sphere wherein eternal life is thus granted. He will enjoy that life in the final and complete sense if, and only if, he remains faithful unto death and "walks in the light," thereby remaining in the sphere of "all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3). We might say that such a believer has a right to it, and is as sure of obtaining it as if he had it already in his possession.

Any attempt to describe the blessings of this life that John speaks of would drain us of every possible word that might grace the lips of mortal men. This life is more than mere existence; it is a quality of life that extends far beyond this life into that realm of eternal bliss that awaits the faithful. Brother Woods noted, "Life, as thus contemplated is vastly more than perpetual existence; it involves and embodies all of these wonderful characteristics we can but dimly visualize here but which await the faithful in full flower in the world to come" (Woods, 75).

### Lessons and Observations

Some valuable lessons are contained within this chapter. Here are some wonderful truths others have focused upon:

The true servant of God seeks not his own honor, but the glory of Christ. A godly preacher will hide himself behind the Master and be forgetful of himself so that Christ is honored....It is no credit to a preacher that his hearers should go away from his preaching thinking and talking of himself. He only preaches effectually who fixes their thoughts on Christ (Johnson, ESword Module).

NT passages regarding God's wrath are extensive; and far more is intended by them than God's displeasure at men who do not accept the Son and obey the gospel. It has reference to the basic antagonism between light and darkness, goodness and evil. The total race of men from Eden and afterward is a fallen and rebellious race, their fellowship with God having been broken by the fall of humanity; and God's face is set against fallen and unregenerated men. He has appointed a day in which the unredeemable portion of humanity will be cast out of God's universe. Mercy and hope for all are available in Christ; but it must be received and appropriated, and the penalty of rejecting the Son of God is the forfeiture of all hope (Coffman, 109).

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### JESUS IS STILL SAVIOR

by Tom Wacaster

"Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15a). "And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). W.N. Clarke wrote almost a century ago, "The glory of Christianity is salvation." The great challenge to the church of this century is getting men to realize their need for a Savior. Modern man has lost his awareness of this need, and among those who profess a belief in Jesus less and less are inclined to perceive Him as Savior. One reason for this is the diminished concept of sin in the modern world. Jack Cottrell wrote, "Of course he recognizes that the world is filled with evils, failures, social ills, and conflicts of all kinds; but he just does not want to think of them as sin. This is because sin connotes a wrongdoing for which one is responsible before God, and modern man does not want to see himself in this light. He will take his evil and his failures to sociologists and psychologists, but not to God." Along that same line, Karl Menninger points out, "In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of 'sin,' a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets." When our "problems" are discussed in social circles they may be described as "disgraceful," "corrupt," "prejudicial," "harmful," or even "evil,"

but never “sinful.” It is obvious that without a sense of sin there can be no real sense of God as our Savior. Hence the great need to impress upon this generation the seriousness of sin and the consequent need for salvation. R.C. Sproul summed up the seriousness of sin with these words:

Sin is cosmic treason. Sin is treason against a perfectly pure Sovereign. It is an act of supreme ingratitude toward One to whom we owe everything, to the One who has given us life itself. Have you ever considered the deeper implications of the slightest sin, of the most minute peccadillo? What are we saying to our Creator when we disobey Him at the slightest point? We are saying no to the righteousness of God. We are saying, “God, Your law is not good. My judgment is better than Yours. Your authority does not apply to me. I am above and beyond your jurisdiction. I have the right to do what I want to do, not what You command me to do.” The slightest sin is an act of defiance against cosmic authority. It is a revolutionary act, a rebellious act where we are setting ourselves in opposition to the One to whom we owe everything. It is an insult to His holiness.” (R.C. Sproul, “The Holiness of God”)

Man’s refusal to acknowledge the existence and reality of sin does not, however, make the sin go away. Nor does it lessen the demand for a Savior. An infection does not go away simply because we refuse to admit we are sick.

In addition to man’s refusal to admit to sin, and consequently guilt of transgression, there is the secularization of society. We are living in a time of unprecedented growth in scientific knowledge, and this has given man a sense of self-sufficiency far beyond that of his predecessors. Science has become the “god” of this generation. In their foolishness men seem to think that man, in the face of the forces about him, somehow invented God. So, according to those who would ‘enlighten’ us, he sought supernatural aid. Now that science has revealed to man a world of order, and placed within his hands the capability of controlling those things about him, there is no longer the need for the supernatural. Or, as one has so adequately stated, “Science is the

new messiah, and man is his own savior.” Perhaps the following adequately expresses this secularization of man:

In the beginning there was man. Man; laughing, thinking, smoking, stronger than dirt. It was he who decided that he had created the heavens and the earth, and all the host therein. And man said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light: neon lights, florescent lights, spot lights, flash lights, lacer lights, mercury vapor lights, General Electric lights, Sylvania and Westinghouse, all blinking on and off at the will of man. Man saw the light, and said, ‘Live better electrically.’ And man called the light ‘Commonwealth Edison,’ and the darkness he called ‘power outage.’ Man looked at the earth, and said, ‘Let the earth bring forth green things.’ So he tilled the ground, and seeded the cloud. He saw the bumper crops that he had made and he said, ‘Yo-ho-ho, I’m the Jolly Green Giant.’ Man split the atom, he assembled the computers, he conquered the heavens. And the heavens he called ‘space,’ and the earth he called ‘ground control.’ And man said, ‘Let there be voices in the heavens praising me for my great wisdom.’ And the voices came: the lunar orbiter and tellstar. And man heard the voices, and nodded his head, and said, ‘A-OK.’ Then man said, ‘I think I will create God in my own image. Of course I will make him to have the same color of skin that I have, and he will be like a doting father, and everything that I do he will always be on my side.’ So man THOUGHT he created God. Man said, ‘God, I will give you dominion over one hour on Sunday, though I may sleep through part of it.’ Then man went back to his own selfish, greedy ways, and he blew himself up. In the end, there was only the true and living God, and His sighs were too deep for words. (Author Unknown)

God is still God, and Jesus is still on the throne. And no matter how proud and arrogant man may become, or how much he may refuse to accept and obey the Lord, Jesus is still Savior. It is in this capacity that our Lord is truly magnified.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

### “HE MUST NEEDS PASS THROUGH SAMARIA”

*Second Discourse: Conversation with the Samaritan Woman  
about the living water, 4:1-26*

The largest portion of chapter four focuses on the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman. In this story we see the magnificence of our Lord as it is demonstrated in His willingness to surpass the prejudice of the Jews and travel through an area avoided by Jewish travelers. In His great quest to seek and save the lost our Lord was ever mindful of those who were *not* of the house of Israel. Because of the increasing hostility of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, our Lord left Jerusalem and headed for Galilee, ever mindful of the opportunities that lay ahead in Samaria.

The occasion for our Lord's departure from Jerusalem seems to have been the death of John and the increasing hostility of the Jewish authorities.

The contrast between the discourse with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman is stark. She was everything Nicodemus wasn't! He was a Jew; she a Samaritan. He was a man; she a woman. He was of the household of Israel and a spiritual leader among the Pharisees; she a morally questionable woman with a checkered past. He was, by any measure, a wealthy man; she a pauper. He sought Jesus out; she was sought by Jesus. This entire episode gives us a greater appreciation for the magnificence of our Lord.

The story unfolds in five distinct movements. First there is the *social contact*: “Give me to drink” (4:7). The woman was astonished that this Jew would have any dealing with a Samaritan; and a woman Samaritan at that! The second movement begins when Jesus introduces her to the “living water” that He, and He alone was capable of providing. “Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever

drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life” (4:13-14). The third movement is personal. “Go call thy husband” was not so much an invitation to tell others of the living water as it was to get the woman to examine herself. The fourth movement follows closely as the woman seeks to turn the conversation toward the traditions that distinguished Jews and Samaritans. The outcome of the conversation was not what the woman expected, but it was certainly what she needed. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (4:24). The small glimmer of light that this woman may have possessed moved the conversation one step further: “The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh” The final movement in this incident is seen when Jesus reveals Himself to her, and openly declares, for the first time in His earthly ministry, “I that speak unto them am he” (4:26). And as is often said, “The rest is history.” Look closer at this story with me.

#### *The Occasion of the Journey, 1-4*

~~ 4:1-3 ~~

*“When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), he left Judea, and departed again into Galilee”*

There appears to be at least two reasons why John [the Holy Spirit] provides us with the information contained in these verses. First, there is the knowledge that Jesus possessed concerning all things that would have an impact upon His earthly mission. The Pharisees never caught Jesus off guard, and at no time did their plans and schemes interfere with the purpose and plans of our Lord. Keep in mind that John introduced Jesus as divine, possessing all of the traits of deity (1:1-3). Omnipotence is one of those divine traits. “Jesus knew” is in complete harmony with the exalted nature of the Lord’s omnipotence.

Second, John helps us to see the ever increasing success of the Lord and the subservient nature of the work of the Baptist. “He must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30) serves as a backdrop of what we have here. That “Jesus was making and baptizing

more disciples than John” (4:1) is the natural consequence of what the Baptist spoke previously.

*“the Lord”* - This particular appellation of Jesus is used a number of times by John and Luke (John 6:23, 11:2, Luke 10:1, 17:5, 22:61). John began this letter with the affirmation of the deity of Jesus, and he never loses sight of that fact.

*“the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making, more disciples than John”* - The Pharisees’ awareness of the success of the Lord precipitated our Lord’s departure from Jerusalem. Some of the reasons for leaving Judea may have included the following:

(1) There was the general rejection of His teaching. The fruit in Jerusalem was disappointing. The influence of the Jewish hierarchy had hardened the hearts of the people so that the word of the Lord increasingly fell on deaf ears.

(2) Second, Jesus may have left Jerusalem out of regard for the wounded feelings of John’s disciples. The Baptist was admired by his followers, and even though John was quick to point men to the Christ and not himself, there would have been a natural tendency on the part of the disciples of John to feel snubbed as the popularity of our Lord continued to grow.

(3) Third, there was a growing hostility among the authorities toward John, a hostility that would have naturally been turned toward the Lord as His popularity increased. Keep in mind that John had been seized by Herod Antipas at this point. Consider for a moment what John tells us about this occasion. There was something that the Lord knew which accounted for His departure from Jerusalem and thus this journey. That something was the fact that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making more disciples than John. The Lord’s knowledge of this precipitated His departure for Galilee. There are a couple of things that emerge from these details. First, the Lord knew that an account of His success had reached the ears of the Pharisees. Keep in mind that when Jesus cleansed the temple He came into conflict with the Pharisees. Now news comes to this ruling body of the religious elite that the same “man” who had cleansed the temple was now gaining a following greater than that of John the

Baptist. The Lord knew that this would produce conflict, and on that account He left Judaea. There is no doubt that the Pharisees played a part in John's execution, as suggested by Matthew 17:12 and 21:23-32. The Lord was aware of the role that the Pharisees had played in aiding Herod to imprison, and eventually kill John. The information that Jesus was baptizing more disciples than John would reach the ears of the Pharisees and might occasion immediate and hostile action on the part of these religious leaders toward Christ. Wisdom dictated that the Lord make a hasty, yet temporary retreat from Jerusalem and head toward Galilee where the disposition of the people was more receptive and the religious leaders less antagonistic. In this case the Lord avoided confrontation because there was yet much work to do before He would willingly offer Himself for the sins of the world.

(4) He wanted to avoid arousing any jealousy between His disciples and John's disciples. Human disposition as it is coupled with the need for spiritual maturity on the part of His disciples, it was almost inevitable that a conflict would arise. Jesus would eliminate any possibility of that occurring.

*“Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not)”* - There is a remarkable, and often missed implication in these words. A person who is baptized in accord with God's specific command and in harmony with His will could be said to have been baptized by Jesus. The same thing might be said with regard to the role of the Holy Spirit in our obedience. The Holy Spirit gave us the complete revelation of God's will, and when we submit to the commands contained therein it could properly be said that we were baptized “by the Holy Spirit” though the Holy Spirit Himself does not do the baptizing.

This might be a good place to point out that the historic setting of the visit with the woman at Sychar is so entirely harmonized with the facts, that the account must have been penned by an eye-witness. Too, it is interesting to note that the story of the Samaritan woman is not recorded by any of the Gospel writers except John, lending credence to the suggestion that John was an eye witness to this entire episode. Let us now turn our attention

then to the background leading up to this particular event and the conversation itself.

~~ 4:4 ~~

*“And he must needs pass through Samaria.”*

To some the statement that our Lord “must” pass through Samaria is nothing more than geographical. It seems evident to me that the word has a much deeper meaning. Instead of taking the road traveled most, our Lord chose the road that the Jews most often did NOT take, as a protest against the very reason for NOT taking that road.

The most direct path from Judea to Galilee would take our Lord through Samaria. John draws our attention to the path that Jesus took into Galilee for a reason. There was a bitter antagonism between Jews and Samaritans, causing the Jews to cross the Jordan and avoid the land of Samaria all together when travelling to Galilee. This fanaticism of Jewish hatred that compelled the Jew to avoid Samaria all together was something that Jesus would not encourage. Our Lord never catered to the prejudices of men. His mission was to seek the lost, and wherever the Father would lead Him, there He would go.

But why is it that our Lord “*must needs pass through Samaria*”? After all, there were other routes which He might have taken to arrive at His destination. Tenney points out that “the word ‘must’ implies logical necessity rather than personal obligation. It is the term one would use in saying, ‘A triangle must have three sides’” (Tenney, 91). He then adds: “In the light of the tenor of the Gospel, the words suggested that His reason was not geographical necessity nor social pressure, but the underlying compulsion of the divine Will that sought out the lost Samaritan sheep. That little phrase, ‘He must,’ makes this interview to glow with the light of destiny” (Tenney, 91-92). Morgan was thinking along the same line:

Geographically it was the straight way, but it was not the usual way; and I do not think we can escape from the conviction that the “must” means that He was making His protest against the false reason for the usual way, and so

refusing to take it; and in doing so, He was, by this very action, in the moment when Judea was refusing Him, and Jerusalem was rising against Him, indicating the universality of His Messianic mission. “He must needs pass through Samaria” (Morgan, ESword Module).

~~ 4:5 ~~

*“So he cometh to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph”*

The name ‘Sychar’ signified ‘the town of the sepulcher.’ This is the only place in the Bible where this particular place is mentioned. Jerome thought the name was a clerical error for Shechem. The evidence that Sychar was a distinct place east of Shechem. John’s added comment that Sychar was a “city of Samaria...near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph” leads me to conclude that the city was rather insignificant and may not have been very well known to those in his reading audience. The city lay east of Mt. Gerizim and north of Ephraim, and the entire area is rich in Bible history. The area commonly known as Samaria included the land formerly occupied by the tribe of Ephraim and the half tribe of Manasseh. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried to Babylon, the Assyrian king sent in men from other nations to occupy the country. When God sent “lions among them which slew some of them” (2 Kings 17:25), the king of Assyria immediately dispatched one of the priests that had been carried into captivity to return to the land and “teach them the manner of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:27). Consequently, they had a religion partly Jewish and partly pagan. Johnson has pointed out that

When the Jews returned from Captivity and began to rebuild the temple the Samaritans offered to aid them, but were sternly repulsed. Henceforth a bitter feeling existed between the two peoples. When Manasseh, a priest, was expelled from Jerusalem by Nehemiah, for an unlawful marriage, he fled to Samaria, took charge of their worship, and a temple was erected on Mt. Gerizim, in opposition to the one at Jerusalem. Henceforth the Samaritans, claiming to be the children of Israel (Jacob), insisted that Gerizim, the Mount of Blessing, was the place chosen by God for worship. As the later Jewish Scriptures recognized

Jerusalem as the seat of divine worship, they were rejected by the Samaritans, who received the five books of Moses alone” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 4:6 ~~

*“and Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.”*

*“Jacob’s well was there”* - The well still exists today as witnessed by those who have visited the site, and those who have studied its history.

The scene at Jacob’s well presents a most graphic, and yet most unartificial picture of nature and human life, as it still remains, though in decay, at the foot of Gerizim and Ebal, the most beautiful section of Palestine. There is still the well of Jacob, recognized as such by Samaritans, Jews, Mohammedans and Christians alike; there is the sanctuary on the top of Gerizim, where the Passover is annually celebrated by the remnant of the Samaritan sect, according to the prescription of Moses...It is still seen by the traveler, cut through the solid rock, between eight and nine feet in diameter, and about seventy-five feet deep (Johnson, ESword Module).

Adam Clarke has this most interesting note on the site of this well:

Of this well Mr. Maundrell gives the following account. “About one-third of an hour from Naplosa, the ancient Sychar and Sychem, stood Jacob’s well. If it be inquired, whether this be the very place, seeing it may be suspected to stand too remote from Sychar for the women to come and draw water, we may answer - that, in all probability, the city extended farther in former times than it does now, as may be conjectured from some pieces of a very thick wall, the remains perhaps of the ancient Sychem, still to be seen not far from hence. Over it stood formerly a large church, erected by the Empress Irene; but of this the voracity of time, assisted by the hands of the Turks, has left nothing but a few foundations remaining. The well is

covered at present with an old stone vault, into which you are let down by a very strait hole; and then, removing a broad flat stone, you discover the well itself. It is dug in a firm rock, is about three yards in diameter, and thirty-five in depth, five of which we found full of water. This confutes a story frequently told to travelers, 'That it is dry all the year round, except on the anniversary of that day on which our blessed Saviour sat upon it; but then bubbles up with abundance of water.' At this well the narrow valley of Sychem ends, opening itself into a wide field, which probably is part of the ground given by Jacob to his son Joseph. It is watered by a fresh stream, running between it and Sychem, which makes it exceedingly verdant and fruitful" (Clarke, ESword Module).

*"Jesus, being wearied with his journey"* - The humanity of our Lord is seen in these words. John is also the only writer to record the words of Jesus from the cross, *"I thirst."* It would seem, therefore, that John was especially impressed with Jesus weariness as He sat by the well. What a paradox: "God incarnate experiencing the limitations of human life" (Morgan, ESword Module).

*"sat thus"* - "The Lord, taking his seat by this memorable spot, rich in varied association, becomes at once a type of the richer and diviner supply of life which he is able and ready to dispense to mankind" (Croskery, Pulpit Commentary, 162). These two words ("sat thus") provide us with a glimpse at our Lord's humanity. It is interesting to note that the Lord did not sit upon a throne on this occasion, nor did He sit upon a cushion. Instead He chose to sit upon the ground, or the edge of the well.

*"about the sixth hour"* - John often notes the particular hour in which some of the most notable events in the life of Christ took place. This would indicate that John was actually there with Jesus, perhaps even sitting with Him beside the well. There has been a great deal of discussion as to whether John was reckoning time by Roman, or Jewish, timetables. If the "sixth hour" is Jewish time, we would find Jesus sitting at the well about noon. If Roman time, it would be in the early morning. Both of these would allow the time necessary for the events to take place in the

remainder of the chapter before darkness might have fallen. The most likely is that it was noon, for the following reasons: (1) There is no indication that plans were being made to spend the evening there, but only that they would take a rest, and then move on toward Galilee. (2) This would be about the time that the disciples would stop for a rest after a lengthy journey. If we set the time at the early morning, the journey would have begun many hours before daylight.

~~ 4:7 ~~

*“There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water:”*

*“a woman...to draw water”* - The fact that the woman had come to “draw water” suggests a low position in life. Women of social importance simply did not perform this kind of duty. Tenney adds, “Although noon was not the customary hour for women to visit the well, the presence of the Samaritan may be explained plausibly by supposing that she was in ill repute among the women of her village, and so preferred to come for water at a time when others would not be there” (Tenney, 92).

*“Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink...”* - Jesus often took advantage of the simplest of opportunities. Coffman made this significant observation:

These multiple contrasts of race, sex, religion, moral status, marital status, social position, ability, wisdom, etc., must be accounted the most dramatic and significant of any that occurred in our Lord’s ministry. Yet, Jesus and that woman had one thing in common; both wanted a drink of water. Unerringly, Jesus saw the common ground between them and did not hesitate to stand with her upon that common platform of their mutual need” (Coffman, 114).

Our Lord, knowing what was in the heart of this woman, was intent upon conferring a blessing by asking a favor of her, and by this very simple request, He opened the way for conversation. In verses 7 to 25 we are provided a record of the conversation that Jesus had with this Samaritan woman. The movement of the conversation is not difficult to follow: *“Jesus said”* and *“the*

woman said” set aside the remarks by both. Jesus opens the conversation with the words, “*Give me to drink*”; He closes the conversation with the words “*I that speak unto thee am he.*” What takes place between those two statements magnified Jesus in the eyes of the woman, and eventually magnified Him in the eyes of the people in the village. Our Lord, by asking a favor of the woman, made it possible for Him to eventually grant to her a blessing. Johnson was thinking along the same line:

He opened a conversation by asking the woman to give him a drink of water, a request that the children of the East regard it an obligation to comply with most cheerfully, even to strangers and enemies. In that parched land water is the chiefest of blessings; Jesus pronounced a blessing upon him who should give a cup of cold water; Mahomet enjoined that it should never be refused; the servant of Abraham had asked it of the daughter of Nahor; the request of Jesus, even to a strange woman, was the custom of the East (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 4:8 ~~

*“For his disciples were gone away into the city to buy food”*

While it is true that some of the disciples had gone into the city to buy food, it would appear that at least John “the beloved disciple” and author of this gospel was there with Jesus.

~~ 4:9 ~~

*“The Samaritan woman therefore saith unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman? (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)”*

“*How is it?*” - Indeed, “how is it?” Here was our Lord’s way of opening a door into her heart in order that she might be led to eternal life. As it turned out she became one of the Lord’s first missionaries and took her new found faith to the people of her village.

“*a Jew*” - The woman starts out with the recognition that this man was a Jew, but before her day was over she would come to confess our Lord as a “prophet,” and ultimately, “the Christ.”

But how is it that this woman recognized Jesus as a “Jew”? There are a number of things which would have revealed Jesus’ national background. First, there was the speech. The Samaritans were accustomed to turning the sound of ‘sh’ into that of ‘s.’ Second, the contour of the Jewish face differs greatly from that of the Samaritan. Finally, our Lord’s appearance after His long travel would have implied that He had come some distance.

*“For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans”* - The background for this statement dates back to the time of the divided kingdom when the Northern Kingdom was carried into captivity. The words here were probably provided by the apostle in order to clarify and explain the comments of the Samaritan woman. We agree with Croskery that these words were not some “pert, half-ironical tone of the woman” (Croskery, Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module). There was much more in her conversation than a mere confrontation with this Stranger.

~~ 4:10 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.”*

The significance of Jesus’ offer as Provider is grounded in the Old Testament where Yahweh is referred to as the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13; 17:13).

*“If thou knewest”* - This suggests that at that point in the interview the woman did not know this deeper truth about the “man” by the well. But had she known to Whom she was talking, and had she asked for a drink, Jesus affirms that He would not only have the ability to provide drink, but the willingness as well.

*“the gift of God”* - Adam Clarke sees the “gift” as Jesus Christ Himself, given to the world by God’s marvelous grace. This seems the most reasonable explanation for the following reasons. (1) The “gift” is something that she could have recognized; (2) the words are connected with the phrase “and who it is that saith...” (3) Christ is referred to as something that God had given to

mankind (John 3:16). (4) Paul refers to Jesus as God's "unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15). The irony here is the fact that this woman was standing face to face with God Incarnate and completely unaware of that wonderful truth. Such is often the blindness of men.

*"Give me to drink...he would have given thee..."* – Interestingly, the positions of the two were reversed. Though our Lord was weary from His travel and obviously in need of something physically, it was she who was in need of the Living Water. Though the Lord had no means of drawing the physical water, it was the woman who was without the present means of drawing the spiritual water.

*"Living water"* - It was living water for the simple reason that the spiritual water that Jesus gives provides life. But even beyond that, the word of our Lord "lives" in every sense of the word. "Just as the body requires water, just so the soul, if it is to live, must drink at the everlasting fountain of God's word" (Coffman, 115). It should be observed here that Christ asks a favor of this woman in order to bestow upon her a greater gift. Appealing to the woman's curiosity, the Lord managed to move this woman from the point of superficial interest to serious inquiry.

There is one more point that begs serious consideration. The claim to be able to give "living water" that could quench all thirst was a claim to deity. Had this woman been familiar with the Old Testament prophets she would immediately recognized this. Consider these Old Testament passages:

Isaiah 49:10 - "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water will he guide them."

Jeremiah 17:13 - "O Jehovah, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be put to shame. They that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Jehovah, the fountain of living waters."

Psalms 36:9 - "For with thee is the fountain of life: In thy light shall we see light."

~~ 4:11 ~~

*"The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water?"*

*"The woman said unto him, Sir"* - By calling Jesus "Sir," she manifested a deep respect for the Lord. Her faith was growing, but so was her respect for this Stranger by the well.

*"thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep"* - The woman was still limiting her thinking to physical water drawn from a physical well. She perceived of this "living water" as something that could be fetched from a well, drawn with some physical apparatus. When people traveled they generally carried something with them with which they could draw water, or dip it out of a stream. It was obvious that Jesus did not have such an apparatus, and the woman said in effect, "You need not talk about drawing water and giving it to me. I can see for myself that you have not a bucket with which to draw water."

*"Whence then hast thou that living water"* - She was asking, "Where, then, shall you get this living water? What is the source?" It is precisely at this point that the woman begins to make the transformation from the physical to the spiritual. It should be observed that the Bible frequently uses the word "water" to refer to spiritual blessings. Consider these passages:

Revelation 21:6 - "And he said unto me, They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Revelation 7:17 - "for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Isaiah 12:3 - "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Psalms 42:1 - "As the hart panteth after the water brooks,  
So panteth my soul after thee, O God."

Isaiah 44:3 - "For I will pour water upon him that is  
thirsty, and streams upon the dry ground; I will pour my  
Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine  
offspring: 4 and they shall spring up among the grass."

Isaiah 55:1 - "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the  
waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat;  
yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without  
price."

Jeremiah 2:13 - "For my people have committed two evils:  
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and  
hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no  
water"

~~ 4:12 ~~

*"Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well,  
and drank thereof himself, and his sons, and his cattle?"*

*"Art thou greater than...Jacob...?"* - The woman was not being disrespectful of our Lord. She was simply inquiring as to the nature of this "water," and precisely what it could supply. "Some have understood her words as a scornful denial that Christ had any power to give the living water he had mentioned; but it appears that something far different from scorn was intended by this reply" (Coffman, 116).

*"our father Jacob"* - The woman now claims some kinship to Jesus, and recognizes their common background in Jacob. It would appear that she is beginning to soften her attitude toward Jesus. What she had seen and heard so far was enough to convince her that the Person she is addressing may be more than just a stranger at the well.

~~ 4:13 ~~

*"Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of  
this water shall thirst again"*

*“Jesus answered”* - Jesus leaves the question about His superiority to Jacob. He would settle this at a later time when she could understand Him better. Seeing that her mind was still focused upon the physical water, Jesus seeks to turn her attention away from the physical to the spiritual. The physical can never really satisfy. Earthly desire obtains only temporary satisfaction. Physical thirst can only be quenched for a short while, and the time eventually comes when we must fetch the pail and go to the well for more water. Jesus may have been appealing to either (1) the longing for complete satisfaction, or (2) the desire to escape the effort so essential to drawing the water. Tenney suggests that Jesus’ “promise was a gratification of common human laziness” (94). “This water” stands for all of those things that the world offers - the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the vainglory of life (1 John 2:15-17). These allurements are only for a season, and all who drink from the wells of fleshly desire will indeed “thirst again.” They will experience neither continuity nor completeness of satisfaction. The thirst that Jesus refers to cannot be quenched by the “water” of the world.

~~ 4:14 ~~

*“but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life”*

*“but whosoever drinketh”* - This is literally, “*whosoever keeps on drinking.*” This water is available for “whosoever”; none shall be denied, and all shall be satisfied. “Jesus speaks of a divine and complete satisfaction. The spiritual thirst once slaked, the heavenly desire once realized by appropriating the gift of God, is fundamentally satisfied. The nature itself is changed” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module). That satisfaction comes only when the source from which we drink is pure.

The source of such a blessing is uniquely in Jesus Christ; and it may not be earned or merited, but is a heavenly gift to fallen and sinful men. The gift, however, is conditional. The woman would not have given Jesus a drink of water unless he had asked it, nor would Christ have blessed her unless she had asked. The Lord will not endow any soul

with living water unless that soul shall ask in the appointed way through compliance with conditions prerequisite to his blessing (Coffman, 116-117).

*“well of water springing up unto eternal life”* – It is not a single drink that Jesus gives, but a perennial fountain that produces deep satisfaction and joy of heart. His is a perpetual spring that pours out eternal life to those who would drink there from. “The water that I give becomes a fountain, and the fountain swells into a river, and the river expands into and loses itself in the great ocean of eternity” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 4:15 ~~

*“The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come all the way hither to draw”*

No doubt the woman completely misunderstood the words of our Lord. To her credit she did not wait until she had reached the point of complete understanding, but immediately asked of the Savior that which she DID understand. The woman still had a limited perception of this “water” of which Jesus spoke. To a Jew “living water” was that which bubbled out of the ground; or a flowing stream. She could not understand what Jesus had in mind. She did not understand how Jesus was going to draw this living water from a well that held stagnant water. But if it were possible, she wanted to have some of this “living water.”

~~ 4:16 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither”*

Wanting to move the woman toward repentance, Jesus now focuses His attention on her personal life. Here Jesus makes an appeal to the depth of the woman’s determination to have some of this living water. If her desire were strong enough she would be willing to put forth the effort to obtain it. From what follows it is apparent that the Lord’s demand that she call her husband touched her heart at its most tender place, and was indeed a partial answer to her prayer, “Give me this water.”

But Jesus’ desire was not so much to just get her husband, but to move her to a disclosure of her present sinful condition. The very

purpose of the statement, therefore, was to eventually convict the woman of her sin; all in response to her desire to have this “living water.” Jesus makes a demand that would, hopefully, awaken her to a sense of her moral and spiritual condition. Barclay had this note:

She was suddenly compelled to face herself and the looseness and immorality and total inadequacy of her life. There are two revelations in Christianity: the revelation of God and the revelation of ourselves. No man ever really sees himself until he sees himself in the presence of Christ; and then he is appalled at the sight. There is another way of putting it -- Christianity begins with a sense of sin. It begins with the sudden realization that life as we are living it will not do. We awake to ourselves and we awake to our need of God (Barclay, ESword Module).

Albert Barnes put it like this:

His object, here, was to lead her to consider her own state and sinfulness--a delicate and yet pungent way of making her see that she was a sinner. By showing her, also, that he knew her life, though a stranger to her, he convinced her that he was qualified to teach her the way to heaven, and thus prepared her to admit that he was the Messiah, John 4:29 (Barnes, ESword Module).

*“Go, call thy husband, and come hither”* - It should be noted here that our Lord did not intend that this woman receive this blessing alone. She would, indeed, become a missionary for the gospel, and her mission effort would begin with her immediate family. But just as important is the fact that spiritual blessings are never bestowed separate and apart from moral responsibility.

~~ 4:17-18 ~~

*“The woman answered and said unto him, I have no husband. Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly”*

*“the woman answered, I have no husband”* - The man with whom the woman was presently living was not her husband, and

she was, therefore, living in fornication. But why would the woman admit to having no husband? There is a hint that the admiration this woman had for Jesus was growing. She had reached the point where she was willing to open up and allow Jesus to examine her inner being.

*“Jesus said, Thou saidst well, for thou hast had five husbands”* - The knowledge that Jesus had of this woman’s “personal” life is quite astonishing. It can be attributed to nothing more than the omniscience of Jesus. The fact that this woman had actually had five husbands is suggestive of a very troubled past. We do not know if these men had died, or if they had put her away. The context suggests that the woman may have lived a rather loose life, having been through five marriages, and now simply living in adultery without any bother of a marriage ceremony. The loose attitude of that generation compelled our Lord to declare on another occasion that this was an “evil and adulterous generation” (Matt. 12:39). The easy divorce laws of that age, permitting a divorce for any cause, are so typical of our generation. Unfortunately there are a number of men and women living in precisely the same situation today, no longer living with their original spouse; or worse, living without any lawful ceremony whatsoever.

~~ 4:19 ~~

*“The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet”*

Evidently the matter of her personal life was most unpleasant, as is often the case when we consider our moral life in the light of God’s word. She quickly changed the conversation from a discussion on her personal life to a theological discussion on the marks of a “prophet.” Interestingly, the Samaritans did not hold to any of the scriptures other than the books of law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Moses spoke of the “prophet” that would arise like unto himself (Deut. 18:15). It was a “prophet” the Samaritans looked, and not a “King,” as would be the case with the Jews. All of the evidence had convinced her that this Stranger was much more than an ordinary Jew. As the Lord “lifted the curtain off her life, she was convinced at once of his superhuman knowledge” (Johnson, 71).

Having at first recognized Him as a Jew, she now hails Him as a prophet. “The more deeply conscious any person is of his sins, the higher Jesus rises in his sight” (Coffman, 118-119). I would add, the more deeply conscious a person is of the beauty of the Lord, the more that person will magnify the Savior.

~~ 4:20 ~~

*“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship”*

The “theological discussion” continued as she considered the subject of worship. Many interesting traditions had arisen with regard to Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans thought that Adam was created from its dust, that the flood never covered it, and that it was here that Jacob wrestled with the angel. It is easy to understand why the Samaritans could not conceive of worship being offered anywhere else. Woods suggests that “she sought to involve him in an age-long controversy” (Woods, 81), but we find in this woman’s question an honest heart seeking truth.

*“Ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship”* - “Partly to turn attention from her sinful life, and partly to have him settle a great controversy, she appeals to him to say where men ought to worship God” (Johnson, 71). We should note that the woman worshipped in “this mountain” because that is the way that the “fathers” had done it. But the ‘fathers’ were wrong. How many misguided souls worship in vain for no other reason than the fact that their practice is “as their fathers” did it? Many deluded individuals continue to practice infant baptism, sprinkling, musical accompaniment, etc. because their fathers did it that way, and not because of personal conviction that comes from a study of God’s word.

~~ 4:21 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father”*

*“the hour cometh”* - This simply means that the time was not far distant when the things Jesus speaks of here would occur. Jesus told this woman that a specific place of worship, such as “this

mountain” or “in Jerusalem,” would not be necessary in that “hour.” In less than three years the Old Law would be “nailed to the cross” (Col. 2:14), and the gospel dispensation would be ushered in on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter 2.

~~ 4:22 ~~

*“Ye worship that which ye know not: we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews”*

*“Ye worship that which ye know not”* - “Ye” refers to the Samaritans; “we” refers to the Jews. It is likely that the Samaritans had an imperfect knowledge of God and what was involved in true worship. Since they accepted only the first five books of the Old Testament their knowledge of what the prophets may have contributed to the subject of worship was missing. The Samaritans would have a limited concept of the nature of God and His will on the matter. They were in error regarding the place and the manner of acceptable worship. Having rejected all the great messages of the prophets, and the Psalms, they had robbed themselves of the essential elements of acceptable and profitable worship.

~~ 4:23 ~~

*“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers”*

Contrary to popular opinion, all worship is not pleasing to the Father. It is possible to engage in worship, and even offer worship to the Father, and it not be acceptable in the sight of God. God seeks a particular kind of worshipper; one who will worship the Father in spirit and truth. It should be observed that God as Creator sets forth the terms of acceptable worship. Man, as the creature, is obligated to acquiesce. Unfortunately the reverse has occurred among the masses, and the general consensus is that if man likes something, he can incorporate it into his worship of God, and expects God, the Creator, to accept what man, the created, offers to Him.

~~ 4:24 ~~

*“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth”*

*“God is a Spirit”* - The better rendering would be, “God is Spirit.” God is not material; He is not some kind of “force” akin to that portrayed in the Star Wars series; He is not an impersonal power that exudes righteousness, but a living God. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and thus can be worshipped anywhere, because He is everywhere.

*“They that worship him must worship in spirit and truth”* - Three simple, but profound aspects of true worship appear in this statement of our Lord: (1) We *must* worship God; (2) we must worship God in *spirit*, i.e., rationally, and sincerely; (3) we must worship God in *truth*, as his word directs.

~~ 4:25 ~~

*“The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh (he that is called Christ): when he is come, he will declare unto us all things”*

The woman’s statement reveals that she was aware of the coming Messiah, and that when He comes He would declare or make known all things. It is interesting to note that the woman’s comprehension of spiritual matters was growing. The fact that she confesses that “Messiah cometh” shows here implicit faith in the books of the Law. She may have had in mind such passages as Deuteronomy 18:18 ff.

*“he that is called Christ”* – These words were probably added by John as an explanation of the word “Messiah.” Both Jew and Samaritan alike used this word to refer to the One Who was to come.

~~ 4:26 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he”*

Our Lord’s self-acknowledgement of His divine nature is quite interesting, particularly in view of the fact that to this point in time He had not revealed it to the rulers. So, why did Jesus

acknowledge His deity to this Samaritan woman while refusing to admit it to the rulers and religious leaders of Judaea? Guy N. Woods addressed this point:

She had developed into a sincere inquirer; they were motivated by hatred and malice; the province of Samaria was without either Pharisees or scribes who were without scruples in misrepresentation; and the Samaritans were more disposed to receive his teaching than were the people of Judaea. Moreover, the people of Judaea expected Messiah to be a temporal ruler, and if they had believed him, they would have immediately attempted to make him a king, and this would not subserve his best interests” (Woods, 84).

*“I that speak unto thee am he”* - This is the first recorded confession by Jesus that He is the Christ. Johnson had this practical observation: “There were a few occasions, and this is the first of them, in which Christ broke through the restraints under which it pleased him ordinarily to act. I believe that there are just four instances of this kind recorded in the Savior’s life: that of the woman of Samaria, of the Roman Centurion, of the Canaanitish woman, and of the Greeks who come up to Jerusalem” (Johnson, ESword Module).

Notice that Jesus moved this woman to a knowledge of the truth, overcoming the obstacles of indifference, materialism, selfishness, immorality, and religious ignorance, leading her toward life everlasting.

## CHAPTER NINE

# “THE FIELDS ARE WHITE UNTO HARVEST”

*The Harvest of Souls, 4:27-42*

The woman at Samaria was quick to share her new-found faith with others. This incident serves as an amazing microcosm of the world wide vision our Lord had for saving the lost. While the disciples wondered among themselves why Jesus would be talking to a woman, and a Samaritan woman at that, the woman had gone into the city to tell others, “Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did” (4:29). The promise of hope that this might indeed “be the Christ” compelled those in the city to make their way to the place where they, too, might hear the Lord, and thus believe “because of his word” (4:41). The disciples, meanwhile, were slow to see the implications of what was unfolding before them. More concerned about the physical sustenance of the Lord, they were likewise slow to see the harvest of souls represented by this woman’s open heart and that of her fellow citizens. As was often the case, the disciples had to be instructed in a most important spiritual truth that stared them in the face: “Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white unto harvest” (4:35).

This section describes the effect that the conversation between Jesus and the woman had upon the disciples, and the woman herself.

~~ 4:27 ~~

*“and upon this came his disciples; and they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman; yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why speakest thou with her?”*

*“and upon this came his disciples”* - Having completed their business in the nearby town, the disciples now return to the point where they had left Jesus.

*“they marveled that he was speaking with a woman”* - The curiosity on the part of the disciples arises out of the position that women held in that society. The low estate of women in the first century is quite different from the high esteem generally

shown to women in civilized nations. The Rabbis had a saying, “Let no one talk with a woman on the street, not even with his wife” (Pulpit Commentary). Not only was it a woman Jesus conversed with, but it was a Samaritan woman, and as such she was regarded with even less respect because of the contempt that the Jews had for Samaritans. Such disrespect for women was not peculiar to the Jewish world. Guy N. Woods noted that “at one time, Roman law gave the husband total authority over his wife, even to the point of putting her to death; and Socrates, the Greek philosopher, thanked God daily that he was born neither a slave nor a woman” (Woods, 84-85). Barclay also addressed this point:

The strict Rabbis forbade a Rabbi to greet a woman in public. A Rabbi might not even speak to his own wife or daughter or sister in public. There were even Pharisees who were called “the bruised and bleeding Pharisees” because they shut their eyes when they saw a woman on the street and so walked into walls and houses! For a Rabbi to be seen speaking to a woman in public was the end of his reputation--and yet Jesus spoke to this woman (Barclay, ESword Module)

Perhaps a third thing that marveled the disciples was that Jesus was speaking to a woman of notorious character. No decent man, much less a Rabbi, would have been seen in public with this woman, much less carry on a conversation.

*“yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why speakest thou with her?”* - This adds to the conclusion that this account was written by an eye witness, no doubt John himself. The disciples may have been afraid to say anything; or perhaps they deferred their traditions to the wisdom and authority of Christ. The Pulpit Commentary concluded this verse with the following observation:

One of the miracles of the Lord’s ministry was to break down the wretched rabbinical prejudice against the spiritual capacities of woman, and the Oriental folly which supposed that she contaminated their sanctity. He lifted woman to her true position by the side of man. Women were his most faithful disciples. They ministered unto him of their substance. They shared his miraculous healing,

feeding, and teaching. They anointed his feet, they wept over his agony, they followed him to the cross, they were early at the sepulcher (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module)

~~ 4:28-29 ~~

*“So the woman left her waterpot, and went away into the city, and saith to the people, Come, see a man, who told me all things that ever I did: can this be the Christ?”*

The Samaritans expected the coming Messiah because of the prophecies of Him in the Pentateuch. Their concept was flawed, however, because they had rejected the rest of the Old Testament which provided a multitude of details as to the mission, work, and kingdom of the coming Christ. This woman saw in Jesus the characteristics that were expected to be found in the Messiah and she reacted accordingly.

*“So the woman left her waterpot”* - So thrilled was this woman over what she had heard and learned, that she left her waterpot, forgetting the very purpose for which she had come to the well. She was so touched with what she had discovered that she was anxious to tell others. John’s detailed note that she “left her waterpot” shows us that John was present during these proceedings and proves the truthfulness of this record. There is a wonderful symbolic lesson in these words. The “waterpot” represented everything the woman was prior to her encounter with the Lord. When she left that waterpot to go tell others what she had found it reminds us that we must leave the things of the world if we are to be servants of the Lord.

*“went away into the city”* - She immediately became a missionary to the city, and a viable witness to the power and wisdom of Jesus.

*“Come, see”* - There are several things of interest in these words. First, we notice that the woman was straightforward with those whom she met. “Come, see.” Just investigate. Examine the evidence! Here is the most effective way to lead men to truth. Let them discover it for themselves.

Chrysostom says, “She might have said, ‘Come and see One that prophesieth;’ but when the soul is aflame with holy fire it looks then to nothing earthly, neither to glory nor to shame, but belongs to one thing alone, the flame which occupieth it.” There is a touch of naiveté, of loquacity, of impetuous womanhood, about this, that thrills with life. She was not afraid, in the first gush of her new-found joy, to brave the unflattering scorn of the men to whom such a confession was made (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

*“A man, who told me all things that ever I did”* - Second, we notice that she acknowledged the omniscience of the Lord. Only omniscience could account for the ability of our Lord to know and reveal to her some of the most sordid details of her past life. It is told that once a small girl heard a sermon by C. H. Spurgeon, and whispered to her mother at the end of it: “Mother, how does he know what goes on in our house?” Yes, the word of God is still alive and active, able to “discern the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Third, as soon as she believed, she became evangelistic. This suggests that evangelism is the natural response of a heart filled with gladness. Barclay wrote, “The Christian life is based on the twin pillars of discovery and communication. No discovery is complete until the desire to share it fills our hearts; and we cannot communicate Christ to others until we have discovered him for ourselves. First to find, then to tell, are the two great steps of the Christian life” (Barclay, ESword Module).

Fourth, she manifested zeal and wisdom. Johnson quoted Chrysostom: “She said not, Come, see the Christ, but, with the same condescension with which Christ had netted her, she draws men to him; Come, she saith, See a man who told me all I ever did. Is not this the Christ? She neither declared the fact plainly, nor was she silent. She desired, not to bring them in by her own assertion, but to make them share her opinion by hearing him” (Johnson, ESword Module). Woods has this interesting note:

Her question, ‘Can this be the Christ,’ is so constructed in the original text as to imply a negative answer but this

does not mean that she disbelieved. The grammatical form in which she couched it was a shrewd and skillful way of avoiding prejudice on the part of her hearers until they had been privileged to learn of the Lord as had she. Her word, 'Come and see,' is the key to her statement. She wanted them to determine the matter, not on what she said, but upon what they could see. In this she was a more effective worker, by far, than Nicodemus who, so far as we know, brought no others to Christ nor at the time, openly declared himself a disciple of Jesus; but, this woman prompted a whole city to turn to Christ" (Woods, 85).

While it is true that the grammar may suggest a negative answer, we would point out that Westcott says, "hope bursts through it." She knows that he is the Christ, but she wishes the townspeople to come to a like conclusion with herself.

~~ 4:30 ~~

*"They went out of the city, and were coming to him"*

Their curiosity aroused, there was evidently a great multitude that came to investigate for themselves. This speaks highly for the citizens of that city. Why did they respond so favorably? Had they been searching for the Messiah?

The vividness of the picture is remarkable. The men were already crossing the green fields that lay between Sychar and Jacob's well. This remarkable touch explains the conversation that immediately follows. We have the twofold scene depicted: on the one side, the disciples eager for their meal, and absorbed for the moment with thoughts of "terrene provender," unconscious of the vast yearnings of their Lord, and his passion for the regeneration and saving of men; and on the other side, the immediate effect, produced neither by signs nor wonders, but by his word only, on a few susceptible souls, who appeared to him living representatives and first fruits of a redeemed humanity (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 4:31 ~~

*"In the mean while the disciples prayed him, saying, Rabbi, eat"*

*“the disciples prayed him”* - Literally, they were “entreating him,” for so the original suggests. The word is used of one who feels an equality with the person addressed. As if the disciples were saying, “We have gone to Sychar to find provisions for thee; do not despise our efforts.”

~~ 4:32 ~~

*“But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not”*

*“I have meat to eat that ye know not”* - It is not uncommon for someone to forego the physical needs during a time of intense spiritual activities. Johnson noted: “This forgetfulness of the needs of the body at such an hour was not surprising or supernatural. It constantly occurs to those whose spirits are deeply stirred” (Johnson, ESword Module). Quite often the nourishment of the spirit dwarfs that of the physical, and men have been known to go incredible lengths of time without food. The statement of our Lord here is in keeping with His intent desire to do the will of the Father always (cf. John 5:36; 6:38; 8:29; 10:18; 14:23; 17:4)

~~ 4:33 ~~

*“The disciples therefore said one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat?”*

In the mind of the disciples Jesus’ absence of hunger could not be explained other than the fact that someone must have brought Him food while they were away. Rather than question the Lord, it appears that they were discussing this among themselves. Some have suggested that their conversation among themselves (if indeed it was among themselves) was an indication that they had not grasped the spiritual element in the words of the Lord.

They could not, or did not, rise to the spiritual or unseen, nor for the moment did they get beyond the pressing needs of the flesh. Still, in the form of their question they leave room for doubt, whether he had not been able to satisfy the craving of the flesh, to make stones into bread, or water into wine. Surely not? (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 4:34 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work”*

Johnson had this observation:

The Savior declares that to do the will of God is food to him; that is, discharges the same offices as food. 1. It was an enjoyment; 2. He longed for it, as the hungry long for food; 3. It refreshed and strengthened him. This is always true of doing the will of God. The character of his service is such that the faithful (1) delight in it; (2) are made better and stronger by it, all the time (Johnson, ESword Module).

By stating the fact that “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me,” the Lord focused our attention on the great design of His life. He had come to this well tired and thirsty; likely at the very time when meals were most often served. Yet the opportunity to teach this woman the truth about the water of life caused the Lord to forget his fatigue and hunger. The purpose of His life absorbed His attention so much so that physical hunger fled. In his distress Job acknowledged: “I have treasured up the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Albert Barnes made this important observation: “The mere supply of our temporal necessities, though most men make it an object of their chief solicitude, is a small consideration in the sight of him who has just views of the great design of human life” (Barnes, ESword Module).

~~ 4:35 ~~

*“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest”*

It was the great need, and the opportunity of the hour, that led our Lord to forego the physical in view of the spiritual. Looking upon a field that was not ready for the harvest, our Lord turns the attention of the disciples to a spiritual field that is “white already unto harvest.”

Here is a clear indication of the time these events occurred. It was four months until grain harvest. In Palestine this occurs in April. Four months previously would be December. The effort of some expositors to interpret the Lord's statement as a proverb of the length of time from sowing to harvest, and not an actual date, fails because (1) there is no indication that there was such a proverb; (2) it was not four, but six months from the time the seed was sown until the harvest was garnered, and such a 'proverb' would be false. The 'fields' upon which the disciples were invited by our Lord to 'look' were undoubtedly the stream of Samaritans already flocking out to see him. Grain, when 'white' is ready for the garner; the Samaritans were now ready and were about to become disciples of Jesus. It is remarkable that the Jews, with greater light, rejected Jesus; the Samaritans, in deeper darkness, accepted him. How often is this observed in our day! Those with greater opportunities and possessed of more knowledge and wisdom in worldly matters often reject the Lord; whereas, those of simple tastes and of less self-sufficiency accept him fully. Paul discussed this fact in detail in 1 Cor. 1:18-31. The 'wisdom of this world' is often nothing more than spiritual darkness (Woods, 87).

The time must have been either the middle of November or December. The Lord must have spent some eight months since the Passover either in Jerusalem, or at least in the area of Judaea, a labor that produced very little fruit. Upon His departure He encounters this woman, and those in the city, who were anxious to embrace the promised Messiah. Before leaving this verse behind, we share with our readers this observation in the Pulpit Commentary:

The very rapidity with which he passes from the symbolism of water to the symbolism of food, and then to that of seed time and harvest, reminds us of One who "without a parable spake not." The words so far have universal application in every age. The harvest has always been ripening. The word *leukov* is used in this place only for the aspect of ripening corn. It has elsewhere the meaning of glittering, translucent whiteness, and perhaps it is used here for "dead ripe." The golden grain in late

summer becomes white, and this intensifies the force of the image. It seems to say, “These fields will be sacrificed, these fruits will be wasted, these souls will be lost, unless they are reaped and brought into the heavenly garner (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 4:36 ~~

*“He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together”*

Whether we are involved in the “sowing,” or the “reaping,” all rejoice together in the saving of souls. Paul put it this way: “I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor. 3:6-8).

~~ 4:37 ~~

*“For herein is the saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth”*

The joint work of many leads to a successful effort on the part of all. Some may plant; others water; but all enjoy the fruit of the harvest. So it is with our spiritual harvest. One may teach; another may encourage. But all lend their efforts and abilities to the salvation of precious souls. This principle is present in so many areas of life. Children inherit the labors of their parents, whether it be a blessing or a curse depends upon the kind of seed the parents are planting in the minds of their children. Mighty nations are built upon the sacrifices of those who have gone before. Be it a builder, a teacher, or a common laborer: much of what we do in this life is passed on to the next generation. It is interesting that this proverb, “One soweth while another reapeth,” is found in some of the Greek writers. Barnes noted:

Similar proverbs were in use among the Jews. See Isa 65:21; Isa 65:22; Lev 26:16; Mic 6:15. One soweth, c. One man may preach the gospel, and with little apparent effect another, succeeding him, may be crowned with eminent

success. The seed, long buried, may spring up in an abundant harvest (Albert Barnes).

~~ 4:38 ~~

*"I sent you to reap that whereon ye have not labored: others have labored, and ye are entered into their labor"*

"Sent" is past tense, and refers to some event prior to the words themselves. The past eight months had seen an abundant period of labor and fruitfulness for the Lord and His disciples (cf. 4:1). It may very well be that our Lord was referring to the work that John had done, and the resultant harvest that the apostles reaped as a consequence of the labors of John the Baptist.

~~ 4:39 ~~

*"And from that city many of the Samaritans believed on him because of the word of the woman, who testified, He told me all things that ever I did"*

What a tremendous influence this woman had on the lives of so many others. Though we are not told the precise number of Samaritans who believed on Jesus, John tells us that it was "many." This may explain why in later years Philip the evangelist would reap such a harvest when he came to that city following the establishment of the church (see Acts 8:5-12).

~~ 4:40-41 ~~

*"So when the Samaritans came unto him, they besought him to abide with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his word"*

The Samaritans stand in stark contrast to the Jews. The Jews, who had the Law of Moses, rejected the Christ; the Samaritans who did not have the Law, were quick to believe. We see the same thing in our day. As is often the case those who are dedicated to denominational dogma are versed in the Bible, but unwilling to give up their false doctrine. On the other hand, some who have little knowledge of the Bible are quick to embrace the truth when once they have been shown.

~~ 4:42 ~~

*“and they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy speaking: for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world”*

The remarkable thing about these Samaritans was their willingness to investigate for themselves rather than simply take the woman at her word. While there is great value in hearing the truth from others, faith born of one's own initiative is all the stronger. The woman became a missionary to a people sitting in darkness by directing them to the true light.

### THE FIELDS ARE WHITE UNTO HARVEST

On two occasions our Lord likened the opportunity for saving the lost to that of a great harvest awaiting the reapers. One of these comes from this passage in John: “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest” (John 4:35). The other is recorded in Matthew 9:35-38:

And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest.

Our Lord is exalted when His disciples go forth with an open eye to seek and save those who are lost. Too often we are limited in our vision, weak in our faith, and timid in our efforts. When we shirk our duty to teach the lost we do not magnify the Lord for the obvious reason that His majesty and glory are not made known. There is always the great danger that we will be overcome with despair at the task that lies before us. When we consider the sheer numbers that are before us, the task seems

staggering. The world population is rapidly approaching 8 billion. Thousands are being born into this world every day. Most of these will grow up to reject God, bowing at the feet of various idols and/or ideologies. In comparison, the small number of God's children pales in comparison. Add to this the hardened hearts that surround us, and we might be tempted to throw up our hands in frustration and ask, "How can we do it? How can we possibly reap the harvest of souls that awaits us?"

Will you focus your attention on four words from the passage in Matthew? "Lift up your eyes!" Our Lord was not talking about the physical eyes, because to look at the harvest in a physical field requires that we look down; down at the earth, down at the rows teeming with crops ready to be harvested. Our Lord said "Lift up your eyes!" He was telling us to look with the eye of faith. He was telling us to imitate the same kind of faith so vividly manifested in the heroes of days gone by (Hebrews chapter 11). So let us lift up our eyes! Here are four things associated with the look to which our Lord refers:

#### LIFT UP YOUR EYES IN SPITE OF THE OBSTACLES

There were obstacles the disciples faced in that first century: Sin, indifference, lack of workers, false teachers, traditions! The list is endless. The simple fact is, we do not have any *greater* problems than Jesus and the apostles faced. How did men and women of faith deal with obstacles that confronted them? Consider a few examples. Twelve spies were sent to look at the land and assess the challenges before them. Only two of these men, Joshua and Caleb, could see the opportunities; the other ten saw only the obstacles. "Let us go up at once" was the cry of faith, "we are able" was a statement of confidence and trust in God. When it came time to conquer the land some forty years later, Joshua faced the massive walls of Jericho. His trust in God had not waned since his initial trip into the promised land some four decades earlier. Simple trusting obedience and a seven day march around the parameters of that city brought the walls down with a shout and the sound of a trumpet. In the words of the Hebrews author:

And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens. Women received their dead by a resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth. And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Heb. 11:32-40).

The early church faced her obstacles as well: the Judaizing teachers, Herod Antipas, and persecution at the hands of Nero. But their eyes were fixed on the harvest and the fields that were white unto harvest. Our century is no different. What are some of our obstacles? Family problems? Financial woes? Increasing persecution in an anti-Christian climate? You see, the problem is not the obstacles; the problem is our lack of faith.

#### LIFT UP YOUR EYES IN VIEW OF THE OPPORTUNITIES

Jesus saw the opportunities, something the disciples evidently did not see. They were focused on the question as to who had provided meat for the Lord. Do you remember when the Lord asked His disciples what provisions were available to feed a crowd of 5,000 men? All they could see was the fishes and the loaves. But Jesus always saw the possibilities and opportunities. On this particular occasion Jesus saw in this Samaritan woman a heart desirous of the living water. Beyond that the Lord knew the hearts of the precious souls in the city. Yes, the fields were white unto harvest.

The same opportunities surround us today. Worldwide, the time has never been greater to take the gospel to people who, for decades, have been locked behind the iron curtain. The progress of the Lord's church in Russia is nothing short of astonishing, particularly when we consider the opposition by the government and the Orthodox Church. India continues to be a field white unto harvest. In our own country, students enrolling in Christian colleges across the country have never been greater. People have grown tired with the political correctness so dominant in the thinking of main stream politicians and educators. We could go on, but the evidence indicates that, like in the days of Elijah, more than "7,000 have not bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18).

#### LIFT UP YOUR EYES WITH AN ATTITUDE OF OPTIMISM

The opposite of optimism is pessimism. Pessimism is an enemy of the mind that will destroy a person. Extremes must be avoided. The "positive mental approach" so prominent in the 70's and 80's created unrealistic expectation in the hearts of those who would goose-step to the sound of their trumpets. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the promises in God's word of success that accompanies the victory we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ours should be an attitude of "realistic optimism" wherein we recognize the challenges and react in a positive manner. Let us never forget that Paul wrote, "We know that to them that love God, all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). Alan Smith shared the following with his readers:

The following is reported to have been seen in the window of an English company: "We have been established for over one hundred years and have been pleasing and displeasing customers ever since. We have made money and lost money, suffered the effects of coal nationalization, coal rationing, government control, and bad payers. We have been cussed and discussed, messed about, lied to, held up, robbed, and swindled. The only reason we stay in business is to see what happens next." As I read that sign, I couldn't help but think of the apostle Paul who listed all the trials that he experienced in his Christian life:

“I have worked much harder than they. I have been in prison more often. I have been hurt more in beatings. I have been near death many times. Five times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea. I have gone on many travels and have been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews, and those who are not Jews. I have been in danger in cities, in places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I have been in danger with false Christians. I have done hard and tiring work, and many times I did not sleep. I have been hungry and thirsty, and many times I have been without food. I have been cold and without clothes. Besides all this, there is on me every day the load of my concern for all the churches.” (2 Cor. 11:23b-28). You almost expect Paul to say, “The only reason I keep serving Christ is to see what happens next.” But, a more accurate statement would be: “The reason I keep serving Christ is out of appreciation for all he has done for me.”

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Here are some things we learn about the Lord from this chapter:

First, we learn about the humanity of Jesus. As the chapter opens we learn that Jesus was weary with the journey and sat down by the side of the well “being wearied.” It is quite interesting that John, who presents the deity of Jesus in marvelous fashion, would also provide great details as to the humanity of our Lord, perhaps more than any of the other writers. As Barclay noted: “John does not show us a figure freed from the tiredness and the struggle of our humanity. He shows us one for whom life was an effort as it is for us; he shows us one who also was tired and had to go on” (DBS, Electronic Edition).

Second, we learn something of the compassion and sympathy of Jesus. Unlike the Jewish Rabbis of His day, our Lord demonstrated a compassionate heart toward this woman who appears to have been of questionable moral character. Upon contact with this woman, our Lord begins a conversation that

would eventually open her heart. Only one filled with the compassion of our Lord would be so interested in someone who would likely have been an outcast of society.

Third, Jesus was “the breaker down of barriers” (Barclay). It might be beneficial to simply share with our readers William Barclay’s comments:

The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was an old, old story. Away back about 720 B.C. the Assyrians had invaded the northern kingdom of Samaria and had captured and subjugated it. They did what conquerors often did in those days--they transported practically the whole population to Media (2Ki 17:6). Into the district the Assyrians brought other people--from Babylon, from Cuthah, from Ava, from Hamath and from Sepharvaim (2Ki 17:24). Now it is not possible to transport a whole people. Some of the people of the northern kingdom were left. Almost inevitably they began to inter-marry with the incoming foreigners; and thereby they committed what to the Jew was an unforgivable crime. They lost their racial purity. In a strict Jewish household even to this day if a son or a daughter marries a Gentile, his or her funeral service is carried out. Such a person is dead in the eyes of orthodox Judaism. So then the great majority of the inhabitants of Samaria were carried away to Media. They never came back but were assimilated into the country into which they were taken. They are the lost ten tribes. Those who remained in the country inter-married with the incoming strangers and lost their right to be called Jews at all (Barclay, Electronic Edition).

## CHAPTER TEN

### “COME DOWN ERE MY CHILD DIE”

*The Second Sign: Healing of the Nobleman’s Son in Galilee,  
4:43-54*

As we trace the steps of Jesus following the conversation with and conversion of the Samaritan woman, we are impressed with what appears to be a purposeful and planned journey. The Lord bypasses Nazareth, His home town, and goes directly to Galilee and the city of Cana, where He had performed His first miracle. The Galileans were receptive to the Lord, having “seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem” (vs. 45). News travels fast, and before the Lord had arrived in Galilee the inhabitants were well aware of the great things Jesus had done in Judah. As this particular section unfolds we are impressed with the willingness of the Lord to associate with men and women from all walks of life. In Samaria, He demonstrated divine compassion for a woman who, for all practical purposes, was among the lowest of humanity morally speaking. Here the Lord will come face to face with a “nobleman” from Capernaum. This man of social prominence - perhaps even royalty - had a son who was sick, even at the point of death. Parents will go to great lengths for a sick child, and this nobleman was no exception. Little did this nobleman realize that his encounter with Jesus would change his life as well as that of his son. This man’s request was not academic; it was a personal appeal for help in a moment of desperation. Instructed to “Go thy way” with the promise “thy son liveth” (vs. 50), the man immediately believed and acted upon the promise of the Lord. John closes this episode with the affirmation that not only did this man believe, but also his “whole house.” Consider further the man and his plea.

~~ 4:43 ~~

*“And after the two days he went forth from thence into Galilee”*

Following “the two days” at Sychar (vs. 40) the Lord continued His journey toward Galilee, placing more distance between Himself and the hostile environment in Jerusalem.

~~ 4:44 ~~

*“For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honor in his own country”*

This verse provides us with a little side note from the author that explains why the Lord went to Cana rather than Nazareth. There are two ways in which this might be taken. First, John may have been telling us that Jesus went to Galilee but not to Nazareth because He “testified that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.” Another suggested meaning is that Jesus went to Galilee, ‘although’ He had said that a prophet had no honor in his own country; yet, because He foreknew that many of the Galileans would believe on Him, He thus made his journey anyway. If we take “His own country” to mean Nazareth, the place of His early life, then verse 43 tells us why Jesus went to Cana rather than Nazareth. But why is it that “a prophet hath no honor in his own country”? It was there that He would have had contact with others while growing up, and with whom He would be considered rather common, and familiar. It is stated by John, therefore, that when Jesus departed from Samaria, He traveled to Galilee, but He did not go into that place where He had been raised. The reason for this was “that a prophet hath no honor in his own country.”

~~ 4:45 ~~

*“So when he came into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did in Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast”*

*“the Galilaeans received him”* - Our English word “received” translates a word that means “to receive favorably” (Thayer). The reason behind their receptive heart was that they had “seen all the things he did in Jerusalem at the feast.” No doubt those who had attended the feast and witnessed the mighty works of Jesus were anxious to return home and tell others about what they had seen and heard. While the Lord lingered in Sychar for two days, at least some of the Galilaeans attending the feast in Jerusalem made haste to spread the news of the Lord’s mighty works.

*“At the feast”* - This feast was the Passover referred to in chapter two.

~~ 4:46 ~~

*“He came therefore again unto Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum”*

Jesus went directly from Samaria to Cana, passing by Nazareth where no doubt there would have been some antagonism toward Him (cf. Luke 4:14-30). Tenney had this note: “The key to the healing of the nobleman’s son is given in the word ‘again’ in verse 46. The report of the first miracle in Cana, coupled with the rumors that had come back from Jerusalem, had established the reputation of Jesus as a healer and wonder worker” (Tenney, 97). By returning to Cana the Lord could thus build upon the faith already produced by the previous miracle of turning water to wine.

*“a certain nobleman”* - The Greek word is *‘basileukos’* and implies that this man was connected in some way with royalty. Josephus, however, uses the word to distinguish the soldiers, or courtiers, or officers of the kings, but never to designate the royal family. Some have conjectured that the nobleman may have been a courtier of Herod the Tetrarch, but such is mere speculation.

~~ 4:47 ~~

*“When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death”*

The Lord’s encounter with this nobleman reveals the following about this man: (1) he possessed faith; (2) his faith would grow from that “as a grain of mustard seed” to full faith in Christ; (3) his faith moved him to seek the aid of Jesus; (4) he took it upon himself to come to Jesus personally rather than send someone else; (5) while he may have believed that Jesus could heal his son, he had no idea that Jesus could do so from a distance; (5) he thought it would be too late once the child had died. His faith may have been imperfect, but it would grow into a great faith.

*“he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee”* - Unable to make the journey to Jerusalem for some reason, this nobleman took advantage of the Lord’s nearness to beseech Jesus that He might heal his son.

*“he went to him”* - The nobleman did not send another. He took it upon himself to go to Jesus for help. Woods had this note: “It is noteworthy that in the Greek text it is said that the nobleman ‘went away unto’ the Lord - a suggestion that he had been constantly at the side of his dying son and left only to obtain help for him” (Woods, 92).

*“besought him that he would come down and heal his son for he was at the point of death”* - The sudden turn for the worse on the part of his son drove him to look for aid wherever he might find it.

~~ 4:48 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will in no wise believe”*

*“Except ye see signs”* - Jesus knew the heart of the nobleman, and saw that this man would only believe if he saw some sign. I do not see in the Lord’s words a rebuke, but a desire to move this nobleman to a greater faith - a faith that would believe even in the absence of a miraculous sign. Jesus was seeking to move this man from faith in a miracle worker to faith in Jesus as Lord.

~~ 4:49 ~~

*“The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die”*

*“Sir, come down ere my child die”* - The nobleman never gave thought to the possibility that the Lord could heal his son from a great distance. So he pled with the Great Physician that He might immediately make the journey, and heal his son. “The language is heartfelt and emphatic...The ability of Jesus to perform supernatural deeds was no academic question to the nobleman; it meant the difference between life and death for his son. He demanded action, not inquiry into the genuineness of his motives” (Tenney, 98).

~~ 4:50 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. The man believed the word that Jesus spake unto him, and he went his way”*

“Go thy way” - Jesus would test the man’s faith! Would this nobleman believe that Jesus could heal his son from a distance, without so much as a visit from the Great Physician? Therein was the test.

He gave him no sign, but He created an opportunity for the exercise of a faith which lacked a sign. Christ said in effect: I will not give you a sign; I will give you a word. You will get your sign after your faith operates (Morgan, Electronic Notes).

Woods quotes Alford, “The bringing out and strengthening of the man’s faith by these words was almost as great a spiritual miracle as the material one which they indicated” (Woods, 92).

*“The man believed...and he went”* - Faith coupled with action appropriated the divine blessings. “Both effects instantaneously followed: the man believed the word, and the cure shooting quicker than lightning from Cana to Capernaum, was felt by the dying youth. In token of faith, the father takes his leave of Christ - in the circumstances this evidenced full faith. The servants hasten to convey the joyful tidings to the anxious parent, whose faith now only wants one confirmation” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, ESword Module).

The nobleman’s immediate reaction to the words of Jesus speaks volumes about the man’s faith. Tenney has this interesting observation:

The answer...put the man in a dilemma. If he took Jesus at His word, he did so with no assurance beyond that word that Jesus would do anything for him. If he refused to take Jesus at His word, he would insult the very man upon whom all his hopes depended, and so forfeit whatever benefits He might confer. With short and simple command Jesus put the nobleman in the position where

he would be compelled to show real faith if he had any to show. The laconic simplicity of this account gives no inkling of the conflict that must have taken place in the nobleman's mind at that moment (Tenney, 98).

The nobleman passed the test, "and went his way." No doubt anxious to return home and see his son.

~~ 4:51 ~~

*"And as he was now going down, his servants met him, saying, that his son lived"*

When the servant witnessed the healing of the nobleman's son, he was anxious to report the news to the father, and began the journey to meet him. There must have been a considerable distance that the nobleman had traveled since by the time the servant met his master, who had started the journey home, almost a full day had passed, it having been "yesterday at the seventh hour" since he had been healed.

*"his son lived"* - That is exactly what Jesus told the man, "Thy son liveth."

~~ 4:52 ~~

*"So he inquired of them the hour when he began to amend. They said therefore unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him"*

Anxious to know whether the boy's healing was the result of happenstance, or the healing hand of Jesus, the nobleman inquired as to when the boy began to amend. It is also interesting to note that the nobleman simply wanted to know when the healing "began." He may have had no idea that Jesus would heal the boy completely and fully. The instantaneous nature of the healing may have contributed to the increased faith of this nobleman and his house.

*"at the seventh hour the fever left him"* - The fever did not "begin to leave him," as if some slow healing process began, but rather the boy was healed instantly. The fever "left him" - period!

~~ 4:53 ~~

*“So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.”*

*“and himself believed”* - Notice the growth of the nobleman’s faith. His “mustard seed” faith blossomed into a full faith once he learned of the complete and instantaneous nature of the child’s healing. It is interesting to note that the nobleman first believed in the power of Jesus, then the efficacy of His word, and finally that he simply “believed,” implying that he believed on the Lord.

*“and his whole house”* - It is a natural curiosity that leads me to wonder the identity of this man. We know that he was an officer of Herod, and we know that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, was one who ministered to Jesus in his Galilean ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Acts 13:1 names Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. Is it possible that this nobleman may have been that very Manaen? If so, then belief in Jesus was making inroads into the upper ranks of society.

~~ 4:54 ~~

*“This is again the second sign that Jesus did, having come out of Judaea into Galilee”*

John is careful to provide us with enough details both historically and geographically to assist us in tracing the course of events. It is interesting that both signs performed in Cana produced favorable results while much of our Lord’s labor in Judaea was fruitless.

### **LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS**

1. Christ is the Great Physician, healing our spiritual maladies as He did the physical ones while on the earth. The physical cures served as a type of the spiritual cure our Lord provides through His blood.
2. “How often those who have the best spiritual opportunities are slowest to appreciate them. R.G. Ingersoll was the son of a

preacher. We have known many other preachers' sons who were wicked blasphemers. The people of Nazareth rejected Christ. He came to his own and his own received him not" (Johnson, 83).

3. "The author presented three main interviews, three types of faith. The first was the cautious and judicial venture of the learned inquirer, Nicodemus, who came to Christ because of his desire to fit him into some framework. The second type of faith was a wistful yearning brought to light only by Jesus' persistent probing of the Samaritan woman's heart. The third type of faith was the result of desperation, which compelled the nobleman to exercise faith as the lesser difficulty of a hard choice" (Tenney, 99).

4. In the case of the nobleman we have the following:

- I. Faith Allured;
- II. Faith Procured;
- III. Faith Assured;
- IV. Faith Matured;

5. The rich have afflictions as well as the poor.

6. Sickness and death come to the young as well as the old.

7. What benefits affliction can confer on the soul.

8. Christ's word is as good as Christ's presence.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# “TAKE UP THY BED AND WALK”

*The Third Sign: Healing the Paralytic, 5:1-18*

There are three parts to this section: (1) The *Circumstance*, (2) the *Cure*, and (3) the *Confrontation*. A year has passed since the first miracle at Cana, and we find Jesus once again in Jerusalem at “a feast of the Jews.” During those twelve months the Jewish authorities sought occasion to discredit the Lord, or to bring against Him some accusation so as to impede the Lord’s growing popularity. They would soon learn, however, that such an attempt not only would fail, but their encounters with the Lord would only serve to magnify Jesus even more in the eyes of the public. The first movement in this section sets the background for what follows. There was a *certain man* to whom John draws our attention. For thirty-eight years this man had been captive to his physical infirmity. Unable to overcome the crowds who would step in before him, and with no assistance from others, he had reached the point of giving up and resigning himself to his misery. “Wouldest thou be made whole?” the Lord asked. Now his hope was rekindled, and his long sought after dream was close to becoming a reality. The second movement in this episode is the *Cure*. But the cure was not in the water, but in the *word*. “Arise, take up thy bed, and walk” (5:8) needed only be spoken one time! “And straightway the man was made whole.” Then John tells us, “Now it was the Sabbath on that day.” Because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, the *Confrontation* with the Jewish authorities was not far off. The first part of the confrontation was with the man who was healed. This was soon followed with a personal confrontation with the Lord. Once again Jesus is magnified with words of wisdom they could not rebuke. And from that day forward they sought the more to kill Him because (1) He healed on the Sabbath, and (2) He made Himself equal with God. We turn our attention to the healing of this paralytic.

In these verses we have (1) The Case, 5:1-4; (2) The Cure, 5:5-9; (3) Conversation between the Jews and the healed man, 5:10-13; (4) Conversation between Jesus and the healed man, 5:14; and (5) Confrontation between Jesus and the Jews, 5:15-18. This

entire episode magnifies the Lord by showing His compassion upon this lame man. But it also magnifies our Lord when it demonstrates the divine wisdom with which He confronted His enemies.

*The Case*

5:1-4

~~ 5:1-2 ~~

*“After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches”*

*“After these things”* - John has been meticulous in providing a detailed account of the chronology of events. But here he is not as specific, so we do not know how much time elapsed between the close of chapter four and the events recorded here. While some commentators are convinced that John deviates from the chronological order to pursue more of a topical discussion of the miracles and events, the overall flow of the book suggests that John did nothing of the sort. The gospel of John is perhaps the most chronological account of the four biographies. Robertson noted:

Some scholars needlessly put chapter 5 after chapter 6 because in chapter 6 Jesus is in Galilee as at the end of chapter 4. But surely it is not incongruous to think of Jesus making a visit to Jerusalem before the events in chapter 6 which undoubtedly come within a year of the end (Robertson, ESword Module).

*“a feast of the Jews”* - One reason for concluding that John did not deviate from his chronological approach is his mention of at least three Passovers, and more likely four, if the “feast” mentioned here is a Passover. The other gospel accounts provide scarce information regarding the Passovers in the Lord’s public ministry. With the exception of the last Passover just prior to the Lord’s death, none of the other writers give mention of that Jewish holy day. In John’s record the first Passover is mentioned in 2:13, the third in 6:4, and the fourth in 13:1. If the feast mentioned here is the Passover, and I happen to think it is,

then it is the second during our Lord's public ministry. It is true he does not call it by the name of the Passover here, but only a feast in general.

Some have suggested that this was the feast of Purim. But it is more likely that this feast was the Passover. It is curious that John, who was so particular about giving the names of the feasts, would leave it out here. Our reasons for concluding that it is, indeed, the Passover are as follows: (1) The events described in chapter four occurred when there "were yet four months, and then cometh the harvest" (4:35). The time frame suggests, therefore, that this feast was the Passover. (2) If this feast was not the Passover, then there were only two such feasts in the life of Jesus, thus making His earthly ministry only a little more than two years. But if this was the Passover, then Jesus' ministry would be a little more than three years. Brother Woods concluded that there were four Passover feasts during the earthly ministry of Jesus. The first when He cleansed the Temple in John 2; the second being this feast; the third associated with the miracle of John 6:1-4; and the Passover when the Lord was in the tomb.

*"Bethesda"* - The meaning in Greek is, "house of kindness." The name is most appropriate in view of what was about to occur. There is also a hint here regarding the dating of John. The words "is in Jerusalem" translate a present tense verb, and suggests that the pool was in existence at the time John wrote this gospel. After the utter destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. it is unlikely that any such pool would have remained intact.

~~ 5:3-4 ~~

*"In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt,  
withered"*

A portion of verse 3 and all of verse 4 which appear in the KJV is omitted in American Standard Version of 1901 because of insufficient manuscript support. It was probably added to the margin following the close of the apostolic age so as to explain the healing believed by many to have occurred in these "magical" waters. It reads,

In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water, for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the waters stepped in was made whole, with whatsoever disease he was holden.

McGarvey commented: “The John 5:3, John 5:4, as given in the King James version, were probably added as a marginal explanatory gloss early in the second century, and from thence gradually became incorporated in the text. John’s failure to mention that the pool was thought to have medicinal qualities tempted transcribers to add a few marginal words in the nature of comments” (McGarvey, ESword Module).

*The Cure*

5:5-9

The miracle would be the catalyst for the confrontation between Jesus and the Jews that would soon follow.

~~ 5:5 ~~

*“And a certain man was there, who had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity”*

The mention of the age of this man is to impress upon our minds that this was a *real* man, known by those in the city, and thus viable to serve as one of the miracles that John chose to record. Or to put it another way - once John’s record had been written and distributed, if there had been any question as to the authenticity of the man and the miracle, all one had need do was talk to those who knew this man and had witnessed first-hand the miracle.

The importance of this miracle is seen in the consequences of the miracle as much as in the case itself. It is with this miracle that our Lord’s conflict with the Jewish authorities begins. Nevertheless, there is something of interest in this man whom Jesus chose to heal. As Tenney put it: “Thirty-eight years of sickness would indicate hopelessness from the physical standpoint; but there was a hint that the man was even more

hopeless psychologically. He had become resigned to his fate and had accepted the inevitable” (Tenney, 104). How many souls live under the shadow of disbelief, wandering in darkness, with no hope of ever finding a release from their burden? The number is incalculable.

~~ 5:6 ~~

*“When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wouldest thou be made whole?”*

*“Jesus saw him”* - It was not a casual glance, but a definite look at the man. Thayer tells us that the Greek here translated *“saw”* means “to perceive with the eyes; to turn the eyes, the mind, the attention to; to have an interview with” (Thayer, ESDS Module). The idea is that Jesus took interest in this man.

*“knew”* - The word translates from a Greek word which means instant or immediate perception; in a flash, before the mind of Jesus came to a full history of this unfortunate man (Woods, 96). The fact that Jesus *“knew”* instantaneously all there was to know about this man is indicative of the omniscience of the Lord.

*“wilt thou be made whole”* - The force of the words are, “Do you want to be made whole?” I have no doubt that Jesus KNEW the man wanted to be made whole, so the question was not asked to provide Jesus with information about the man’s desire. He asked the question to secure the man’s attention and to seek a demonstration of the man’s faith. Johnson points out: “In almost every miracle he requires attention and an act of the will on the part of the subject. So in healing of sin, the will of the sinner must be reached and act, in order that he may be saved. ‘Almost every miracle is a parable of redemption’ (Johnson, 86). Reynolds (Pulpit Commentary) had this interesting note:

The question implies a doubt. The man may have got so accustomed to his life of indolence and mendicancy as to regard deliverance from his apparent wretchedness, with all consequent responsibilities of work and energy and self-dependence, as a doubtful blessing. There are many who are not anxious for salvation, with all the demands it

makes upon the life, with its summons to self-sacrifice and the repression of self-indulgence. There are many religious impostors who prefer tearing open their spiritual wounds to the first passer-by, and hugging their grievance, to being made into robust men upon whom the burden of responsibility will immediately fall” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 5:7 ~~

*“The sick man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me”*

With regard to the genuineness of the words of verse 4, it might be noted that without that explanation provided by the scribe, the words of this man might not be understood. What “pool” was he talking about? What did he mean, “another steppeth down before me”?

*“when the water is troubled”* - The waters may have been therapeutic or medicinal. Hot springs, mineral waters, and warm baths have been known to relieve pain and suffering, and to aid in the healing process. The ignorance on the part of the multitudes of such therapeutic powers could easily have led them to believe that the waters were, indeed, miraculous, or that an angel in some way “stirred” the waters. A common belief in that day was that harmful waters were made that way by demons, and helpful or healing waters were the result of angelic intervention. Tenney points out that “the reply revealed that the man was placing the blame for his condition on what somebody else had not done for him. He was bound by his circumstances and could rise no higher than a futile complaint” (Tenney, 105).

*“no man...to put me”* – Literally, “Throw me into the pool.” The words express the hopelessness of the myriads of lost souls who have no one to teach them; to “put them into the pool,” so to speak, and to guide them to the waters of eternal life.

~~ 5:8 ~~

*“Jesus saith unto him, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk”*

The Lord expected the man to immediately act. Christ may have given the command, but the individual still had to act upon his faith. Had the man made some excuse, failed to arise, take up his bed and walk, the healing process would not have occurred, and he would have forfeited the blessing of healing. The man was told to “take up thy bed,” in order to show that he was a perfectly healed man. Woods points out that “the tense of the verb ‘take up’ and ‘walk’ is different, the first signifying an act completed, the second an action in progress” (Woods, 97).

To a man who had been crippled since birth, this must have seemed an astonishing command. Unable to do anything for himself, as indicated by his own words, “these crisp words were a challenge to an enfeebled will as well as to a paralyzed body” (Tenney, 105). It is also significant that the Lord did not use any means other than His spoken word. No touch; no physical contact; simply the spoken word.

~~ 5:9 ~~

*“And straightway the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day”*

Take note of the process in this healing. Christ addresses the man seeking a response or expression of desire to be healed. This is followed by the Lord’s command to take up the bed and walk - a test of faith in and of itself. The man acts on the command, and is then healed. As Johnson noted, “Christ is the healer, but he is healed by the obedience of faith” (Johnson, 86).

The “immediate” nature of the healing stands in stark contrast to the modern day “healings” which are anything but instantaneous.

*A Conversation  
(between the Jews and the healed man)*

5:10-13

~~ 5:10 ~~

*“So the Jews said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for thee to take up thy bed”*

John used the word “Jews” to refer to the religious leaders rather than the people. Their accusation that what Jesus had done was “not lawful” was based, not upon the Law of Moses, but their traditions. The edict which forbade work on the Sabbath is recorded in Exodus 31:13-17, Numbers 15:32-35, and Nehemiah 13:15. On the return from Babylonian captivity, Nehemiah prohibited the conducting of any commercial burdens on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees concluded that NOTHING was to be picked up on the Sabbath day. The prohibition which the Pharisees bound was based upon “their bald literalism and not on reasonable interpretation” (Woods, 98). We have many such Pharisaic interpreters in the Lord’s church today.

~~ 5:11-12 ~~

*“But he answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. They asked him, Who is the man that said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?”*

The lame man simply pointed out that the very one who had made him whole, had likewise commanded him to arise and walk. So it is today. The One Who makes us whole has told us to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:6-9). With every spiritual blessing comes an inherent responsibility.

“*Who is the man*” - The question betrays the bigotry of the officials. They do not ask, “Who healed thee,” but rather, “What man...said..take up thy bed and walk.” They would have preferred that he was lying on his bed, sick, than that he should carry the bed on the Sabbath. Notice also that the word “man” was used to avoid any implication that the one who performed the miracle was righteous in any sense of the word.

~~ 5:13 ~~

*“But he that was healed knew not who it was; for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in the place”*

Christ never worked His miracles for personal notoriety. Consequently, the man who had received the healing did not know the identity of Jesus. Immediately after the healing, Jesus mixed in with the multitude and “conveyed himself away.” Our English word “conveyed” translates a word (*ekneuo*) that

literally means “to bend to one side; to take one’s self away; to avoid a thing; to escape by swimming” (Thayer, ESword Module). Our Lord intentionally mixed in with the crowd so as to avoid immediate confrontation. He would later find the man and provide further instruction regarding the consequence and responsibility that went with the healing.

*Another Conversation*  
*(between Jesus and the healed man)*

5:14

~~ 5:14 ~~

*“Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him,  
Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing  
befall thee”*

The man probably went to the temple in deep appreciation for the blessing that he had received. So grateful was the man for his healing that he wanted to express his heartfelt thanks and gratitude in praise and worship.

This man puts all to shame by his action here. While ill he could not go to the temple for prayer; now he could, and he did. Too often those who plead illness as an excuse for not attending services are not faithful when their health improves (Woods, 99).

*“Jesus findeth him”* - It is implied that Jesus was seeking this man, and *“afterward ... findeth him in the temple.”*

*“sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee”* - The greater healing is that of the spiritual man. Failure to repent will bring a “worse thing” than physical impairment. Some have suggested that the man’s physical impairment had been the result of some past sin, but Reynolds suggests an alternative reason for these words: “From the words of Jesus one might as reasonably suppose that the man was treading [sic] at the time on dangerous and moral ground, making some kind of gain from his notoriety” (Pulpit Commentary, 209).

*Confrontation  
(between Jesus and the Jews)  
5:15-18*

~~ 5:15 ~~

*“The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole”*

We do not know the motive of this man, and any accusation that his intentions were evil are nothing more than conjecture. It is just as likely that the man wanted to share his new found knowledge with those who were supposed to be the spiritual leaders of Israel.

~~ 5:16 ~~

*“And for this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the sabbath”*

*“persecuted”* - The word is literally rendered “pursued Jesus.” They hunted Him in an attempt to destroy Him. The reason for this animosity toward the Lord? He “did these things on the Sabbath.”

At this point in the narrative John provides us with the indictment of the Jews. Jesus had done these things on the Sabbath, something that, at least in their opinion was a violation of the Law of Moses. Of course it was not a violation of the Law, but a violation of their traditions that surrounded the Law.

~~ 5:17 ~~

*“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh even until now, and I work”*

*“but Jesus answered them”* - From here through verse 38 Jesus provides no less than four “witnesses” as to the legality of His actions. We will take note of these in the next chapter of our study. The answer that Jesus gives here goes right to the root of the matter at hand. God’s “rest” is not what men might commonly call “rest.” The Father’s government, providence, and direction of nature have never been suspended. As the Father worked up until and including the present, even so our Lord.

Bruce addressed this important principle being set forth by our Lord:

Did God keep his own laws? In particular, did he keep the Sabbath law? But how could he, since plainly his providential care over his creation was unceasing?" (Bruce, 126-127)

Jesus was simply pointing out that there was to be no suspension of compassion and benevolence simply because it was a day of rest. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He can, therefore, modify it, change it, or even suspend it at His choosing. But our Lord set the example of what it meant to truly observe the Sabbath by going right on with His work of blessing men. It should be noted that Jesus was in no way admitting that the charge of the Jews was correct. He is showing that His action is justified on the grounds that He was indeed divine, as indicated in the next verse.

One more observation is in order. There are some even among our brethren, who have concluded that the 7th day of rest in Genesis 1 and 2 is "on going." Bruce explained the matter thus:

Jesus' reply presupposes a view of the matter which finds expression also in Heb. 4:3-10 (and also here and there in the writings of Philo of Alexandria) namely, that God's seventh-day rest (or sabbatismos), which began when creation's work was finished, has never come to an end; it is still in being" (Bruce, page 127).

We happen to believe there is a better explanation and application. It was not the law of the Sabbath that Jesus had broken, but the traditions of the Pharisees. In every instance where Jesus did good on the Sabbath it was specifically designed to teach His audience the true nature of the Sabbath rest. When God rested on the seventh day He did truly rest - but He did not cease to work for the good of His creation. So also, when our Lord "worked" on the Sabbath, He could imitate the Father by continuing to do good on the Sabbath while at the same time observing the Sabbath as God had intended it be observed.

*“my Father”* - Our Lord’s reference to the Father as “my Father” was offensive to the Jews. It suggested that He was putting Himself on a level with God. In the Sabbath assemblies the Jews would refer to God as “our Father,” but never “my Father.” Tenney points out that “in the Fourth Gospel Jesus said either ‘my Father,’ or ‘your Father,’ but never ‘our Father’” (Tenney, 106). Bruce is correct in concluding that “Jesus appeared to be claiming God as ‘his own Father’ in an exceptional, if not exclusive, sense” (Bruce, 127).

~~ 5:18 ~~

*“For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only brake the sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God”*

The “Jews” recognized the implications of Jesus’ actions. The inescapable affirmation from our Lord was that He was, indeed, “equal with God.” Had Jesus not been equal with the Father, He could have avoided much of the antagonism that was directed against Him by this religious class of Israelites by simply stating plainly and clearly that He was, in fact, not equal to the Father. This, of course, He never did.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### “THESE BEAR WITNESS OF ME”

*The Third Discourse: The Credentials of the Son, 5:19-47*

We might as easily entitle this chapter, “Bring forth your witnesses.” In this discourse our Lord takes the position of a masterful attorney and defends Himself against the charges of blasphemy and/or breaking the Sabbath. In the eyes of the Jews the Lord was worthy of stoning because He had made Himself equal with God. The Lord does not deny His equality with the Father; instead He methodically calls His witnesses to bear testimony to the truth of the matter. But this is more than a simple defense against the charges. This section also sets forth some of the most astonishing character traits of our Lord – character traits that would magnify the Lord in the minds and the hearts of those who would look at the evidence, consider the witnesses, and believe. Consider the claims that appear in this discourse; claims that *would* be blasphemous if Christ were *not* Who He claimed to be.

“Whatever the Son sees the Father doing; these same things the Son does” (5:19).

“As the Father raiseth the dead, so also the Son giveth life to whom he will” (5:21).

The Father giveth “judgment unto the Son” (5:22).

The Son is to “honored...even as the Father is honored” (5:23).

The words of Christ provide eternal life (5:24).

The Son can, and will, raise the dead (5:26-29).

The Son is greater than John the Baptist (5:34-36).

“The Father...sent me” (5:37).

“The Scriptures are they that bear witness of me” (5:39).

“I am come in my Father’s name” (5:43).

“Moses...wrote of me” (5:46).

Such claims made by any ordinary man would immediately brand him a mad man; unless those claims were true.

This third discourse is a masterpiece of logical reasoning. It is heaven’s answer to the Jews’ indictment that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath. Like a skilled lawyer, Jesus (1) sets forth His argument, and (2) presents His witnesses, and (3) turns the argument back against the Jews. In these verses we have the Lord’s *Declaration*, *Defense*, and *Denunciation*. Let’s take a closer look.

### **HIS DECLARATION**

#### **5:19-30**

Not only is Jesus the defendant, He is also the Attorney for the defense. In these verses the Lord presents His opening remarks to the jury. These verses are a record of His *Declaration*, containing a five-fold argument: (1) “I am doing what I see my Father do” (vss. 19-20); (2) “The Father has given me the power of life and death, both now and in eternity” (vs. 21, 25b); (3) “The Father has given me the authority to judge both now, and in the final judgment” (vs. 22; 24-29); (4) “I am to be honored as the Father is honored” (vs. 23); (5) “I am completely submissive to the will of the Father” (vs. 30).

Keep in mind the background. The Jews were enraged because Jesus broke the Sabbath (a false accusation since He only broke their *tradition* pertaining to the Sabbath). Their anger was enhanced because He made himself “equal with God” (5:18). Addressing their accusations, the Lord makes this five-fold declaration. Let’s look at each of these points a little closer

#### **First Point**

*Jesus declares, “I am doing what I see my Father do”*

5:19-20

~~ 5:19-20 ~~

*“Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel”*

*“Jesus therefore answered”* - Evidently this entire discourse is in response to their hypercriticism of what He had done on the Sabbath. But it is also a defense of His divine authority; something which the Jews had also denied.

*“The Son can do nothing of himself”* - Implied is the complete harmony between the Father and the Son. When Jesus affirmed that He could “do nothing of himself” He was speaking of His utter dependence upon the Father. The implications are astonishing. Rather than acting contrary to the Father’s will, Jesus was complying with the utmost of submission. That being true the only conclusion would be that it was not Jesus Who was disobedient, but the Jews who had made false accusations against Him.

*“for whatsoever he doeth these the Son also doeth in like manner”* - That is, “Whatsoever the Father doeth.” In healing the lame man Jesus is claiming to have done what He saw the Father doing. Seeing that it is the healing of the lame man on the Sabbath that is under consideration, our Lord was simply pointing out, “I saw the Father doing this work; I am simply doing the same thing I saw Him do.” No higher claim to equality can be made than this. If it is the case that the two (Father and Son) were acting on the same plane, with each doing all that the other does, or can do, then both are equal. Hence, Jesus is affirming His divine nature with every breath. But in addition, when Jesus said that He does what the Father does, He was telling them that the Father was His pattern. Our Lord’s assertions regarding the work He does, being a continuation and duplication of the Father’s work, again imply His equality with the Father. Bruce made an interesting observation on these verses:

C.H. Dodd discerned an ‘embedded parable’ in verses 19-20: Jesus draws an analogy from his own boyhood experience in the carpenter’s workshop, when he learned to imitate the things he saw Joseph doing, thus serving his apprenticeship against the day when he in turn would be the carpenter of Nazareth (Bruce, 128).

*“the Son can do nothing of himself”* - The complete loyalty of the Son to the Father is apparent in this statement. Phillips’ comments are interesting:

The Lord could have put it like this: “While I, as God, am never anything less than God, so I, as man, am never anything more than man.” He was here to make all that he was as a man available to all that the Father was as God, so that all that the Father was as God might be available to all that he was as a man. Independence was impossible. Perfect deity was enshrined in perfect humanity. This was something Jesus’ opponents never grasped (Phillips, 105).

*“the Father loveth”* - The word “loveth” is from the Greek word (*philei*) denoting warm, tender affection.

*“showeth him all things”* - As great as the Apostles were, there were many things they never knew about the plans and purposes of God. But such was not characteristic of the Son. The Father made all things known to Him. Bruce’s summation of this section is worth placing in our notes:

Jesus’ opponents had been scandalized because of a comparatively minor work that he had performed - the healing of a cripple. He justified this action - Sabbath day as it was - by an appeal to the example of God: if the Father worked on the Sabbath, so must the Son. And now that his defense has scandalized them more than his original action had done, he goes on to assure them that, because he is the Son, he has the authority to perform much greater works than that one, as he perceives the Father’s will and gives effect to it. If what he has done already has taken them by surprise, what they have yet to see will give them real cause for wonder” (Bruce, 129).

Not only did Jesus heal a man on the Sabbath, but He would do much more! He would raise the dead (as only God could do), and He would be given the power to Judge from He Whom is the Judge of all men! The first thing the Lord takes up, then, is the power to “give life,” even as the Father gives life.

### **Second Point**

Jesus declared that *“The Father has given me the power of life and death, both now and in eternity”*

5:21, 25b

The claim to the power over life and death is another prerequisite of the Father. Jesus’ claim to such power and authority places Him on an equal plane with the Father, thereby substantiating His equality with the Father. It is futile to argue whether or not Jesus’ power over life is in reference to that which He exercised while upon the earth, or that which He will exercise when He comes in judgment. It is just as vain to attempt to isolate His power over life and death and limit it to the physical or spiritual realm. Since Jesus has power over life and death, He had power to raise the dead while walking upon the earth and He will have the power to raise the dead at His second coming. By the same token, what He can do for the body He is capable of doing for the spiritual man as well.

~~ 5:21 ~~

*“For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will”*

*“as the Father...so the Son giveth life to whom he will”* - A long standing Jewish belief was that only God could raise the dead. Not only was this a demonstration of His power, but it was what Bruce calls “one of his chief prerogatives” (Bruce, 129). Bruce then quotes S. Singer’s reference to the ‘Amidah’ or ‘Eighteen Benedictions,’ which dates back to pre-Christian times:

Thou, O Lord, art mighty for ever; thou quickenest the dead; thou art mighty to save. Thou sustainest the living with loving-kindness, thou quickenest the dead in great mercy, thou supportest the fallen, healest the sick, loosest those who are bound, and keepest faith with those who

sleep in the dust. Who is like thee, O Lord of mighty acts? Who is comparable to thee, O King, who bringest to death and quickenest again, and causest salvation to spring forth? Yea, thou art faithful to quicken the dead. Blessed are thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead!” (Bruce, 129).

Now Jesus was claiming the same power and authority! Indeed, His claim did place Him in equality with the Father. While we have no doubt that the Lord is speaking of the physical resurrection here, we simply cannot ignore the spiritual implications in His words. Our death to sin, burial in the grave of water (Romans 6:3-8), and resurrection to walk in newness of life is the more important, and Jesus has no less authority to give life to all men spiritually. In fact, verses 24-25 are most definitely a reference to the spiritual resurrection that occurs when a man hears and obeys the Lord.

*“to whom he will”* - Sole discretion was given to the Son to raise whomsoever He chose. He exercised this prerogative while living by raising the son of a widow, a nobleman’s son, and Lazarus. So far as the spiritual resurrection of the obedient soul, Christ does not speak of “an arbitrary expression of will involving a system where some are chosen and others are passed by, as Calvinists claim; provision for the salvation of all has been made and the fact that not all men will be saved is not due to any arbitrary selection on the part of the Son but because of the unwillingness of some to accept the plan offered them” (Woods, 103).

It is important to note that Jesus’ claim to give life to the dead is much more than the power granted to the prophets of old, like Elijah and Elisha. As Bruce noted, “He asserts that authority has been given him to raise the dead not merely to a resumption of this mortal life but to the life of the age to come. It is not only that eternal life is granted to those who believe him; it is that he exercises the divine prerogative of imparting this life” (Bruce, 129).

### **Third Point**

*Jesus declared that “The Father has given me the authority to judge both now, and in the final judgment”*

5:22; 24-29

In addition to giving life to whom He will, Jesus declares that He has the authority to judge all men. This would have been a bold affirmation had the Lord not been able to prove the point. Prove it He did, not only by His works, and ultimately His resurrection, but by the very fact that He was crowned Lord and King (Acts 2:33-36; 1 Tim. 6:15).

~~ 5:22 ~~

*“For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son”*

Abraham recognized the divine right of God to judge all men: “That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25). Not only had Jesus claimed the power and right to raise the dead; now He is claiming the right to execute final judgment on all men. Such authority to judge was never given to any man.

*“he hath given all judgment unto the Son”* - It was the purpose of Jesus to prove that He was equal with the Father. Our blessed Lord had the same power as the Father (verse 17), He did the same things the Father did (verse 19), and now it is noted that the Son was given the power raise the dead and to judge all men. “The power to judge in determining the destinies of men requires such omniscience as only God possesses and since Jesus exercises this power he is God” (Woods, 103). Hence, the divine nature of our Lord is clearly implied. In verses 20-22 we are given three proofs of the exaltation of our Lord, all introduced by the word “for”: (1) for the Son is loved of the Father; (2) for the Son gives life to the dead; and (3) for the Son shall judge the world. The implication of the things Jesus was saying is set forth in the next verse.

~~ 5:24 ~~

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life”*

In verses 24-29 Jesus returns to His declaration of His authority to give life and to judge. I will deal with verse 23 momentarily.

*“He that heareth my word”* - One significant aspect of this verse is the simple truth that the Son imparts life through His word. The word “heareth” means more than just the reception of sound. It carries the idea of accepting those things presented, and embracing in application.

*“and believeth him that sent me”* - “Faith only” advocates latch on to this verse in an attempt to bolster the doctrine of salvation by faith alone without any further acts of obedience. In the mind of those who advocate salvation by faith only, baptism is a work, and is therefore excluded as a requirement for salvation from sin. The fallacy of such reasoning is due to the improper approach to the scriptures that excludes whatever is not specifically mentioned. For that matter, neither is repentance; nor confession. It is of interest that believing on Jesus is not mentioned either. It is said, (1) He that believeth on him that sent me, and (2) he that heareth my words. The belief is on “he that hath sent me.”

*“hath eternal life”* - It is often claimed that the one that hears, and believes, is in possession of eternal life NOW, and thus the impossibility of apostasy. But neither Jesus, nor the Bible anywhere suggests that we are in possession of *eternal* life NOW. The verb “hath” is translated from *‘echei’*. It is 3rd person, singular, present indicative. Danta and Mantey say that it “denotes an event which has not as yet occurred but which is regarded as so certain that in thought it may be contemplated as already coming to pass” (Danta and Mantey, *Manual of Greek*, 185). Every single source we consulted on this passage dealing with the Greek words and their tenses agreed with Danta and Mantey. Lenski, Woods, Winer all declare that the phrase used here may be said of one who, though not as yet in the actual enjoyment of the eternal life, yet in his certain hope already has it as a possession belonging to him. Guy Woods points out that the words “heareth” and “believeth” involve ‘linear’ action, that is, continuous action. The meaning is, therefore, “he that keeps on hearing my word and keeps on believing on him that sent me hath eternal life so certainly in thought that it may be

contemplated as already coming to pass, and it absolutely must ensure in virtue of the unalterable law of the immutability of God's promises" (Woods, 106).

God granted the Son authority to judge all men. There are two phases of this judgment; one obtaining in this life, the other on the judgment day. The first is described with the words, "the hour cometh and now is," the second with the words, "the hour cometh." Let's consider both of these.

~~ 5:25 ~~

*"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live"*

*"the hour cometh and now is"* - When taken with verse 24 it is abundantly clear that our Lord is speaking about His authority to pass judgment even while He walked upon the earth. His ability to forgive men of their sins (Luke 5:20; Luke 23:43) demonstrates the divine right to judge men. It is the spiritual judgment that is contemplated here.

*"the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God"* - The reference is to those spiritually dead who would "hear" the voice of Jesus, and thus pass from death to life. Those that "hear" are those who make application of the teachings of Jesus to their life.

~~ 5:26 ~~

*"For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself"*

*"the Father hath life in himself"* - God is the very essence of life. He is the source and possessor of all life. He is not dependent upon any outside source for life.

*"even so gave he the Son also to have life in himself"* - Does this mean that prior to that precise moment Jesus DID NOT have life in himself? I do not think so. The context is speaking of the authority of Jesus to GIVE life unto those that hear him. That power to give life to those who hear is IN JESUS HIMSELF. It is not dependent upon any other. As mentioned earlier, our Lord

demonstrated the authority to “give life” when He forgave men of their sins.

~~ 5:27 ~~

*“and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man”*

*“because he is a son of man”* - We must remember that Jesus is both divine, and human. On the human side, he is the son of man. This qualifies him to do the work assigned by the Father - that is to judge. He knows the trials of man, and can sympathize with us to the fullest.

~~ 5:28-29 ~~

*“Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment”*

For one to “*marvel*” is to experience surprise. Strong defines the Greek (*thaumazo*) as meaning to “wonder or admire” (ESword Module). With the negative attached, the admonition from the Lord is, “Don’t be amazed at this doctrine of the resurrection.”

*“the hour cometh”* - When that particular moment in time arrives, here defined as “the hour,” *“all that are in the tombs”* shall hear the voice of Jesus. Notice especially that the “hour” is singular, and those who shall “hear his voice” is inclusive of both those who have “done good” and those that “done evil.” And what shall occur when they hear his voice?

We note that all men shall hear the voice of Jesus. When they hear that voice, they (all men) *“shall come forth”* from the grave. They shall all, at one and the same time, be raised from the graves. We note also that there are two classes of men: “they that have done good,” and “they that have done evil.” All men fall into one of these two classes. We are either doers of good, or evil. Those that have done “good” shall come forth “unto the resurrection of life,” and those that have done “evil” shall come forth “unto the resurrection of judgment.” The resurrection of life is eternal life with all of its rewards and blessings. The

resurrection unto judgment is eternal condemnation. Finally, we notice that our eternal destiny is inseparably connected to those things that we have done in this life. Notice also 2 Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”

#### **Fourth Point**

*Jesus declared, “I am to be honored as the Father is honored”*

5:23

~~ 5:23 ~~

*“that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father that sent him.”*

For this point we back up to verse 23. The honor of the Son to the degree that one honors the Father is set forth in a number of New Testament passages. For example, when the inspired apostles speak of the exaltation of Christ, that He has “received the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9-11), they are using language “that Christ, by divine decree, receives honours which belong to the God of Israel alone” (Bruce, 130). Similar language was used in the Old Testament in reference to the honor which belonged to the God of Israel: “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear” (Isa 45:22-23).

The only way that any man can “honor the Son, even as they honor the Father,” is to recognize the divine nature of our Lord and pay the proper homage due Him. So completely are the Father and the Son one that no one can ignore Jesus and claim to honor the Father.

### **Fifth Point**

*Jesus declares “I am completely submissive to the will of the Father”*

5:30

~~ 5:30 ~~

*“I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me”*

By claiming obedience to the Father with regard to the things of which the Jews accused Jesus, Our Lord was saying in effect, “If you are going to condemn me for what I have done, then you, by implication, are condemning the Father, for I am fully compliant to His will.” Jesus plainly states (1) that He cannot do anything in and of Himself. He was not speaking of the possibility but rather the authority by which He did certain things; (2) that His judgment is limited to the things which He hears (implied from the Father); (3) that His judgment is righteous, and by implication, that the Father’s judgment is righteous, since He judges only what He hears; (4) that He does not seek His own will, but the will of “him that sent me” (that being the Father).

Having thus set forth the opening remarks, Jesus would now turn His attention to the witnesses in order to substantiate these claims.

### **THE DEFENSE**

**31-36**

The opening remarks have been given. The time has come to call the witnesses, of which there are three: (1) The Father, vss. 31-34; (2) John - though only a man, and only temporarily, vs. 35; and (3) The works of Christ Himself, vs. 36.

#### **Witness #1 - the Father**

5:31-34

There are three distinct reasons why the Father serves as a reliable witness: His witness is true, His witness is divine rather than human, and His witness is greater than that of John.

~~ 5:31 ~~

*“If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.”*

The law required two witnesses to establish a truth (Deut 19:15). Jesus was suggesting that He was not the only witness as to His deity and mission. He was saying, “If I am the only one to bear witness regarding myself, then what I am saying is not true.” It is not that He would be guilty of telling a lie, but rather that the law required at least two witness to substantiate a charge. If only one witness could be found, then his witness was not to be regarded as truth for purposes of conviction. The Lord’s first witness was Himself. Each of the witnesses that now follow would simply add credibility to His claims.

In calling the Father as His next witness Jesus was affirming His respect for the Law rather than disregard for its legislation. He would, then, produce other “witness” to His claims. Our Lord’s first witness was Himself. An apparent conflict between this and verse 31 is explained by Tenney: “The former was a concession to the legal rule that a man’s testimony about himself is inadmissible as evidence in court, since it might be assumed that his judgment would be prejudiced. The latter was an avowal of personal competency to speak concerning Himself since He knew more about Himself than anybody else did” (Tenney, 108).

~~ 5:32-34 ~~

*“It is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye have sent unto John, and he hath borne witness unto the truth. But the witness which I receive is not from man: howbeit I say these things, that ye may be saved”*

*“It is another that beareth witness of me”* – Had Jesus sought to sustain His claim on His testimony alone, His enemies would have rejected the evidence on the grounds that He was biased. Thus we can see the importance of calling the Father as one of His witnesses. Since the Father cannot lie (Titus 1:2), the testimony which He bore to the deity of Christ is true. The view of some that the ‘another’ of verse 32 is John the Baptist does not fit the tenses of the verbs. The Father “witnesseth” (present

tense), but John “hath borne witness” (past tense). If it is asked when the Father bore witness to Jesus as the Son of God one need look no further than the heavenly words spoken at our Lord’s baptism (Luke 3:22; Mark 1:10; Matt. 3:19).

**Witness #2, John**

5:35

~~ 5:35 ~~

*“He was the lamp that burneth and shineth; and ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light”*

*“he was the lamp that burneth and shineth”* – What an amazing tribute to John the Baptist. Like “the lamp that burneth and shineth,” John bore witness to the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The function of a lamp is to provide guidance to those dependent on its light. The more the lamp burns, the more the oil is consumed, until eventually the lamp no longer shines. These Jews may have been “willing to rejoice for a season in his light,” but when the time came to shift their allegiance to Christ they failed to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Before the lamp was extinguished, however, John the Baptist bore clear testimony to the magnificence of Jesus.

**Witness #3, The Works of Christ**

5:36

~~ 5:36 ~~

*“But the witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me”*

*“the works”* as has reference to the miracles which Jesus performed. The wide variety of miracles performed by Jesus were designed to show His power over a vast area of life, both physical and spiritual, “selected to portray all aspects of the divine power of Jesus, and to establish His claims as the Son of God” (Tenney, 108).

## DENUNCIATION

37-47

Like a masterful attorney, our Lord not only defends His actions, He turns the tables on His enemies. Even as He was bringing His defense to a close our Lord sought to point out their sin. It was not He Who was in sin, but those who had brought the accusations. The Lord would set forth at least nine indictments against these unbelieving Jews:

- (1) They would not hear (vs. 37)
- (2) They would not believe (vs. 38)
- (3) They would not apply (vs. 39-40)
- (4) They would not honor (vs. 41)
- (5) They would not love God (vs. 42)
- (6) They would not receive the Lord (vs. 43)
- (7) They received the glory of men over God (vs. 44)
- (8) They would not believe Moses (vs. 45-46)
- (9) They would not believe their own law (vs. 47)

Take a closer look at each of these

***They would not hear***

5:37

~~ 5:37 ~~

*“And the Father that sent me, he hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his form”*

The list of witnesses gives way to the Lord’s denunciation. The transition is smooth. This verse reaches back to remind us of the primary witness - the Father - while turning our attention to the rebuke of those Jews who refused to see the significance of the miracles Jesus had performed. This history of Israel is a demonstration of their refusal to hear the prophets of old. As their forefathers, so also these Jews refused to hear the voice of God. Commentators are divided as to whether Jesus was speaking of the Old Testament scriptures or the audible voice from heaven spoken at the time of our Lord’s baptism. It really makes no difference. Ancient Israel had ignored the testimony of the Father through the voice of the prophets, and their

descendants refused to hear the testimony of the Father through Jesus His Son. McGarvey Picked up on this:

The testimony of the Father was given in three forms: 1. By direct or audible voice and the visible sending of the Spirit--as at Jesus' baptism. 2. By revelations, through the medium of prophets and angels gathered and preserved in the Old Testament Scriptures. 3. Through the Son and his works. Jesus here asserts that all testimony of the first kind had failed to reach the Jewish rulers; that the testimony of the second kind has been utterly lost upon them, for they failed to see its accordance with the testimony of the third kind which he was even then exhibiting to them, neither had it taught them to expect a personal Saviour (McGarvey, ESword Module).

Our English word "heard" translates a word that could refer to either the audible sound, or "perceive the sense of what is said" (Thayer). The history of Israel demonstrates the very point the Lord was making. With the exception of small pockets of faithful service on the part of the remnant, Israel's long history demonstrates their unwillingness to listen to the commandments of God. Robertson points out that "heard" and "seen" are both perfect active indicatives and describe "a permanent state of failure to hear and see God" (Robertson, ESword Module). The tragedy is that Israel *chose* not to see and hear. The ancient Gentile world is likewise guilty. Paul described a people who "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever" (Romans 1:25). In our passage now under consideration it is evident that the Lord's denunciation was scathing in its nature and sharp in its implications. Sad are those who refuse to hear the word of God when given the opportunity. Closed minds are a major factor in the growing disinterest in spiritual matters. George Bernard Shaw is credited with saying, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." A close minded person is one who decides ahead of time what he is going to hear and what he is not going to hear. Sadly, Israel would not hear.

These religious rulers of the Jews, so smug and complacent in their rites and rituals, feasts and fasts, sacrifices and Sabbaths, traditions and teachings, so distorted and disbelieved the Bible that they were strangers to the truth of God: the truth embodied in Christ. God's word did not abide in them (Phillips, 113-114).

*They would not believe*

5:38

~~ 5:38 ~~

*“And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not”*

The very reason God's word was not “abiding” in them is because they did not believe that word. Jesus had given them the word of God, but they rejected both Christ and God's word. They did not allow the word of God to take root and produce the kind of faith essential to salvation. The indictment was especially powerful because the evidence supporting the claims of Christ was simply overwhelming. In the face of an obvious healing recorded in the first part of John 5, these Jews chose to reject the evidence and accuse the Lord of breaking the Sabbath.

Unbelief was a major factor in the negative report by the ten spies. “And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19).

The Psalmist Asaph acknowledged, “Surely God is good to Israel, even to such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped” (Psalms 73:1-2). There is an ever present danger that we might drift from God (Heb. 2:1-4), and fall victim to a “heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). The highway to eternity is littered with lost souls who once walked in the narrow way, but have long since abandoned their faith. Be it for whatever reason, spiritual treasures have been sold out for the pleasures of sin for a season. False teaching, unholy living, immorality, or materialism - it makes no difference what might be the cause, the end result is the same as that of Demas who “loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). It

should be emphasized that the slippery place itself is only the danger. How you respond will determine the result. Will you, like Demas, forsake God and His Son? Or will you, like Asaph, be lifted up by God and restored to your first love? I have heard that a cork placed on the top of the water will float. If pressed down ten, fifty, or even a hundred feet, it will rise again. But once a cork is submerged below two hundred feet, it cannot rise again because the pressure of the water on the top counteracts its buoyancy. There is such a point of no return for the soul that has slipped into the mire of sin. Though rescue may have been possible early in his fall, he will eventually reach a point in his downward plunge into sin that recovery is no longer possible. Careful consideration should be given to the warnings in God's word that speak of such a hopeless spiritual condition (Heb. 6:1-6, 2 Pet. 2:12-14, 17). It is not that God CANNOT save, but that man WILL NOT repent. Like the cork that has sunk to unrecoverable depths, so is the soul that has gone so far away from God in unbelief that he will not repent. To those precious souls who once travelled the road with us, we beg and plead that you come home before it is too late.

*They would not apply*

5:39-40

~~ 5:39-40 ~~

*“Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of me; and ye will not come to me, that ye may have life.”*

The word “search” implies painstaking, exhaustive, and careful examination. It was applied to miners, who search for precious metals - who look anxiously for the “bed” of the ore with an intensity or anxiety proportionate to “their sense” of the value of the metal. It is applied by Homer to a lioness robbed of her whelps, and who “searches” the plain to “trace out” the footsteps of the man who has robbed her. It is also applied by him to dogs tracing their game by searching them out by the scent of the foot (Barnes, ESword Module).

“*the scriptures*” – This refers to the Old Testament books of Law, History, Poetry, and Prophecy, for this is all they had. These

books predicted the Lord's coming, His death, resurrection, and even the mighty deeds He would perform while upon the earth. Woods noted:

It should be observed that these people were diligent students of the word but they allowed their prejudices to blind them to the truth. Mere familiarity with the word does not of itself assure genuine belief in it. We ought to study the word to learn of the way of salvation as did Timothy and not to sustain a human tradition as did these Pharisees (Woods, 112).

*“you will not come to me”* – Note several things of importance in this short phrase: (1) They had the knowledge of God's will; (2) they refused to apply that knowledge; (3) it was a matter of choice, not some pre-determined course set by God.

The Old Testament Scriptures foretold the coming of the Christ by supplying essential details that would identify the Messiah when He did come. Barnes paraphrased the Lord's argument here:

Though the Old Testament bears evidence that I am the Messiah; though you professedly search it to learn the way to life, and though my works prove it, yet you will not come to me to obtain life (Barnes, ESword Module).

It boiled down to an unwillingness to apply what they knew to what they were witnessing. “It has often been said that men perish because of lack of knowledge and this is very true; it is also true that others perish because of the refusal to use properly the knowledge they already have” (Woods, 112).

*They would not honor*

5:41

~~ 5:41 ~~

*“I receive not glory from men.*

One of the problems with these disbelieving Jews was that they had preconceived ideas about the coming Messiah. When Jesus

was not what they expected they refused to honor Him. In so doing, they also failed to honor God. Their idea of the Father's glory was so profoundly different from the reality, that they did not recognize it when it was offered to them. Rather than *magnify* the Lord, they *maligned* Him. Of course the root cause of their dishonor and disrespect was a heart void of love, something addressed in the next verse.

*They would not love God*

5:42

~~ 5:42 ~~

*“But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in yourselves.”*

They did not honor the Son because they had not the love of God in them. Had there been any love for God they would have had compassion on this man who had been a captive to his physical infirmity for some thirty-eight years. They would have demonstrated their love for God by magnifying the Lord in the face of the wonderful miracle that Jesus had performed. Instead, they criticized the Lord for healing on the Sabbath and because He violated one of their sacred traditions.

*They would not receive the Lord*

5:43

~~ 5:43 ~~

*“I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”*

*“if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive”* - They would accept the *false* Christs, but they would not come to Jesus. It is important to note that during the time of Christ, and for more than a century following His death, there were those who made the claim to be the Messiah. There were at least 64 pretenders who had been accepted by the Jews at one time or another.

*They received the glory of men over God*

5:44

~~ 5:44 ~~

*“How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?”*

The Greeks gloried in obtaining a good opinion from their fellow citizens or fellow countrymen. Men have not changed a lot in 2,000 years, and peer pressure is still a driving force in the behavior of the masses. The highest glory of man is not self-aggrandizement; rather it is approval in the sight of God. “This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecc. 12:13). The highest glory man can attain to is that of glorifying his Creator. Those who deliberately ignore this fundamental truth and substitute for it the glory of the ignorant plaudits and unreal approval, and the unhesitating homage of the clique to which they belong, are alienated from the Father. When men honor men above the Father, giving to them titles which belong only to God, they demonstrate that their mind is befogged and their moral judgment clouded.

As for these Jews, they desired and sought after the praise that comes from men rather than the Father, and in so doing they honored men above God. Our Lord’s denunciation is quite revealing. They were willing to receive the false prophet, the pseudo-Christ, for no other reason than their desire for self-glory.

*“How can ye believe?”* The question is rhetorical; they cannot believe when their affections are focused on themselves and not the Father.

*They would not believe Moses*

5:45-46

~~ 5:45-46 ~~

*“Think not that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me.”*

*“there is one that accuseth you, even Moses”* – It was not necessary for Christ to accuse them for they had already done

this by their rejection of the Law of Moses. The verb “*accuseth*” is present, with action in present time. The Jews were, thus, continually under the condemnation of Moses. Romans chapter two is an excellent commentary on this very verse. When Israel condemned the Gentiles, at the same time they condemned themselves, for “wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things” (Rom. 2:1).

*They would not believe their own law*

5:47

~~ 5:47 ~~

*“But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”*

Rejection of the words of Moses simply laid the background for the rejection of Christ. Once a person refuses to hear the word of God, his heart becomes increasingly hardened. If a person will not heed the inspired, written word, he would not listen to God even if He should appear Himself.

## **Lessons**

The lame man was asked: “Wilt thou be healed?” The same question could as easily be asked those with spiritual impairments: “Wilt thou be healed?” It does not always follow that men are conscious of their sin, and when they are, that they would necessarily desire to be healed. Unless a man desires the cleansing of his sins he will never make the initiative to do what is necessary to receive forgiveness. divine mercy does not operate independent of human faith, desire, and action. But where there is desire on the part of man, coupled with obedient faith, God will not withhold spiritual blessings.

McGarvey had this observation: “A man may be able to justify an act in a dozen different ways, and may choose to rest content in justifying himself in only one way. Such is the case here. Elsewhere we shall find that Jesus was careful to show that his sabbatic actions were strictly legal; but in this case, that he might

bring his divine claims plainly before the rulers, he ignored the question as to the human legality of his act that he might present without confusion its divine legality. Hence he used only one order or method of justification; viz.: an appeal to his divine rights as exhibited in the habits of the Father. It was the divine and not the human in Jesus which wrought this miracle, so Jesus causes the whole controversy to turn on the divine rights, that he may use the occasion for an elaborate discussion of his divine claims and the proofs by which they are sustained” (McGarvey, 197).

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### THERE IS A GENERATION

by Tom Wacaster

I suppose that every generation tends to despise the younger. Maybe that's why Paul wrote Timothy these words of encouragement: “Let no man despise thy youth...” (1 Tim. 4:12). Perhaps the same advice could be given to those whose hair is graying and health is fading, “Let no man despise thy age.”

Age tends to develop wisdom, something that is often lacking in youth simply because of lack of experience. Of course there are always exceptions. H.L. Mencken concluded, “The older I grow the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.” The down side of growing older is the temptation to become cynical and hyper critical of the leadership and capability of the next generation. Having now surpassed my 67th birthday and rapidly approaching the beginning of my 8th decade upon this planet, I am determined not to become overly critical, not because of the foolishness of a generation gone awry, but because I know God is in control.

Someone warned, “In case you're worried about what's going to become of the younger generation, it's going to grow up and start worrying about the younger generation.” The “baby boomers” are passing the torch to generation “Y” (or is it “X”?) in preparation for their social security checks, retirement, and increasing medical bills and ill health. Like the generations now passed into the dust bins of history, these “baby boomers” are anxious about where the next generation will take them. Having

aborted more than 45 million babies since 1973, the work force has reached a crisis of precisely how they are going to provide for the aging population. But they need not worry, for the medical and scientific minds that were allowed to come to full term and somehow avoid the knife of the abortionist are now seriously considering euthanasia as a viable means of getting rid of so many unwanted senior citizens (quite ironic isn't it - or perhaps more like poetic justice).

Since every generation needs wisdom, it seems appropriate to seek that wisdom from a source that is reliable - I speak, of course, of the Bible. Most of our readers know that there is a book in the Old Testament called "Proverbs." I have been meditating on some of those pithy sayings this past week, and there was one that struck me as particularly interesting, and motivated me to pen this week's article. Listen to the words of Agur from Proverbs 30:11-14

"There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men."

"There is a generation" was Agur's assessment of either his present generation or that which was soon to follow. Keep in mind that the Proverbs were written during a time of great affluence in Israel. The temptation of wealth turned the heart of Israel away from God, and plunged that nation into moral corruption, the likes of which are described in these four verses.

There is an amazing similarity between the rich and abundant years of Israel's history, and our generation - whether we are speaking of generation "X," "Y," or the baby boomers. Youth have learned the language of Ashdod. Honor for mother and father have fallen upon hard times and in many instances a child is no longer afraid of parents because he knows that society will

protect him from discipline. I have pity for a child, any child, who does not honor his or her parents.

This is a generation “pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” We have justified homosexuality, adultery, drunkenness, lying, embezzlement, cheating, gambling, and every other ungodly act known to men while claiming to be a “Nation under God.” Why is it that we become so upset when someone suggests that we should take the words, “In God We Trust” off our currency, but seem so unconcerned about the hundreds of thousands of babies being slaughtered each year?

This is a generation that is “lofty...and their eyelids are lifted up. “When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Prov. 11:2). “In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them” (Pro 14:3). “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Pride will sully the noblest of men, and bring low the mighty. It will render leaders ineffective, and destroy the good influence of all who are caught in its grip. Our generation has produced great strides in science, medicine, technology and education. But our successes and blessings have made us proud so much so that we have lifted up our eyes and declared God dead and religion a non-essential.

This is a generation whose teeth are as swords and their jaw teeth as knives. The violence in the theater has poured out into the streets, and our hatred for fellow man has found vent in the internet and “blog” pages of personal expression. A recent article in the Dallas News pointed out that web sites fostering racial hatred, fascism, neo-Nazi, and anti-Semitic mentality have increased dramatically in the last ten years.

Finally, there is a generation that devours the poor from the earth and the needy from among men. Con artists and shysters prey on the needy and elderly. From the dishonest salesman to the lying televangelist, this generation has its fair share of those whose only aim in life is to make a buck or get ahead, and the needy suffer as a result.

Perhaps this generation will run its course and the pendulum will swing the other way. I like to hope this will happen. But with every passing year, I see little hope for a generation that cares only for itself, with little interest in things eternal. Maybe, just maybe, when this generation is lying in the muck and mire of sin and ungodliness they will look to the God Who created them and long for something better and declare in hope of something better, “There is a generation...”

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# “THE PROPHET THAT COMETH INTO THE WORLD”

*The Fourth Sign: Feeding the 5,000, 6:1-15*

This miracle is the only one recorded by all four of the gospel writers. The story itself is a majestic display of our Lord’s power, and His ability to provide those things necessary to life itself. Did the miracle magnify the Lord in the eyes of the people? Indeed it did! “When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world” (6:14). While it is true they desired to make the Lord an earthly king, the important point you do not want to miss here is the fact that the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 magnified the Lord in the eyes of the multitudes; so much so that “they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king” (6:15).

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Keep in mind that John’s account of the life of Christ is an exhaustive treatment of every event. John leaves out a whole year between the healing of the man in chapter five, and the events of chapter six. To say that this year was a busy one is an understatement. Having attended the Passover in Jerusalem, Jesus thereafter left to enter into what has oft been called His “Great Galilean Ministry.” The following are some of the things Jesus did in the year leading up to John chapter 6:

1. The arrest of John the Baptist (Luke 3:19-20)
2. Healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:46-54)
3. Calling of the four fishermen (John 5:1-11)
4. Teaching and miracles in Capernaum (Matt. 8:14-17; Mark 1:21-24; Luke 4:31-41)
5. The first general tour of Galilee (Matt 4:23-25; Mark 1:35-39; Luke 4:42-44)
6. The cleansing of a leper (Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16)
7. The healing of the paralytic (Matt 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26)

8. The call of Matthew and the controversy about eating with sinners (Matt 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32)
9. The controversy about fasting (Matt 9:14-17; Mark 2:17-22; Luke 5:33-39)
10. The healing and controversy at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-47)
11. Another controversy about breaking the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5)
12. The healing of a man with a withered hand, and further controversy (Matt 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11)
13. The calling of the Twelve Apostles (Mark 3:13-19)
14. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-8:1)
15. Healing of the Centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10)
16. Raising the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
17. Second preaching tour of Galilee (Luke 8:1-3)
18. The great sermon in parables (Matt 13:1-35; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18)
19. Stilling the tempest (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25)
20. Healing the Gadarene demoniacs (Matt 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39)
21. Healing of the woman who touched Christ's garment and raising of Jairus' daughter (Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56)
22. Healing two blind men and a dumb demoniac (Matt. 9:27-34)
23. Last visit to Nazareth (Matt 13:54-58)
24. The Twelve sent on evangelistic campaign: Jesus' third tour of Galilee (Matt 9:35-11:1; Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6)
25. Herod's conscience stricken: Confusion of John the Baptist and Jesus (Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)
26. Retirement of Jesus with the apostles: Feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-18; John 6:1-14)

In order to help us keep this particular event in proper context, both textually and chronologically, let's get a bird's eye view:

### III. The Public Ministry Of Jesus, 2:1-12:50;

12. The Fourth Sign: Feeding the 5,000, 6:1-15;

13. The Fifth Sign: Walking on the Water, 6:16-21;
14. The Fourth Discourse: The Bread of Life, 6:22-66;
  - (1) Preliminaries, 6:22-25;
  - (2) Food that endures, 6:26-51;
  - (3) Eating the Flesh and Drinking the Blood, 6:52-59;
  - (4) Words of the Spirit and Life, 6:60-66;
15. Peter's Confession, 6:67-21;

Right now we are concentrating on this the *fourth sign* that Jesus performed.

### **Feeding the 5,000**

6:1-15

When this chapter opens we find the Lord and His disciples on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee. A great multitude was now following Jesus because "they beheld the signs which he did on them that were sick" (vs. 2). As mentioned earlier, this miracle is the only one recorded in all four of the Gospel accounts. Additionally, John is the only one of the four that tells of the crowd's readiness to take Jesus and make him King. There is no doubt that this must have been one of the most astonishing miracles which our Lord performed. Regardless of how large this fish may have been, or what might have been the size of the loaves, to feed in excess of 5,000 was a most remarkable manifestation of our Lord's power to provide. We also get a glimpse into the character and nature of the disciples of Jesus, and most especially Philip and Andrew.

Philip was a statistical pessimist. Challenged by Jesus, the best he could do was to produce some arithmetical calculations. Philip calculated that two thirds of a year's wages would not buy enough bread to provide afternoon tea for the crowd, to say nothing of a meal. He was very sure of what could not be done, but had no vision for what could be done. Hardheaded and practical, he thought in terms of cash" (Tenney, 113).

Faith trusts in God regardless of the circumstances. The Hebrew writer tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (11:1). Andrew, on the other hand,

was an optimist. What a contrast between these two men. Whereas Philip's information came as an answer to a question asked by the Lord, Andrew spoke up voluntarily. Philip focused on what *could not be done*, while Andrew simply brought food in anticipation of what *would be done*. Andrew must have had a persuasive and likable character for he was able to convince this small boy to give up his lunch without receiving anything in return.

~~ 6:1 ~~

*“After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias”*

*“After these things”* - The phrase does not necessarily mean *immediate* sequence of events. From a comparison of the four gospels, it is apparent that John passed over several months of the Great Galilean Ministry, between the second and third Passovers of our Lord's three and a half years ministry. If the “feast” of chapter five was the Passover (which I believe it was), then it would appear that a whole year intervened between chapter five and six. Exactly why John chose not to record the events of that year is not certain. Matthew's account helps us here by filling in some of the details of this year which John chose not to address. He tells us that Christ had just heard of the death of John the baptizer. It is generally agreed that John was beheaded about the third year of Christ's ministry. Our Lord's ministry began a few months before the first recorded Passover in which He cleansed the temple. The miracle at Bethesda was at His second Passover, and this event at His third, hence in the 3rd year of His ministry.

With the beginning of chapter six we find Jesus back in Galilee. This is certain by a comparative study of Matthew and Mark when these events in chapter six occurred. The events of chapter five occur in Jerusalem in approximately 28 A.D. while the events in this chapter occur one year later in 29 A.D. Some two dozen incidents recorded in the other three gospels are completely ignored by John [see list above].

*“Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee”* - The occasion for His departure was the death of John (cf. Matt. 14:1-

13). Upon hearing of John's death, He left the jurisdiction of Herod, lest He should be seized as well. See also Mark 6:32-44 and Luke 9:10-17. Mark tells us that Jesus retired for rest, and Luke adds the fact that "Herod sought to see Jesus."

~~ 6:2 ~~

*"And a great multitude followed him, because they beheld the signs which he did on them that were sick"*

*"And a great multitude followed"* - According to Robertson this was more like a "rapid race of the crowd on foot." The reason for their anxious search for the Lord was *"because they beheld the signs."* There were many who were interested in the physical, not the spiritual. We have the same with us today. There are those who are interested in the physical things they can get out of religion, but when the demands for change come, they quickly flee. From Mark's account we learn that some of this crowd had actually circled the sea on foot and arrived at this point before Jesus did. Others continued to arrive until the crowd had swelled to more than 5,000.

It is a fascinating picture which the crowd made strung out along the lake front for miles, with every person exerting himself to the utmost, running or at least hurrying as best he could. The strong and youthful would be far ahead; the infirm and aged would be far behind. From other towns and villages others would join in the race" (Foster, 630).

~~ 6:3 ~~

*"And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples"*

*"went up into the mountain, and there he sat"* - Literally, "there he was sitting," a "picture of repose" (Robertson, ESword Module). Jesus often resorted to the mountains for prayer and meditation. On this occasion the disciples were with him. Johnson points out that "the mountains on the eastern shore of the sea rise to the height of nearly two thousand feet above the level of the water" (Johnson, 97).

~~ 6:4 ~~

*“Now the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.”*

*“the Passover...was at hand”* – This would explain why so many were present for this miracle. They were likely on their way to Jerusalem for the feast. Robertson points out that John the apostle was fond of inserting notes having to do with time. We will learn later that Jesus did not go up immediately to this feast because of the hostility of the Jews. Johnson makes this interesting observation:

The feast named in John 5:1 could hardly be that of Purim, for then he would not have left Jerusalem before the passover, it following only about a month later. If that feast was a passover, we have now reached a period of two years from the passover at which he cleansed the temple (2:18)” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 6:5 ~~

*“Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great multitude cometh unto him, saith unto Philip, Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?”*

The other writers tell us that Jesus was filled with compassion; and why not? Here was a multitude that was destitute of faithful teachers. They had no guides but the Scribes and Pharisees, blind guides at best. Their spiritual food consisted of man-made traditions. No wonder our Lord had compassion on this multitude. And lest we forget, our Lord does not change. He pities us still, and desires that we have what is best for us. John does not tell us, as does Mark, that this multitude had been listening to Jesus’ teaching all day. This would explain why Jesus was so concerned about their wellbeing.

*“He saith to Philip”* – John’s is the only one of the four accounts that notes the role that Philip and Andrew play in the discussion with Jesus. Philip came from the neighboring town of Bethsaida, so it would be natural that he would be consulted about where to buy bread. Of course Jesus knew where to buy bread, and lest John leave the impression that perhaps Jesus was

uninformed of the whereabouts to get food, he adds the statement that Jesus “himself knew what he would do” (verse 6).

*“Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?”* - Jesus was testing Philip. Johnson pointed out, ‘He often asked questions for the sake of their moral effect upon others’ (Johnson, ESword Module).

*6:6 - “And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.”*

*“to prove him”* - Jesus wanted to test Philip to see if he would exhibit faith in Him Who alone could resolve the matter. In John, Jesus takes up the matter of feeding the multitude, whereas in the synoptic accounts the disciples raise the problem with Jesus. There is no conflict, and the problem may be resolved as follows: Near the end of the day some of the disciples came to Jesus saying, “The place is desert, and the time is already past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves food” (Matt. 14:15). Jesus, therefore, upon the basis of what had been said, lifted up His eyes, looked over the masses of people, and then turned to Philip with this question, “Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?”

~~ 6:7 ~~

*“Philip answered him, Two hundred shillings’ worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little.”*

Two hundred denarii is approximately two-thirds of a man’s yearly wages (Matt. 20:2). The funds which were available amounted to the wages of about two hundred men for one day. This was a sizeable amount but not sufficient for such a large multitude. It is interesting that Philip did not seem to anticipate a miracle here. He had witnessed the miracle at Cana, but seems to have forgotten the power of Jesus to supply.

~~ 6:8-9 ~~

*“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, who hath five barley loaves, and two fishes: but what are these among so many?”*

The Greek term here translated “*lad*” suggests “a little boy.” That which this young man had in his possession was an exceeding small amount in view of the multitude. The bread was little more than soda crackers. The fish, being small (KJV) would have been about the size of sardines. Why would this little boy have food whereas the multitude did not have provisions? Foster suggests,

He must have been going to a different destination and have been attracted to the crowd in their desperate race around the end of the lake. It is thus that boys today respond to the exciting impulse of fire engines roaring down the city streets. But when we consider the fact that this boy still had his lunch after all these hours of the service, then we find a most interesting basis for estimating his character. What temptations to nibble had been resisted! Moreover when Jesus peremptorily commanded that this pitiful handful of food be brought to Him, it is clearly implied that the boy gladly gave the food to Jesus (Foster, 634-635).

On a side note, John is the only one to mention that the bread and fish belonged to this “*lad*” among the company.

“*five barley loaves*” - These would have been baked on a flat griddle of some kind, or on hot stones. As for the “two fishes,” John calls them ‘*opsaria*,’ indicating that they were small and intended to be eaten as a kind of relish along with the barley cakes.

“*but what are these among so many*” - Was Andrew drawing the Lord’s attention to the complete inadequacy of these provisions to feed this multitude? Did he not trust in the power of the Lord to provide, even in the most difficult of situations?

~~ 6:10 ~~

*“Jesus said, Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.”*

*“make the people sit down”* - Literally, “fall back, lie down, recline” (Robertson, ESword Module). The Lord proceeded in an orderly manner. Mark tells us that they sat down in companies. Several things would thus be accomplished. First, the food could be easily served; second, this arrangement would require less time on the part of the disciples in distributing the food; third, the people would be more comfortable; fourth, the possibility of overlooking someone was reduced; fifth, the miracle would be more evident to a great number of the people.

The vast assemblage was thus subdivided and broken up into manageable portions; there was less danger of tumult and confusion, or that the weaker, the women and the children, should be passed over, while the stronger and ruder unduly put themselves forward; the Apostles were able to pass easily up and down among the groups, and to minister in orderly succession to them all (Trench, 167).

*“there was much grass there”* - It would have been in the early Spring, in the month of Nisan. This is another one of the details contained in the book that suggests that the writer was an eye witness to the events here recorded. Mark 6:39 notes that it was “green grass.”

*“the men...about five thousand”* - This miracle is often referred to as the feeding of the five thousand, but actually many more were involved. There are two different words used by John to refer to the crowds. When it is said by the Lord, “Make the people sit down,” the word for “people” is *‘anthropoi.’* But when it is said that the “men sat down,” John uses the words *‘andres.’* The former word includes men, women, and children, but the later denotes only men. Matthew makes the distinction when he says “they that did eat were about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matt. 14:21). Johnson points out that “it was customary then, as now, in the East, for men to eat alone. It was easy to number the men, who were arranged in companies of hundreds and fifties; but not the women and children, who perhaps sat around promiscuously” (Johnson, ESword Module). The number could easily have exceeded ten thousand in view of the women and children that would have been present.

Bruce makes this interesting observation that would help in understanding the implications of verse 15:

These 5,000 men would have constituted a ready-made guerrilla force to anyone willing to become their leader, and verse 15 suggests that a leader is just what they were looking for” (Bruce, 144).

Mark points out that the crowd was arranged into groups of fifty and a hundred, precisely the number of those who would have made up the various divisions of an army. However, the Lord had no intention of leading a physical army. The fact that the people were told to sit down in ranks was to facilitate the catering of the food to the people.

~~ 6:11 ~~

*“Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, he distributed to them that were set down; likewise also of the fishes as much as they would.”*

“giving thanks” - Matthew and Mark note that he “blessed” the food. Mark also added that he looked up to heaven, as does Luke. We learn from the comparison of the gospels that to “bless” and “give thanks” are the same thing. If the Son of God was obliged to give thanks for God’s provision, then so should we. A common proverbial saying among the Jews was: “He who partakes of anything without giving thanks acts as if he were stealing it from God” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 6:12-13 ~~

*“And when they were filled, he saith unto his disciples, Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost. So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces from the five barley loaves, which remained over unto them that had eaten.”*

Nature wastes nothing, and neither should we. It is the waste that often causes want.

“when they were filled” - God supplied completely, leaving none hungry. What He does physically, He certainly does spiritually.

“Blessed are those that hunger and thirst...for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6).

Wonderful though this action by our Lord was, we must not forget that in a non-miraculous fashion he multiplies the material things of his creation in immeasurable number for our good in a thousand different ways today. The power by which he multiplied these loaves and fishes is that which causes the seed to germinate and grow that supplies us with our food today. We are, as were these people, the recipients of his power and goodness, for which we should be evermore thankful (Woods, 119).

*“gather up the broken pieces”* - Stewardship requires that there be no waste. It is also significant that after the multitude was fed from one basket of food, that there were twelve baskets left over. Someone has pointed out that this would have been a full basket of leftovers, one for each of the apostles.

The Greek word for ‘basket’ is the same in all four accounts. It means the wallet that Jews usually carried with them on long journeys, such as to the Passover. In the feeding of the four thousand the Greek word is different and means a big hamper such as might be used to carry a large amount of grain” (Foster, page 637).

While Philip tried to calculate how much they would need for each person to have just a little bit, it turned out that all were given as much as they desired.

~~ 6:14 ~~

*“When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said,  
This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world”*

*“the people saw the sign”* - This would imply that the miracle was performed in such a fashion as to be observable to all. They drew the proper conclusion from the sign. “This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world.” The Jews were expecting the foretold prophet to eventually come and deliver them from the bondage under the Roman Empire in much the same way Moses delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage. Though they

entertained the possibility that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, they would reject Him not many days hence as an imposter.

The Evangelist does not suggest that the people were wrong in identifying Jesus as the coming prophet; he does suggest that they were wrong in interpreting his significance on a material and external plane. When the true interpretation of his significance was made plain to them, most of them took offense” (Bruce, page 146).

I find it rather ironic that there are those of our day and age who expect a literal reign of Christ upon some earthly throne, leading a mighty army that will overthrow all the enemies of the Lord. If our Lord refused such an earthly position on this occasion, what makes us think it would be His intention to set up an earthly kingdom when He comes again?

~~ 6:15 ~~

*“Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone.”*

*“take him by force, to make him king”* -- Their idea of the Messiah was one of physical power, and earthly rule. Jesus would have nothing to do with such intentions, and quickly withdrew into the mountain. John is the only one of the four who mentions this action of the multitude.

The Zealots were quick to see that a person who could feed so many thousands of people from a little handful of food could destroy a legion of Roman soldiers at a word. Here was the highway to world conquest. Such a miracle as they had witnessed could provide the most luxurious living without labor or effort of any kind... That He had not prevented the death of John added further evidence. The spiritual messages on this fateful day in the desert must have confirmed this conclusion. This fact later emboldened the leaders in Jerusalem to seize Him and put Him to death; they realized He would not use His miraculous power to defend Himself. Therefore the action of these Zealots is of the same pattern and has the same basis. If He would not turn His miraculous power upon

them to defend Himself, then perhaps they could compel Him to use His miraculous power to affect their dreams (Foster, "Life of Christ", page 645).

Bruce had a similar comment:

Jesus had already shown his power to banish disease; now he had shown his power to banish hunger. If only he would show his power to secure his people's liberation, nothing could stand in his way. Here, surely, was the leader for whom they had been waiting; with him as their captain and king, victory and freedom were as good as won! But Jesus recognized in their action a recurrence of one of his wilderness temptations. He knew that this was not the way in which he was to fulfill the Father's will and win deliverance for his people. So he avoided the crowd's unwelcome attention by withdrawing to the Golan heights - not this time with the disciples, but in solitude" (Bruce, 146-147).

It is interesting to read Mark's account along with John's. According to Mark the disciples had just returned from a mission trip in Galilee. It was a successful mission effort, but it excited the hostile interest of Herod Antipas. Keep in mind that Herod had just got rid of John the Baptist, and now he hears of Jesus and the works He is doing, and feels threatened. Following the mission efforts of the disciples, and the feeding of the 5,000, and due in no little part to the effort of the multitude to make Him King, Jesus and His disciples leave to cross the sea to the other side.





## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### “IT IS I, BE NOT AFRAID”

*The Fifth Sign: Walking on the Water, 6:16-21*

Magnified in the eyes of the multitude, this particular sign would serve to magnify the Lord in the eyes of His disciples. “And it was now dark” describes not only the time of day, but the spiritual climate of that generation. The lack of faith on the part of the multitude can be seen in their desire to make Jesus an earthly King. That same lack of faith had evidently infected the thinking of the disciples and the Lord immediately sends them away to the other side of the Sea unto Capernaum. There are three movements in this amazing miracle. The first is that of the disciples by themselves. “Jesus had not yet come to them” (6:17). It was not that He was unobservant, or that He did not care. Mark tells us that He saw them distressed (Mark 6:48). Don’t tell me the Lord is not observant, or that He does not care for us! But in His absence “a great wind blew.” So it is in every man’s life. Any wind is a great wind if the Lord is not in our life. The second movement finds the Lord walking upon the sea. He is coming unto them, and Mark tells us He “would have passed by them” (Mark 6:48). God’s initiative is man’s opportunity. Our Lord came to this world, and the world received Him not (1:11). For many, the door of opportunity is open but once. The last movement in this miracle is the comfort and consolation offered and received. “It is I; be not afraid” (6:20). Their fear then gives way to faith, and “they were willing to receive him into the boat” (6:21). Let’s take a closer look.

Having been in the mountain, following the feeding of the 5000, the disciples started for Capernaum. Comparison with Mark and Matthew show us that Jesus actually “constrained his disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side” (Mark 6:45, Matthew 14:22), the reason being (1) Jesus’ perception that they would desire to make Him king, and (2) Jesus’ desire to spend some time in prayer. There may have been a real temptation to the disciples to join in with the crowd’s demands to make Jesus a King; hence our Lord’s wisdom in sending them away, even out of His own presence.

This section actually contains two miracles; the first being the walking on water, and the second their immediate arrival at the land where they were going. Encompassing those two miracles we have three distinct divisions: (1) Jesus *apart* from the disciples, vss. 16-18; (2) Jesus *appearing* to the disciples, vss. 19-20; (3) Jesus *accepted* by the disciples, vs. 21.

*Jesus apart from the disciples*  
6:16-18

~~ 6:16-17 ~~

*“And when evening came, his disciples went down unto the sea; and they entered into a boat, and were going over the sea unto Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them”*

*“went down unto the sea”* - Going “down” is in reference to their descent from the mountain to the sea. John gives less attention to this event than do Matthew and Mark.

*“entered a boat, and were going over the sea unto Capernaum”* - The disciples were traveling from the east side of the Sea of Galilee to the northwest side. The distance across the northern part of the sea was about four kilometers. While it is stated that they actually headed for Capernaum, the boat ended up landing in Gennesaret, a short distance to the south of Capernaum.

*“And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them”* - The day was rapidly coming to a close, and Jesus had still not joined them. They thus began their journey across the sea without Him. From this comment we can assume that the disciples remained close to the shore in expectation of seeing Jesus walking along the seashore.

~~ 6:18 ~~

*“And the sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew”*

*“and the sea was rising by reason of a great wind”* - It was evidently a sudden storm that arose, not uncommon for that lake. Cold air from the highland often moved down the valley

and produced stormy winds and rough seas, sometimes with very little warning to the fishermen.

There are times in life when, like the disciples, we are tempted to think that God is not aware of our problems and needs. This is especially true when adversity comes our way; when the unexpected storms of life beat upon us and we find ourselves in a “boat” without any indication that God is anywhere near. We are pilgrims traveling through uncharted waters. We know not what lies ahead any more than the disciples were aware of the impending storm once they had embarked upon the sea. The storms of life threaten our very being. The ferocious winds threaten to tear our ship to pieces and cast us into the depths of the sea. The storms of life include loss of loved ones, financial setbacks, discouragement and disappointment, etc. They come suddenly, and they come in full strength, with no respecter of persons. When this happens we must not forget that Jesus is aware of our struggles.

It is then that we need to take the time to focus on the important things in life, and go one step further, and focus on those things that are eternal rather than temporal. Therein is the reason why God “allows” such tragedies to come into our lives—to remind us that this world is not permanent and that the spiritual far exceeds the temporal when it comes to those things that are really important. To this end the storms and tragedies of life are beneficial to our wellbeing.

In his book, “Man’s Search For Meaning,” Austrian psychiatrist Dr. Viktor Frankel documents the profound power that a life purpose exerts over an individual under even the worst of circumstances. Frankel, who survived the Nazi concentration camps, described how prisoners who felt they had nothing to live for succumbed, while those who perceived themselves as having a mission to complete, struggled to survive. Deprived of all external supports that might give life meaning, these survivors came to realize that, in Frankel’s words, “It did not really matter what we expected of life, but rather what life expected from us.” Their sense of an inner purpose pulled them through the most horrible physical and emotional experiences so that they might make their unique contribution to the world. Friends, no matter

what life throws our way, if we will realize our true purpose in life, we can be victorious. What is our true purpose in life? The inspired quill of Solomon gives us the answer: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). With this sense of inner purpose there is no obstacle that we cannot overcome.

*Jesus appearing to the disciples*

6:19-20

~~ 6:19 ~~

*"When therefore they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they behold Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the boat: and they were afraid"*

Best estimates are that the twenty or thirty furlongs would have put them about halfway across the northern part of the lake. The "fear" on the part of the disciples may have arisen as a result of the great wind coupled with the revelation of Jesus walking on the water. There is a wonderful application for us in all of this. In the storms of life we should "not be afraid" (verse 20), but rather "believe" (verse 30) in He Who feeds the multitudes, walks on the water, and calms the sea."

*"about five and twenty or thirty furlongs"* - approximately three or three and a half miles.

*"they beheld Jesus walking on the water"* - Mark says that Jesus saw them "distressed in rowing." Brother Woods has some encouraging comments relative to this: "How we should rejoice in this wonderfully consoling and reassuring fact. Alone, or with others; troubled or in peace; ill or in good health, in the darkness of the night or the brilliant light of a beautiful day, he sees us and is wholly aware of us and ready always to come to our aid" (Woods, 121). The appearance of Jesus must have been quite astonishing, if not startling. It is plainly stated, "they were afraid." Attempting to row across the lake, they would have been looking back from whence they had come. All of a sudden they see a figure walking across the water, making better time than they, and in fact, about to pass them by (Mark 6:48). There is no

doubt that this experience led to their confession recorded by John toward the end of this chapter. Johnson quoted this significant observation by Alford: “The words, ‘walking on the sea,’ are common to the Evangelists, and can have no other meaning here than that the Lord walked bodily on the surface of the water” (Johnson, 100). There are critics who seek to discount every miracle in the Bible, for obvious reasons. Some suggest that John meant to say that Jesus was walking “*by*” the sea. While the Greek can bear that translation, the context plays an important part in determining the meaning of the word. The same phrase is used in the Synoptic account in Mark 6:48 ff. and Matthew 14:26, where it clearly means ‘*on the sea.*’ Mark uses the phrase “on the sea” in the same sense, and both Matthew and Mark say that the boat was “in the midst of the sea.” If Jesus was merely walking *BY* the sea, then wherein is the reason for the fear of the disciples when they saw Jesus?

~~ 6:20 ~~

*“But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid”*

Literally, “stop being afraid,” or “Don’t go on being afraid.” It may be that the disciples thought they saw a ghost. Jesus could read their minds and knew that there was fear in their hearts and thus sought to console them. It is possible that they were afraid of the storm as well.

*“It is I”* -Literally, “I Am” (Johnson, 100). The same language was used by Jesus in John 8:58. As Johnson concluded, “Here I should prefer to give it this meaning: Christ says not merely, ‘It is I, your Friend and Master;’ he says, at least implies, ‘I AM,’ who is coming to you, the Almighty One who rules wind and waves, who made them, and whom they obey” (Johnson quoting Abbott).

*Jesus accepted by the disciples*

6:21

~~ 6:21 ~~

*“They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat: and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going.”*

*“They were willing”* – A troubled heart can find peace if a person is willing to receive the Lord into his life. Jesus is willing to enter our little “ship” if and only if we are willing to receive Him. The word “receive” has the meaning of compliance to His will and subjection to His every command. It is foolishness to even suggest that a person can “receive” Jesus and ignore the very demands He places upon us for the blessing of salvation. “Jesus had bidden the disciples to cross the sea. It ought to have comforted them, to remember that he himself had constrained them to enter into the ship. They were evidently in the path of duty. How, then, could any evil befall them? It is a great comfort to us when we can feel sure that we are doing the will of God; for whatever trouble may threaten us, we can trust Jesus to bring relief in the storm” (Johnson, 101).

*“and straightway they boat was at the land...”* - This implies another miracle. “Straightway” or “immediately” indicates divine intervention. While some see in this nothing more than “within a short time,” we will take the text for what it says: “Immediately” they were at the shore!

#### LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS

The story is told of a fishing fleet that went out from a small harbor on the east coast of Newfoundland. In the afternoon there came up a great storm. When the night settled down not a single vessel in all the fleet had found its way back into port. All night long wives, mothers, children, and sweethearts paced up and down the beach wringing their hands and calling on God to save their loved ones. To add to the horror of the situation, one of the cottages caught fire. Since the men were all away, it was impossible to save the home. When the morning broke, to the joy of all, the entire fleet found safe harbor in the bay. But there was one face which was a picture of despair - the wife of the man whose home had been destroyed. Meeting her husband as he landed, she cried, “Oh, husband, we are ruined! Our home and all it contained was destroyed last night by fire!” But the man exclaimed, “Thank God for the fire! It was the light of our burning cottage that guided our whole fleet into port!” One has pointed out that had Paul and Silas not been cast into prison, the jailer and his family may never have heard the soul saving

message of the Gospel (Acts 16:19-34). When adversity comes your way, pray for strength, and wait until the ship reaches the harbor before you make final judgment on the situation at hand.

AND THE BAND QUIT PLAYING  
by Tom Wacaster

While working in India some years back it was my privilege to travel with brother Nehemiah Gootam to Nakkerkal to work with brother Premdas, one of the preachers in that area. We had completed our morning speaking engagement and had returned to brother Premdas' house, which is situated on one of the major highways that goes to Hyderabad. It would be another three hours before our next meeting. Across the street there was some sort of marriage party in progress. The house was decorated with colored lights, and a colorful tent had been erected outside the house where the guests had gathered so as to provide some shade from the blistering sun. The tent had no walls; only a covering, supported by about half a dozen poles situated at the corners and along the sides to hold the awning in place. From the activities it would appear that no expense had been withheld to provide an elaborate and festive wedding party for the bride and groom. There were fireworks, what appeared to be an abundance of food, and a band that would, on occasion, march from the house to some point down the street, playing their music as they marched along. I could not determine why the entire band would march down the street, unless it was to invite others, or perhaps simply to make their presence known. Upon returning to the house, they would situate themselves just outside the awning so the guests would have enough room to sit in the shade. As the guests gathered and visited, the band played on, with seldom a lull in their festive music.

In the distance I watched as clouds began to gather - dark clouds that promised rain, and along with it cooler temperatures. There was no attempt to make arrangements for the comfort of the guests should it rain, and the band played on, either ignorant of the approaching storm or unconcerned. It seemed like everyone was enjoying the party, and although I was not a guest, it was quite enjoyable to observe the activities from a distance. And then the rain came; and the band quit playing. At least for the

moment the merrymaking and festivities came to a halt, and the guests, wedding party, and the band hurried about seeking shelter from the rain. People were shouting one thing and then another. Every effort was made to stay dry, and keep the festivities going. Before the rain, the party went on uninterrupted; the band played their merry songs; all was well. But when the rains fell, the activities were disrupted, and the band quit playing.

I am sure that we have all heard the proverbial saying, “Into everyone’s life a little rain must fall.” Whoever penned that proverb was trying to express the undeniable truth that life is not a bed of roses. There are interruptions in life; the “rains” come, and our lives are disrupted by the storms that come upon us. Our Lord spoke of just such storms in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). One built upon the rock; his foundation was solid, and his house withstood the rains that beat upon it. The other built his house upon sand; and when the rains came, and beat upon his house, “it fell, and great was the fall thereof.”

What I observed that day is analogous to so many lives. For the most part, our world marches from one point to another, “eating, drinking, and giving in marriage,” unaware of the approaching clouds in the distant future. While life treats us good, the band plays on, and little, if any consideration is given to the foundation upon which we are building our house. But when the storms come, we are confronted with a dose of reality, and, if only temporarily, the band quits playing.

The rain eventually quit that day, and, once again, the band resumed its playing. It came time for us to leave for our next appointment. As we drove off, I could still hear the firecrackers going off, and the band playing its music. And I thought to myself, “How will my house fair when the rains come? And am I prepared for those occasions in life when tragedy strikes, and the storms rage, and, even if only for a moment, the band quits playing?”



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# “I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE”

*The Fourth Discourse: The Bread of Life, 6:22-71*

There are four parts to this section. As we move through these verses we encounter four groups and/or individuals, and in each encounter we are provided a deeper insight into what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the bread of life.” The fourth *discourse* is more like a *dialogue* as our Lord interacts with each of the four groups. The first encounter is with the multitudes who had witnessed the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus may have been magnified in their eyes, but for the wrong purpose. This group had an intense desire for the ‘*loaves and fishes*.’ And while it is true they sought the Christ, their purpose was to satisfy the flesh rather than respond to the higher calling of their Lord. “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled” (6:26). The Lord sought to turn them away from a desire for something akin to the “*manna in the wilderness*” to the true “*bread of life*” that could provide access to the Father.

The second encounter is with the “Jews,” a term that John uses frequently in his gospel to refer to the authorities rather than the common people. Having moved from the *sea shore* to the *synagogue* (vs. 59), the Lord will develop the true meaning of His being the bread of life.

The third encounter is with a broad spectrum of disciples. To this group the Lord speaks more plainly about this bread of life. As these would-be disciples followed the Lord (perhaps from a distance or out of sheer curiosity), and struggled with His words on the bread of life, the Lord took advantage of the opportunity to explain the *mystery* of the bread of life. Unable to grasp the significance of the Lord’s words to the ‘Jews,’ this group, “when they heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” (vs. 60). Tenderly, and evidently with carefully chosen words, our Lord asks, “Doth this cause you to stumble?” (vs. 61). We may never know why so many in this group “went back, and walked no more with him” (vs. 66). Perhaps it was His explanation that “It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing; the

words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life” (vs. 63).

The fourth and final encounter is not with a group, but with Simon Peter – perhaps representative of that group that remained loyal to the Lord. When Peter responded, “*Thou hast the words of life,*” I get the impression that Peter understood the full meaning of the Lord’s discourse on the bread of life, and properly concluded that Jesus, indeed, is “the Holy One of God” (vs. 69). His question echoes the cry of all humanity who seek deliverance from sin and everlasting peace: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (vs. 68).

Let us take up a closer examination of our Lord’s discourse on the Bread of Life and the varied reactions on the part of each of these groups of people. We will study this section using the following headings:

Encounter with the multitude, 6:22-40 - Curiosity

Encounter with the Jews, 6:41-59 - Confrontation

Encounter with doubting disciples, 6:60-66 - Confusion

Encounter with Peter, 6:67-71 - Confession

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### **Encounter with the multitude**

*Curiosity*

6:22-40

The tone for this particular encounter is seen in verse 25 where it is recorded that they asked the Lord, “When comest thou hither.” This question is followed by other questions, “What must we do?” (vs. 28), and “What then doest thou?” (vs. 30). There is nothing that suggests an interest beyond material things. In fact, the focus seems to be on the physical “manna” provided by Moses and whether or not Jesus could provide something similar to it.

~~ 6:22-24 ~~

*“On the morrow the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other boat there, save one, and that*

*Jesus entered not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples went away alone (howbeit there came boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks): when the multitude therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they themselves got into the boats, and came to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.”*

Following the feeding of the 5000, the apostles departed in their boats. The multitude, wanting to see Jesus, must have decided that Jesus had somehow departed for Capernaum. Regardless of their motive, their desire to see Jesus provided the opportunity for one of the greatest discourses of our Lord, the sermon on His being the Bread of Life; and what an astonishing discourse. Johnson is correct in observing that “there is no reason to believe that we have more than a condensed report. The whole discourse can be read in five minutes, and it is likely that the Savior occupied much more time in its delivery” (Johnson, 102).

These things occurred “*on the morrow,*” or the day following the events just noted. The “*other side of the sea*” would be the opposite of Capernaum from that where the disciples had landed (vs. 22).

The “*boats from Tiberias*” may have been commercial fishing boats, or even those used for public transportation. These boats landed at the shore where the feeding of the 5000 had taken place, whereupon the multitude boarded and traveled to the other side “*seeking Jesus.*” Seeing that the night before there was only one boat, which the disciples used, one can only conclude that the other boats must have arrived during the night, either driven by the wind of the storm, or by fishermen seeking safety from the storm.

~~ 6:25 ~~

“*And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither? “*

The question “*when camest thou hither*” implies that the crowd was asking both when and how He came to “*the other side.*” The Lord does not answer their question. Instead, He takes the opportunity to teach them, no doubt with the intention of

turning their superficial curiosity into an earnest desire to develop their faith. The sermon about to be delivered would separate those interested in the true spiritual values from those only interested in the physical loaves and fishes. There comes a time when the demands of Jesus will, in fact, cause those uncommitted souls to depart from the Master. There is a vast difference between those who follow Jesus out of *curiosity* and those who do so out of *commitment*.

~~ 6:26 ~~

*“Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled”*

In verse 2 it is said they followed Jesus because of the “*signs*,” and here it is said that they followed NOT because of the signs, but because of the loaves. The context shows that by this Jesus meant they were interested in the *results* of the signs rather than the *implications* of the signs themselves.

It has been well said that he who loves man for his money loves the money more than the man. It would follow that one who loves the Lord for any other reason than because he is the Lord loves that more than he does the Lord (Woods, 124).

They followed Jesus, not because He taught them, but because He fed them; not for *love*, but for the *loaves*. There are a number who maintain allegiance to Jesus today for no other reason than the secular and physical benefits they might get. “The dealing of Jesus with the general crowd was characterized by a new harshness. The multitude was a group of materialistic curiosity seekers who were self-satisfied in their tradition. He sought to awaken them from a supine complacency to active faith” (Tenney, 115-116).

~~ 6:27 ~~

*“Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed.”*

This is not a prohibition to labor for that food that is necessary to sustain physical life. If Christ was forbidding manual labor for food, then He and Paul would have been at odds one with another since the apostle later wrote, “if any man will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). John utilizes a figure of speech known as an *ellipsis*. This refers to the omission from a clause of one or more words that are nevertheless understood in the context of the remaining elements. By supplying certain words, the meaning becomes clear: “Work not [only] for the food which perisheth, but [even more so] for the food which abideth unto eternal life.”

*“for him the Father, even God, hath sealed”* - A seal was a mark of authority and approval. Johnson noted that “In the East a document was always authenticated by the seal of the maker, instead of by the signature of a name, as with us” (Johnson, ESword Module). The miracle of feeding the 5,000 was designed to be a seal of the authenticity of the Lord’s teaching. This is something the crowd missed entirely.

It should be noted just here that our Lord was addressing the motives of the multitude. The crowd sought nothing more than their physical wellbeing. Jesus sought to correct their misguided motives, and turn their attention toward the “food which abideth unto eternal life.” As Tenney noted, “The motive of the multitude was wrong because it was a desire for more bread and fish rather than what the bread and fish symbolized” (Tenney, 117).

~~ 6:28 ~~

*“They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the works of God?”*

This question implies that they understood that there was SOMETHING they must *do* in order to do the works of God. Likely they had in mind something akin to the work they had to do for the physical bread; only now they were asking what work was needed for this bread of life.

*“What must we do, that we may work the works of God?”* - Notice, the words “we do,” and “we may work.” To argue that the work under consideration is the work that God does is to ignore

the thrust of the question. The emphasis is upon what WE must do, not what God might have done! The multitude is to be commended for their teachable disposition; but as we shall see later, they did not allow the moment to have an impact upon their lives, choosing to leave the Lord rather than cleave to Him. At least at this point they were concerned about what they must do to “work the works of God.” Too many today are completely unconcerned about what they must do in order to be saved.

~~ 6:29 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent”*

The answer that Jesus gives lends credence to the position that the multitude was asking what *they* must do, not what God does. Individual responsibility is stressed with the words, “that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.” Jesus was doing more than demanding mere mental assent here. Saving faith is faith that includes works of obedience. Anything short of this is NOT saving faith.

~~ 6:30-31 ~~

*“They said therefore unto him, What then doest thou for a sign, that we may see, and believe thee? what workest thou? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. “*

They were asking for evidence. They wanted a sign that would prove to them the claims that Jesus was making. It should be noted that Jesus does not rebuke them for asking the question. The irony in this whole situation is that the multitude accepted the evidence with regard to Moses, but missed the force of our Lord’s miracle of feeding the 5,000. If they had not been convinced with the miracle of the loaves and fishes, it is unlikely that anything would have proven our Lord’s deity to them.

~~ 6:32-33 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of*

*God is that which cometh down out of heaven, and giveth life unto the world."*

The argument this multitude was making was wrong on two counts: First, it was not Moses who provided the manna, but God. Second, manna was not the true bread; only a type of it. These potential disciples of Jesus had a complete misconception of what the "bread out of heaven" consisted. To be sure, the physical sustenance of Israel was totally dependent upon God's giving the manna and the quail, but God's intention in caring for Israel was to draw them close to Him spiritually. The true "bread" was the Messiah to Whom the words of Moses pointed. It is tragic that the greater portion of Israel never ate that bread, deciding instead to eat of the husks that idolatry threw to them. The contrast between the manna given in the wilderness and Jesus as the Bread from heaven represents the difference between the ministry of Moses, and that of our Lord. The manna was limited, while the Bread from heaven is an endless supply of spiritual nourishment.

There are three essential characteristics of the true bread of which our Lord spoke. First, it "*cometh down out of heaven.*" Second, "*it giveth life.*" And third, it was "*unto the world,*" not just a select nation. There is no way that the manna and the quail could qualify as that bread. As Johnson noted, "The manna did not last longer than a single day; all who ate it died; it was for a single nation. These things are not true of the bread of God. God feeds his people, not with bread made on earth, but prepared by his own hands from heavenly materials" (Johnson, 105).

~~ 6:34 ~~

*"They said therefore unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread."*

These Jews had a limited perception of the bread, much like the Samaritan woman with regard to the living water (John 4:1 ff.). Like Ponce de Leon who sought for immortality at some physical fountain, these people thought that "life" was wrapped up in the here and now! If men would but realize the value of spiritual life, and the "bread" that nourishes the soul, perhaps they would be as willing to pay the price to attain unto that which heaven has

offered. Once a hungry Arab on the desert sought a spring of which he knew to quench his thirst. As he rose he saw a bag, dropped by some traveler, and he joyfully exclaimed, "Here is food." Eagerly he tore it open, and then in bitter disappointment he cried, "Alas, it is only pearls."

~~ 6:35 ~~

*"Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"*

With the declaration "I am the bread of life," Jesus began His "I am" axioms recorded only in John. The words "I am" are, as one writer noted, "solemnly emphatic, and these affirmations are mountain peak declarations in John's Gospel" (from my personal notes; author not recorded). Jesus points them to Himself - "*I am that bread of life.*" Not in the sense that they could literally eat of his physical body and then live, but that they might listen to His words and live spiritually. Previously Jesus had pointed his audience to the bread of life; here He identifies Himself as that bread.

*"he that cometh to me"* – It is important to notice the number of times Jesus uses a style of teaching with which the Hebrews were familiar. In Hebrew poetry there is a style known as synonymous parallelism in which one statement follows another, the second statement being synonymous with or an expansion of the first. We see this in verses 35-36 where "he that cometh to me" is equivalent to "believeth on me." "Coming" and "believing in" are clearly equivalent to "eating" and "drinking" of verse 54. Whenever the Bible speaks of "coming" to God and/or Christ, it means to acknowledge, believe, and trust them fully and completely. Men draw nigh to God through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14).

~~ 6:36 ~~

*"But I said unto you, that ye have seen me, and yet believe not. "*

Their problem was not lack of evidence, but stubbornness of heart. The words of Jesus here are similar to John 5:36-38; but while those earlier words were addressed to people in Jerusalem,

here the Lord is speaking to Galileans. Bruce addressed the deeper problem with these Galileans thus:

They had seen Jesus providing food for the multitude, but did not penetrate by faith into the true significance of what he did. They had not come to him and believed in him in the only sense that mattered” (Bruce, 153).

It was noted earlier by the apostle John that the disciples “beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father” (John 1:14). John never lost sight of the magnificence of our Lord, something which the disciples eventually grasped, but which these unbelieving Jews and Galileans simply failed to see with the eye of faith. Like a fine thread that runs through this gospel, the apostle never takes his eyes off the glory of Christ. Whether or not men see that glory, and believe in Jesus as the only begotten of the Father, is the difference between life and death, heaven and hell.

~~ 6:37 ~~

*“All that which the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”*

Note in this verse the connection between “*that which the Father giveth*” and “*him that cometh to me.*” This shows that the only ones that the Father “giveth” to the Son are those who, of their own free will and volition, make the effort to come to Jesus. The gospel is for all (2 Thess. 1:7-9, Matt. 13:14,15). As brother Woods has noted, “The very fact that some choose to come to Christ shows that they are under no compulsory decree to do so” (Woods, 128). Johnson also made some discerning remarks here: “The whole body of believers, Gentiles as well as Jews, are given to the Son by the Father. Christ is God’s gift to men, but believers are his gift to Christ” (Johnson, ESword Module). I do not think I do injustice to the passage when I to render it thus: “All that which the Father giveth me shall [have] come to me.”

*“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”* - Jesus will receive all men, regardless of their past. The NT teaches that our coming to Jesus is conditional, and we must cast off the old man, turn away from sin, and come to God in humble submission to

His will. All such men who come in living obedience will in no wise be cast off. What a promise!

~~ 6:38 ~~

*“For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me”*

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, even up to the point of death on the cross, the attitude of Jesus was one of submission to the Father’s will. “He did not come to choose such followers only as were congenial to him, nor to follow his own inclinations, but to do the Father’s will” (Johnson, ESword Module). Jesus is our example in these matters and should motivate us to submit humbly to the will of the Father, no matter what the cost. We must not overlook the fact that Jesus was also aware of His former abode with the Father.

~~ 6:39-40 ~~

*“And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

The will of the Father is (1) that none be lost (vs. 39), and (2) that all should ultimately be raised unto eternal life (vs. 40). The Calvinist doctrine runs counter to this, and depicts God as not desiring that all men be saved, but only a select few. Bruce pointed out that the “all” of verse 39 is “neuter singular, and when Jesus says that he will ‘raise it up at the last day’ he speaks of the sum-total of his people” (Bruce, 154). When our Lord comes to receive us into His glory, not a single one will be left behind; no one need worry that he will somehow be left out.

Note the progression of faith in verse 40: First, one “*beholdeth the Son,*” followed by “*believeth on him,*” then he is rewarded by the “*raising up*” in the last day. The reference to the “last day” shows that there will be a definite termination of the age in which we presently live. At that time there will be the judgment and pronouncement of our eternal state. Regarding verse 40, Brother Woods writes:

Not to be overlooked here is the clear indication of definite consciousness Jesus had of his former abode with the Father in heaven from which place he had come down to earth. Here is additional evidence of his deity. Moreover, the reference to the 'last day' and to the raising up of those who come to him points conclusively to a definite termination of the age, the resurrection and the administering of reward and, by implication, the rejection of the wicked. It is significant that the pronoun is emphatic in the Greek text in the words 'I will raise him up at the last day.' 'I, in my own person, will raise him who believes on me at the last day'" (Woods, 128-129).

### **Encounter with the Jews**

#### *Confrontation*

6:41-59

Following the encounter with the multitude, we have this encounter with the Jews. There are two movements in this section. Each section is set off by the mention of a specific action of the Jews. In the first it is said, "The Jews therefore *murmured* concerning him" (vs. 41). In the second it is said, "The Jews therefore *strove* one with another" (vs. 52). In the first section the confrontation has to do with the *origin* of the Lord. In the second, it has to do with the *obligation* of men to "eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood" (vs. 53). Let us approach this section under the headings: (1) Confrontation over the Lord's origin, vss. 41-51; (2) Confrontation over their obligation, vss. 52-59.

*Confrontation over the Lord's origin, vss. 41-51.*

~~ *John 6:41* ~~

*"The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said, I am the bread which came down out of heaven"*

Was this portion of the discourse separate and apart from the previous? Did it follow immediately on the heels of the Lord's words to the multitude? Were these Jews present among the crowd, stirring up the multitudes lest they come to believe on

Jesus as the “bread of life”? It seems more reasonable to view this entire chapter as a unit. That being the case, the place would be the same, the people would be the same, and the discourse uninterrupted.

*“The Jews”* – Previously Jesus had been addressing the multitude; now, for the first time, we read of “the Jews.” At this point in their confrontation with Jesus they had not come to the forefront; they were working behind the scenes, stirring up the multitude, casting doubts and putting questions in the minds of their hearers. It is possible that these Jews had been sent from Jerusalem to investigate and to watch, and perhaps to bring some accusation against the Lord if the opportunity availed itself (cf. Mark 3:22 and 7:1-2).

*“therefore murmured”* - Our English word “murmured” translates ‘*gogguzo*,’ and means “to grumble, to say anything against in a low tone” (Thayer, ESword Module). Robertson says it is “like the cooing of doves or the buzzing of bees” (Robertson, ESword Module). Rather than confront the Lord directly, they sought to spread their doubts in a secret, almost imperceptible manner.

~~ 6:42 ~~

*“And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how doth he now say, I am come down out of heaven?”*

The reason for their murmuring had to do with the Lord’s ‘*origin*.’ The Jews could not reconcile the Lord’s claim that He was the bread come down from heaven (6:32) with the fact that He was (according to their limited knowledge) the son of Joseph and Mary. It is interesting that the gospel of John, written to produce evidence of the divine nature of Jesus, is the only one of the four gospels that says absolutely nothing directly about the virgin birth of Jesus.

*“Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?”* – Like the previous group, these murmuring Jews could see no further than the physical! To them, Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph. “How,” they reasoned, “could He

possibly come down out of heaven?” Their reasoning was typical of materialistically minded disbelievers. Rather than hold their disbelief and discontent to themselves, they sought to influence others as they “*murmured concerning him.*” Johnson correctly noted, “These men were not honest inquirers but cavilers” (Johnson, 108). The reason for their misunderstanding is that they had not been taught of the Father; and the reason why they had not been taught of the Father is that they had not come to Him to learn. In passing, it might be pointed out that when men have a misconception of the nature of our Lord it leads inevitably to a number of other false doctrines. Every false doctrine will find its root in a misunderstanding about the nature of God.

~~ 6:43-44 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day.”*

The omniscience of Jesus is demonstrated here. While they murmured among themselves, Jesus observed it all. This lends support to the conclusion that the Jews were actually present when Jesus was speaking to the multitude in the previous section.

What follows now is the ‘*answer*’ Jesus gives to these murmuring Jews. The discussion, therefore, of a man being drawn to the Father is in response to their disbelief regarding the origin of the Lord. Before entering into the discussion, Jesus urges them to stop this exchange of scandalized criticism: they would not arrive at the truth with their murmuring and carping criticism.

These two verses have served as a proof text by those of the Calvinist persuasion to teach the false doctrine of election. If the passage is carefully studied one will see that Jesus sets forth the *principle* of salvation in verse 44, and the *procedure* for that salvation in verse 45. Calvinism, on the very surface, is a heinous doctrine. It impugns the majesty of God, robs man of his free will, and mocks every word in the Bible wherein God invites men to come to Him in loving faith and obedience. As John Phillips noted:

God does not arbitrarily damn the greater part of the human race into an existence they did not seek, on terms they did not select (so called total-depravity), under impossible handicaps they did not choose (depraved in will and 'dead in trespasses and sins'), dominated by forces they cannot control (the world, the flesh, and the devil), into a ruined family (Adam's) they did not themselves plunge into sin, just in order arbitrarily to send people to hell for not choosing a salvation offered only to the "elect" (Phillips, 129).

*"No man can come to me, except the Father...draw him"* - Here is the *principle*. This says absolutely nothing about *how* that drawing takes place. To stop here and insert one's own definition is poor hermeneutics and a careless tampering with God's word. We must keep in mind that there are two sides to salvation: The *human* and the *divine*! On the *human* side, the individual will is the deciding factor. Earlier Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life" (John 5:40). In Matthew 23:37 Jesus said He "would have gathered thy [the Jews', TW] children together...and ye would not." On the *divine* side, God draws us, but He does so always respecting that human will. The Gospel is God's drawing power (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 2:14). There are also other factors involved in drawing men to God: The love of God draws us; the cross draws us; God's goodness draws us; just to name a few. Johnson wrote:

God often mellows the human heart by his providences so that it becomes a fit soil for the Word, and by the gospel, the sword of the Spirit, his providence, the invitations of the Spirit, he 'draws' men. If our will consents, and we yield to the drawing power, we come" (Johnson, 108).

Unfortunately the vast majority of the human race in this generation, or any generation, will never be drawn to God for the simple reason they do not *want* to be drawn.

*"I will raise him up"* - To those who would respond to that call in submissive obedience, Jesus promises that He would "*raise him up in the last day.*" While there is a sense in which Jesus raises

us out of spiritual death, the passage clearly speaks of the resurrection in the last day unto eternal life.

~~ 6:45 ~~

*“It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me”*

*“It is written in the prophets”* - Jesus now draws on the Jews’ own authority: the prophets. He does this to show their inconsistency with regard to their carping criticism. Would they listen to their own Scriptures? And what did the prophets say?

*“And they shall all be taught of God”* – The quote is from Isaiah 54:13. And what did Isaiah tell them? *“And all thy children shall be taught of God.”* Reflecting upon that Old Testament passage, the Lord would next set forth the *procedure* for this “drawing.”

*“Taught...heard...learned...cometh”* – Note the process. First, there is teaching. Teaching is the means by which information is disseminated. God has always intended that His word be taught to the masses (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; 2 Timothy 2:2).

*“heard”* - Here is where these Jews fell short. They had the Law of Moses; they had the prophets – but they did not *listen* to their own Scriptures. Had they listened to the word God gave them they would have “heard from the Father” and seen in those prophecies all the evidence they needed to convict them and compel them to come unto Jesus. In this they failed miserably. How does one hear the Father today? God speaks to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2), through the word (2 Tim. 4:1-4), all Scriptures being inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In fact, no one will come to the Father *unless* he hears and believes the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

*“learned”* – It is even possible for a person to be taught, then hear, yet not learn. I learned this lesson while doing mission work in South Africa during the closing years of the 1980’s. I was studying Romans chapter six with an elderly man who had been a member of the Dutch Reform Church all his life. I was seeking to convince him of the essentiality of baptism for remission of

sins. I had him read selected verses from that passage at least three times. I would ask him, “What does this passage tell us about baptism?” His response was astonishing: “I don’t read anything in the passage about baptism.” He had been taught; he had heard; but he had not learned.

“*cometh*” – Once taught, and once having learned, men can come to the Father. Coming to the Father *should* follow teaching and learning as sure as night follows day; but, unfortunately, that is not always the case. Why then, it might be asked, are not all who hear (audibly), and all who learn, drawn to God? A magnet will draw iron, but not all objects are made of iron. One must have the right disposition, a submissive heart, and a willingness to come to God before that drawing can occur. In this connection it would be good to study such passages as Isaiah 54:13, Jeremiah 32:33-34, Joel 3:16-17 and Micah 4:1. In addition, there are *other forces* underway that draw us *away* from God. These *other* things are summed up in the words of John as “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vain glory of life” (1 John 2:15-17). Satan is ever busy in his attempt to blind “the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them” (2 Cor. 4:4).

Do not forget the order; let it sink into your heart: Every one that (1) hath heard, and (2) hath learned, (3) comes. The learning follows the hearing, and precedes the coming. Thus, there must first be an *enlightening*, (2) followed by an *educating*, (3) and then an *embracing* on the part of those who would be saved.

~~ 6:46 ~~

“*Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he hath seen the Father*”

What is the connection between this verse the previous verses? Jesus reminds these Jews, “*Not that any man hath seen the Father.*” Only the Son has seen the Father. It stands, therefore, that one can only come to know God through the Son. Consequently, any rejection of the Son and/or a rejection of His word will bar a man from access to the Father. Those waiting for

some kind of a vision, tingling feeling up and down the spine, or direct operation of the Holy Spirit will never come to know God.

~~ 6:47 ~~

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life”*

The “believeth” of this verse is not “believe only,” but belief that is inclusive of all that God demands of us. The only time “faith only” is used in the Bible (in our English translations) is in James 2:24 (it reads “not only by faith” in the ASV): “Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.” When men say you are saved by “faith only” (or an equivalent thereof), and an inspired writer tells us you are *not* saved by faith only, someone is not telling the truth. I think I will put my trust in the word of God rather than what men might say, regardless of how well educated they might be.

~~ 6:48 ~~

*“I am the bread of life”*

Jesus again states, *“I am the bread of life.”* The Lord brings His audience back to the great truth that is the subject of this discourse. It was not the manna in the wilderness that gives life, but Jesus Christ. This particular “I Am” statement represents what Winfred Clark called the *“I Am Of Preservation.”* There are at least seven places in the book of John where our Lord uses these two words to describe Himself. Each one is significant; each one teaches an important lesson. This particular “I Am” statement has as its backdrop the feeding of the 5,000 and their reaction to the miracle, and the miracle Worker, Jesus Christ. The people wanted to make Jesus King, but He would have none of it. While the people wanted the loaves and fishes, Jesus was determined to spend His time in more important matters. When Jesus made this statement, “I am the bread of life,” there was a message He sought to convey to the people. That message, as we shall see, is the absolute essentiality of receiving and obeying the Lord.

*“bread of life”* – The words of Jesus provide sustenance for our spiritual life. The manna in the wilderness was only a faint

illustration of heaven's life giving power. Jesus is to the soul what bread is to the body. As the bread of life, our Lord is the very staff of life and without Him the soul would not, yea could not, be nourished.

The similarities and contrasts between the manna and the true bread from heaven have been noted in a number of commentaries. Matthew Henry observed that "bread-corn is bruised (Isa 28:28 [KJV, TW]), so was Christ; he was born at Bethlehem, the *house of bread*, and typified by the *show-bread*" (Henry, ESword Module). There are some other amazing similarities between the "manna" and the true "bread of life": Manna was given to Israel; so Christ to the spiritual Israel. There was sufficient manna to feed and nourish Israel; so in Christ there is a fullness of grace for all believers.

~~ 6:49 ~~

*"Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died"*

The manna did not, and could not, forego that inevitable appointment to which all men are called: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this cometh the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). Eternal life – that which pertains to the soul – cannot be obtained through physical means. This seems to be something these Jews did not realize, or chose to forget. Their fathers ate manna in the wilderness, and yet they died. The bread of manna was NOT, therefore, the bread of which Jesus spoke.

~~ 6:50 ~~

*"This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die"*

*"This is the bread"* – Whatever "this" refers to, the blessing attached to eating this bread serves as a great comfort to those who "through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15). Unlike the manna in the wilderness that could not provide eternal life, Jesus as our "bread of life" promises eternal life to those who would "eat" and "drink."

~~ 6:51 ~~

*“I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.”*

“*I am the living bread*” – This is the third time Jesus says “I am the bread of life” or equivalent words (cf. 6:35; 6:48). What will follow in the remaining verses of this discourse is a description of all that is involved in Jesus being the bread of life, and the implications of what it means to “eat” and “drink” the body and the blood.

*“the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world”* – Jesus gave His flesh when He allowed Himself to be arrested, tried, falsely convicted, and crucified on the cross “for the life of the world.” These words are reminiscent of John the Baptist’s declaration that Jesus is “the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The difficulty that most people have with the remainder of this chapter is a proper understanding of exactly what is meant by *eating* the flesh of Christ. If the Lord was talking about His physical body here, I can see how that would produce a theological Gordian knot. Eating the literal flesh of Christ would not be possible for the simple reason that His body is no longer with us. He must, therefore, have had reference to something of far greater significance than the physical body in which He sojourned while upon this earth. It was in the “flesh” that Jesus achieved His great mission. It was in the “flesh” that He taught us how to live. It was in the flesh that the embodiment of heaven’s message became a reality. By making reference to His “flesh,” the Lord was using a metaphor for His human nature, the totality of His life upon this earth, with particular emphasis upon what He taught. Notice a similar use of the word “flesh” in Hebrews 10:19-20:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by *the way which he dedicated* for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, *his flesh* [emphasis mine, TW].

Phillips makes this interesting observation regarding this particular passage in Hebrews:

In that passage the Lord's flesh is identified with the temple veil. That veil represented all that Jesus was as God incarnate. It was made of fine, twined linen symbolizing his sinlessness and righteousness. It was dyed blue, scarlet, and purple. The blue symbolized his deity: he came from heaven; he was the Son of God. The scarlet symbolized his humanity: he was "the last Adam, the scone man" (the name Adam means "red"). The purple symbolized deity in humanity. If you take a quantity of blue dye and an equal quantity of red then mix one into the other, you have purple. Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh." So the veil represented all that Jesus was and is as deity in humanity (Phillips, 133).

When Jesus makes reference to the bread of life being His flesh, He was pointing toward Calvary. His "flesh" represented His absolutely sinless life that would be given for the sins of the world. In that sinless body was embodied the full extent of heaven's truth that could truly bring salvation. No wonder Jesus would later say, "I am the way, the *truth* [emphasis mine, TW], and the life" (John 14:6).

I have no doubt that the Jews present realized the full implications of what Jesus was saying; they may not have accepted it, but they did grasp the significance. What follows is their reaction.

*Confrontation over their obligation, vss. 52-59.*

While the previous eleven verses addressed the confrontation over the Lord's *origin*, these seven verses will look at the confrontation over the *obligation* that rests upon all who would enjoy the benefits of that bread of life. There are three distinct movements in these eight verses. The first is the *problem* troubling these Jews (6:52). In the second movement the Lord will elaborate upon the *principle* set forth in verse 51 (6:53-58). This section will close with a side note from John regarding the *place* where these things took place (6:59).

~~ 6:52 ~~

*“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

*“The Jews therefore strove among themselves”* – These words set the tone for what is recorded here. This verse records the question these Jews were asking; a question that evidently was presenting no little discussion among themselves. The Greek word (*machomai*) means a “fight of armed combatants, or those who engage in hand to hand combat” (Thayer, ESword Module). The Jews still had their minds fixed upon the material. They failed to grasp the higher lesson Jesus was teaching. Indeed, how CAN Jesus give us His flesh to eat? There is a note of contempt in the question. “How can THIS man, whose father and mother they purported to know, give us HIS flesh to eat?” Of course Roman Catholicism makes a similar mistake with their doctrine of transubstantiation, wherein they think the bread and the fruit of the vine *literally* become the fleshly body and blood of Jesus at the time one partakes of the communion. Take a moment and notice that the “coming” and “believing” of verse 35 mean the same thing as the “eating” and “drinking” of verses 51 and 54 because the same blessing is attached to each one of them. When a person truly comes to Christ, and exercises biblical, saving faith, he receives the fullest benefit of the body and blood of Jesus in that atoning sacrifice.

~~ 6:53 ~~

*“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”*

What patience Jesus must have had! Once again Jesus attempts to get their minds off the physical and on to the spiritual. “*Except*” means there is simply NO WAY to have life, unless it be through the eating of the flesh of the Son of man, and the drinking of His blood. The Lord is not talking about the Lord’s supper which He would institute later. While this may INCLUDE partaking of the Lord’s supper, this passage does not speak of that memorial feast. In fact, to use these verses as a reference to the Lord’s supper is to take them out of context.

The fact that the verbs of the Greek text indicate a continuous eating and drinking it is apparent that this chapter does not speak of the bread and wine, but of spiritual eating, i.e. of the belief that Christ, both God and man, hath shed his blood for us (Woods, 134).

~~ 6:54 ~~

*“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

Whatever the eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood may be, we do know that attached to participating in the act are two wonderful blessings: (1) eternal life, and (2) being raised in the last day. The responsibility and blessings are inseparably attached one to another in the same way that “eternal life” is inseparably attached to “beholding,” “coming,” and “believing.”

But it might be asked, “How shall one, then, eat his flesh and blood?” Verses 47-48 taught us that the *‘bread of life’* is appropriated by believing. My studied conclusion is that when Jesus speaks of eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He is referring to complete assimilation of the Lord into one’s life. It is to imbibe His teachings, acquiesce to His law, embrace the atoning sacrifice, and obey His every command.

~~ 6:55 ~~

*“For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”*

*“flesh is meat indeed...blood is drink indeed”* - His flesh and blood is the only thing that can give everlasting life. The additional mention of drinking the blood implies the complete acceptance of the will of God.

*“indeed”* – Our English translates a word that means “of a truth, in reality” (Thayer, ESword Module). When Jesus told us his “flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” He was revealing reality. We often speak of “virtual” this or that. This means that what we may “see” is only a likeness of something. What an amazing truth we have before us. What Jesus offers is the only thing that IS real! What men offer is *not* real; it is not “of a truth.”

~~ 6:56 ~~

*“He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me,  
and I in him.”*

*“He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood”* – The obligation over which these Jews *strove* was clearly stated in verse 53. “Except”! “If and only if” is another way of saying the same thing. Here is motivation to accept that obligation. Two wonderful blessings are promised: (1) we abide in Christ, and (2) Christ abides in us. If we will compare this with such passages as John 15:7 and 10, and 1 John 2:24, we will see that abiding in Jesus is the result of a proper respect for and obedience to the word which He speaks.

How shall mortals so partake of Christ as to receive the life he had himself, and thus have eternal life? I believe that he means that every man must become a partaker of the benefits of his death, his slain body and shed blood, by an appropriation of them to himself, in order to live. Verse 47 and 48 show that the Bread of life is appropriated by believing. There must, then, be such a belief, not merely in Christ as a divine teacher, but in his death and resurrection, as will induce us to be planted in the likeness of his death and raised in the likeness of his resurrection (Johnson, 110).

~~ 6:57 ~~

*“As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father;  
so he that eateth me, he also shall live because of me”*

*“As the living Father sent me”* – Jesus never lost sight of His submission to the Father. Robertson points out that this particular designation of the Father is nowhere else used in the New Testament. There are passages that speak of God as the “living God,” such as Matthew 16:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 10:31, etc.

*“I live because of the Father”* – The Father is the source of life. But in what sense can it be said that Jesus lived “because of the Father.” Quite obviously it cannot refer to our Lord’s pre-incarnate state. The Hebrews writer may have had the same thought in mind when he recorded these words:

Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, But a body didst thou prepare for me; In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure: Then said I, Lo, I am come (In the roll of the book it is written of me) To do thy will, O God. Saying above, Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein (the which are offered according to the law), then hath he said, Lo, I am come to do thy will. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second (Heb. 10:5-9).

Another possible meaning is that when Jesus said “I live because of the Father,” He was telling these Jews, “Because He [the Father] lives, I live; My life is guaranteed by His.” We may never fully understand the import of the Lord’s words here, but I feel that the true meaning lies somewhere in this general area.

*“he also shall live because of me”* - If men assimilate the teachings of Jesus into their life, they would be “eating” of Jesus. Life, then, would be received from the Lord.

~~ 6:58 ~~

*“This is the bread which came down out of heaven: not as the fathers ate, and died; he that eateth this bread shall live for ever.”*

*“This is the bread”* – In view of the fact that the Lord would later declare, “the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life” (6:63), I lean toward the position that the “bread of life” is essentially the teaching of our Lord, given orally while He walked on this earth, and to the apostles through inspiration after He ascended to the right hand of the Father.

They had sought to put his reference to being bread in conflict with the manna which came down from heaven. Jesus, instead of suffering by the allusion thereto, showed that he was immeasurable superior to that food, even though miraculously supplied, because those who thus ate eventually died, whereas, those who partake of the bread he offers shall never hunger or die (Woods, 135).

~~ 6:59 ~~

*“These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum”*

John was fond of inserting details like this. Capernaum had become like a “second home” to the Lord; His Galilean headquarters so to speak. He had performed many miracles here, including the healing of the Roman centurion who may have built this very synagogue (Luke 7:1-10). Unfortunately the inhabitants of this city would prove to be a disappointment to the Lord. As the remainder of this chapter unfolds we will see a reaction on the part of the Lord’s disciples that is quite baffling. John may have remembered this particular event as the turning point in the Lord’s ministry, thereby providing us with one of those little details to convey that message to his readers as well.

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#### PARACHUTE MENTALITY

by Tom Wacaster

Having never worn a parachute, and fortunately never having needed one, I don’t know if I can appreciate what a paratrooper goes through in the exercise of his basic skills as a skydiver. While serving in the Coast Guard in Corpus Christi, it was my privilege to work in the field of aviation search and rescue. Those of us who went on search and rescue missions were never issued a parachute, never trained in the use of them, and seldom had one on board when we went out on search and rescue missions. I was told on one occasion that there were always a couple on board, but they were stored under the seats of the pilot and co-pilot (hmmm). I once asked one of my fellow workers if he felt a little uncomfortable flying several hundred miles out into the Gulf of Mexico not having a parachute. He answered in the negative, and then explained that the parachute was bulky, uncomfortable to wear, and interfered with movement inside the plane. And, since it was not required that crew members wear the parachute seldom if ever would you find someone with one strapped to his back. I once read (some years after my discharge from the military) of a sign that hung over the door of a parachute preparation room which read, “If you ever need it, and

don't have it, you ain't ever goanna need it again." In time of need it might be great to have one close by, but, hey, who needs it now? Until and unless an emergency arises, we'll just leave it stored under the seat. That, my friends, is what I mean by "parachute mentality." Do you suppose some members of the Lord's church have a "parachute mentality"? Think with me on this.

In every congregation there are a small number of Christians who are barely hanging on. There is little, if any, involvement in the work of the church. To them, Sunday morning worship is all that is required, and that only if something else does not interfere. Sunday morning Bible classes, Sunday evening worship, and Wednesday night are purely optional, and that only for the fanatical, right-wing fringe (which they want to avoid at all costs). Asked if Jesus were important they would answer in the affirmative. But if the truth were known, their definition of "important" is quite different than what God considers "important." The faithful, humble, serving child of God realizes that when he was baptized into Christ he "put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). But that child of God with a "parachute mentality" perceives of Christ as bulky, uncomfortable to wear, and an interference to his free-moving life style that places a premium on business, pleasure, and self-gratification. Jesus is stored under the pew at the local church building, ready to be grabbed and strapped to the back in time of emergency; but to wear it on a daily basis? Forget it! Sometimes I think we ought to hang a sign over the exit door on our buildings similar to the one referred to above. That sign might read something like this: "If you ever need Him, and don't have Him, you ain't never goanna need Him again." The Christian with the "parachute mentality" makes at least two fatal blunders. First, he thinks that Jesus is something you put on and take off depending on your need. But you know as well as I do that Christianity is a daily walk. I read somewhere that Jesus said, "take up your cross daily" (Luke 9:23). Second, he thinks that God can be ignored and spurned when things are going well, and then immediately come to the rescue when things turn sour. If I read my Bible clearly it does not work that way. Dearly beloved, God wants your humble obedience and submission every second, of every minute, of every hour, of every day of the year. It isn't that He needs you; it

is that YOU need HIM! To think otherwise is to possess a “parachute mentality.”

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Encounter with doubting disciples  
*Confusion*  
6:60-66

These seven verses record what must have been a great disappointment to the Lord. From this point forward the animosity of the Jews increases, culminating eventually in Calvary. The multitude who had sought Jesus for the *loaves* and *fishes* now seem ready to abandon Him. The Jews were becoming more open in their criticism, murmuring about Jesus and striving among themselves. Now John tells us that many of His disciples were evidently influenced by these murmuring Jews. Let's take a closer look.

~~ 6:60 ~~

*“Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said,  
This is a hard saying; who can hear it?”*

*“Many therefore”* - This is the last section of the discourse, and it contains the response of many of the disciples to what Jesus had said. To them the message of Jesus was *“a hard saying.”* Thayer says the Greek word means “hard, harsh, rough, stiff.” It could mean the meaning was hard to discern; but if that were that the case then these disciples could simply have asked for an explanation. I am more prone to think that the saying was “hard” because it was offensive to them. The murmuring Jews may very well have had an influence on them so much so that they considered the words of Jesus objectionable; it ran counter to their opinions and prejudices. It does not mean hard to be understood but difficult to accept.

~~ 6:61 ~~

*“But Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at  
this, said unto them, Doth this cause you to stumble?”*

The effect of this discourse and the crisis that followed in His public ministry is now described. The words of Jesus led to

deeper faith on the part of some, and to a more determined antagonism on the part of others. It is as if this discourse on the “bread of life” became the line drawn in the sand, calling for a commitment on the part of His disciples. It may be that the Lord deliberately provoked this crisis in order to weed out those who were not truly His disciples.

*“Jesus knowing in himself that his disciples murmured”* – Those who had followed the Lord were influenced by the murmuring Jews to the point that they, too, began to question the words of Jesus.

*“Doth this cause you to stumble?”* – Our English “stumble” (“offend” in the KJV) translates the Greek word *‘skandalidzo’* from which we get our word “scandal.” It would appear that these disciples now looked upon the Lord’s teaching as a scandal, filled with lies and false promises. They simply could not reconcile the claim that Jesus had come down from heaven with His earthly existence.

~~ 6:62 ~~

*“What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before?”*

In essence Jesus was asking them, “If you question my claim of having come down from heaven how will you answer when I return to heaven?” It was always Jesus’ intention to return to heaven from whence He came. Such was God’s plan and purpose. The word “What” does not appear in the Greek. More literally, “If then ye behold.”

Notice that we not only have a reference to the Lord’s ascension, but the fact that at least some of the disciples would “behold” that event. “This passage is remarkable as furnishing the only instance in which the Lord spoke in specific terms of His ascension during his earthly ministry” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 6:63 ~~

*“It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.”*

Keep in mind that these disciples had been listening to what the Lord said about eating His flesh, and drinking His blood; unfortunately their thinking was confined to material things. When Jesus said, “The flesh profiteth nothing,” it is as though He has said to them, “Do not be blinded by your desire for physical things. The fleshly things do not provide anything; they profit absolutely nothing. It is the *words* that I am speaking to you right now that are life.” This verse is the KEY to the whole of the discourse on the “bread of life.” A failure to understand or ignore this verse produces the numerous problems in interpretation of the rest of the chapter.

*“It is the spirit that giveth life”* - And what is that “*spirit*” spoken of here? It is the “*words that I have spoken,*” so says Jesus. “He Who had just said, You must eat My flesh, and drink My blood, now distinctly said the flesh as flesh alone, profiteth nothing; it is the spirit which is life. That is to say that what is suggested by the flesh, is of supreme value, not the flesh” (Morgan, ESword Module).

~~ 6:64 ~~

*“But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray him”*

The first part of the verse contains the words of the Lord to those disciples who found His sayings hard. The second half of the verse contains the words of John the apostle.

*“There are some of you that believe not”* – Robertson pointed out that “failure to believe kills the life in the words of Jesus” (Robertson, ESword Module). Exactly who “some of you” includes is not certain.

*“Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray him”* – John is speaking of Judas here. Jesus was not caught off guard; He knew fully how things would develop, who would remain faithful, and who would betray Him.

~~ 6:65 ~~

*“And he said, For this cause have I said unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it be given unto him of the Father.”*

Jesus is referring back to His words recorded in 6:44. No man *can come to the Father* unless that privilege is granted by God Himself. The question to be answered, therefore, is, “Who does God grant into His presence? “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

*“For this cause”* – Because Jesus does know all men, He knows exactly who will, and who will not, come unto the Father. Knowing that fact, the Lord expressed the full truth that not all men would come to the Father. The same warning was expressed in Matthew 7:21-23: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

~~ 6:66 ~~

*“Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”*

These were the ones who were weak in faith and unable to accept the teaching of Jesus. Legion are those men and women who have trod the same path, showing interest initially, but later become offended at the teachings of the Lord. Sadder words were never spoken than those recorded here. Here is a passage filled with tragedy. But why, after following the Lord, would they now abandon Him? Here are some possible reasons:

First, some may have left Him because of the increasing conflict with the authorities. He was headed for disaster and they wanted none of it.

They were fair-weather followers. It has been said that the test of an army is how it fights when it is tired. Those who

drifted away would have stuck by Jesus so long as his career was on the upward way, but at the first shadow of the Cross they left him (Barclay, ESword Module).

Second, some simply did not want to accept the challenge. These may have seen the implications of this discourse on the “bread of life,” and did not possess the faith necessary to see it through to the end.

Third, some may have stumbled at the emphasis Jesus placed upon the things that are spiritual as opposed to the material things. The same kind of reaction has been demonstrated on a number of occasions over the centuries. Some simply cannot see beyond the physical to that “city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). They look at the things which are temporal rather than eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).

### **Encounter with Peter**

*Confession*

6:67-71

This encounter with Peter gives us the opportunity to see why some of the disciples ceased to follow the Lord while others remained loyal, even to the end. Perhaps the largest percentage turned away out of sheer *dissapointment*. That occurred when the disciples murmured and rejected the teachings of Jesus as a “hard saying” (vs. 60). Others, such as Judas, would turn away because of *defection*. Jesus must have seen in the man great potential. Unfortunately Judas would allow the devil to enter into him and turn his devotion to disaster. Finally, we see in this section the *determination* of those men who would stay the course until the end. Oh that all men would come to learn that which the apostles learned, and which Peter stated here.

~~ 6:67 ~~

*“Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away?”*

There is here yet another opportunity for the disciples to abandon their association with Christ. Jesus would now put them to the test. He asks them plainly, “would you go away?” His words are emphatic!

No extant translation can do justice to them: ‘YOU’ do not want to withdraw too, do you?’ The negative (‘me’) suggested that the question should be answered, ‘No’ (Tenney, 124).

~~ 6:68 ~~

*“Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.”*

What a noble statement of faith on the part of Peter. Indeed, to WHOM shall we go? Who, upon the face of this earth could ever even begin to offer the hope that Jesus offers? Who could compare with Him, the great Savior and divine Son of God? It is Jesus, and Jesus alone, that has the “words of life.”

His reply showed (1) the exclusiveness of faith, for there was none other that could command their respect; (2) the fixity of faith, for the word ‘believe’ is in the perfect tense, which indicated an existing state resulting from and continuing a completed act; and (3) the finality of faith, because they finally realized in experience that He was ‘the Holy One of God’ (Tenney, 124).

Peter’s confession occurred about four months before the one he would make at Caesarea Philippi. His growth between now and then helps us to see why Peter became such a great leader for the cause of Christ.

*“to whom shall we go”* – Indeed, “to whom”! Certainly not Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed, for these do not have the “words of eternal life.” The sages of the ages cannot provide salvation. Who would want to go to Plato, Philo, or Marcus Aurelius? Peter recognized the unique teaching of the Lord, grasped the significance of Jesus being the “bread of life,” and returned the Lord’s question with a question of his own.

~~ 6:69 ~~

*“And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God.”*

What caused Peter to make this statement? His statement is based upon evidence which he had witnessed during his time with Jesus. This affirmation of Peter marked a definite state of settled faith on his part and that of the disciples. It is curious that *“The Holy One of God”* is not used anywhere else in John. I was particularly impressed with Barclay’s assessment of Peter:

Peter’s loyalty was based on a personal relationship to Jesus Christ. There were many things he did not understand; he was just as bewildered and puzzled as anyone else. But there was something about Jesus for which he would willingly die. In the last analysis Christianity is not a philosophy which we accept, nor a theory to which we give allegiance. It is a personal response to Jesus Christ. It is the allegiance and the love which a man gives because his heart will not allow him to do anything else (Barclay, ESword Module).

~~ 6:70 ~~

*“Jesus answered them, Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?”*

*“One of you is a devil”* – This simply means that Judas was influenced to become a servant of the Devil, not that he was such originally. Johnson points out that “diabolical” comes closer to the meaning of the word.

~~ 6:71 ~~

*“Now he spake of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve”*

At one time Judas enjoyed the fellowship and privileges that went along with that special band of followers of Jesus. “Being one of the twelve” and then having turned away from the Lord is a clear indication that apostasy is a real possibility.

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“THE BREAD OF LIFE”  
by Tom Wacaster

Bread is a staple food around the world and is one of humanity’s oldest foods, having been around since the very dawn of agriculture. Having traveled to various countries I find it interesting that different cultures have varying textures, shapes, and tastes of their bread. While doing mission work in Ukraine we would purchase our bread at a little kiosk or shop that sold only bread. The lines would be long, and seldom did they ever package their bread. On one occasion we saw the back of a truck loaded with loaves of bread which had no packaging. There were no preservatives in their bread, and so it would grow stale within a short period of time. That may be why the loaves were so small. Despite the lack of packaging, the long lines to purchase, and the absence of preservatives, I do not recall a single time we visited some of our brethren when bread was not served. Occasionally a baker would experiment with a new recipe for a day, but return to the customary size, shape, and ingredients after it was gone. Unfortunately, any attempt to get him to remember a particular bread we liked met with a blank stare. He simply could not remember what he had baked the week before.

It is sometimes noted that a preacher’s sermon is not long remembered upon the closing “Amen” of the weekly service. And, some have therefore, disparaged the importance of listening to religious sermons on the grounds that they are soon forgotten. A number of years ago a reader of the *British Weekly* wrote a letter to the editor addressing this matter. “Dear sir, I noticed that ministers seem to set a great deal of importance on their sermons and spend a great deal of time in preparing them. I have been attending services quite regularly for the past 30 years and during that time if I estimate correctly, I have listened to no less than 3,000 sermons. But, to my consternation, I discover I cannot recall a single one of them. I wonder if a minister’s time might be more profitably spent on something else? Sincerely....” The letter provoked a great deal of discussion, with responses both pro and con appearing in the “letters to the editor.” The following response ended the debate: “My dear sir, I have been married for 30 years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals, mostly my wife’s cooking. Suddenly I have discovered that

I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet, I received nourishment from every one of them. I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago. Sincerely....”

The absence of spiritual nutrition in our country is evident at every turn. A steady diet of the bread of life that is found only in God’s word would go a long way to alleviating the social problems that challenge this generation. Don’t worry about remembering each and every lesson you hear, or retaining each and every scripture you read. The accumulative effect will be evident over the long haul and you will be blessed for having eaten thereof.





## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### “NEVER A MAN SO SPAKE”

*Activity At the Feast Of Tabernacles, 7:1-52*

So far as the chronological sequence in the ministry of our Lord, we come now to the commencement of the third and final period. Following the events in chapter six, John bypasses the great confession that Peter made at Caesarea Philippi as recorded in Matthew 16:16-18 and begins the record of the last six months of the Lord's life.

With this chapter the opposition from the Jewish authorities enters a new phase. From this point to the death of the Lord on the cross we will see increasing hostility toward Jesus. “The rapids begin to roar in this chapter; the rising storm of hatred against the Lord would not diminish till a cross arose upon Golgotha” (Coffman, 195). The opening sentence of chapter seven reflects a settled hostility on the part of the Jews. It was no longer a matter of *what* was to be done to Jesus, for they had already concluded that Jesus must be destroyed. From this point on to the close of chapter 11 Jesus is living on borrowed time. Morgan summed it up this way:

The first incident which John records in that period is that of the occurrence of the feast of Tabernacles. At the time He was in Galilee, and we are told the reason. He would not, that is, He did not desire, to walk in Judæa because the Jews were seeking to kill Him. The hostility was becoming more and more intense. All the conditions were characterized by unrest. Everything was in turmoil around our Lord. He was the one calm, poised, majestic soul. His friends were perplexed. Some of them had gone back to walk no more with Him. His enemies were becoming more and more bitter. Controversy was surging round Him. He was engaged in discussions with His enemies, discussions with enquirers, discussions presently with His own (Morgan, ESword Module).

The whole of this chapter focuses upon the things that occurred in connection with the “Feast of Tabernacles.”

There seems to be four movements in the chapter. The first is in connection with His physical brethren (vss. 1-13). The second has to do with the rulers in Jerusalem (vss. 14-24). The third has to do with the Lord's encounter with the citizens in Jerusalem (vss. 25-44). The last part of the chapter is John's record of the report to the Sanhedrin (vss. 45-53).

As I mentioned in the last chapter, this particular point in the Lord's ministry is a pivotal point. The closing part of chapter six is the defining moment. "Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66) stands in contrast to the words of Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). As the pivotal moment in the Lord's ministry, this chapter also magnifies the Lord and gives us a greater appreciation for His courage, determination, and commitment to follow through with the divine plan to save mankind. No wonder the officers who were sent to arrest the Lord were so astonished! The only thing they could say to the Jewish leaders was, "Never man so spake" (7:46). Let's turn our attention now to an examination of this great chapter.

*The Lord's encounter with His physical brethren*  
(7:1-13)

~~ 7:1 ~~

*"And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Judaea, because the Jews sought to kill him"*

John begins with a chronological note. The events in chapter six occurred during the week of the Passover, but when we come to chapter seven the "feast of tabernacles was at hand." John has actually passed over our Lord's labors from the Passover to the feast of tabernacles, a period of about six months. It was during that interval that Jesus visited the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, the only time He ever passed beyond the boundaries of Israel to a Gentile country. It was there that He healed the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician women. After returning from that area He healed one with an impediment of speech, and fed the 4,000. It was during this time that Jesus visited the area of Cesarea

Philippi, where our Lord's conversation with the disciples evoked the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16-18). The transfiguration occurred during this six month interval, as well as the healing of a lunatic child, and the paying of tribute money at Capernaum. Following those events, Jesus set out for Jerusalem to attend the feast of Tabernacles. So we can see that only a small selected portion of the ministry of our Lord is recorded by this gospel writer. Matthew 15-18, Mark 7-9 and Luke 9 cover the events during this interval of time.

*“And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee”* – But why? John gives us the answer, “because the Jews sought to kill him.” During this period an intense hatred had developed toward Jesus, and by the time He arrives in Jerusalem, the Jews were seeking to kill the Lord. John's use of the word “Jews” is limited. “He regularly used it of unbelieving Jews...the word was used uniformly to denote those antagonistic to Christianity” (Woods, 141). Of course it was not the Jews as a whole, but those in position of authority and influence. Johnson noted, “Christ's disciples and friends were all Jews by race, but when John wrote, all disciples had merged their race distinctions into Christ and were Christians. ‘The Jews’ were still a hostile people, and when the word is used without qualification it has this hostile sense” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 7:2 ~~

*“Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand”*

Though the Lord spent most of His time in Galilee, He broke that routine in order to observe the feast of tabernacles. John's record of the Lord's last visit to Jerusalem prior to the Passion Week occupies all of chapters seven through ten.

*“feast of tabernacles”* - Three times a year the whole adult population of Judea was required to assemble at Jerusalem to attend one of the great feasts. These feasts occurred during some of the finest seasons of the year, spring and autumn, and were chosen for these gatherings of the people. Johnson had this interesting note:

Separated into the various tribes, these annual gatherings must have served to cement the bond of national unity and establish acquaintance and friendship (Johnson, 116).

This gathering of the people would have presented a number of opportunities for discussion regarding those things happening in and around Jerusalem concerning the Christ; and eventually when the people returned home they would have carried the news of the arrest, crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ. This particular feast was instituted to commemorate the time when the Israelites had dwelt in tents during the wilderness wanderings. During this feast the people were instructed to dwell in tents. The flat roofed houses would have been covered with the temporary huts, and the hillside would be cluttered with rough structures occupied by the sojourning multitude. The dates would correspond with the last portion of September and early part of October (see in this connection Leviticus chapter 23:33-43). Johnson had this discerning note:

It is a remarkable fact that after so long and systematic an absence from Jerusalem, as eighteen months prior to this feast, our Lord should attend every feast for the next six months, the last of his ministry, in their order” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 7:3 ~~

*“His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may behold thy works which thou doest”*

*“His brethren”* are His brethren in the flesh: James, Joses, Simon and Jude (Matthew 13:55). Our Lord’s physical brethren not only did not believe in Him, but were disposed to scoff at His claims. Their instruction was that Jesus *“depart hence, and go into Judaea.”* Evidently they thought it inconsistent with His claims that He was the Christ to avoid the very center of religious culture and activity, especially during this important feast. Additionally, it had been more than a year since Jesus had been in Jerusalem, and His absence may have seemed odd to these brethren of Jesus. “Often large groups traveled together to the

great feasts and likely those brothers of Jesus were in one of those caravans” (Woods, 144). This would explain the presence of His physical brethren at this particular moment.

*“That thy disciples may behold thy works”* - Johnson thinks that their words were “partly ridicule and partly entreaty” (Johnson, ESword Module). While Jesus had moved His work to Galilee because of the hostility of the Jews in Judaea, our Lord’s brethren encouraged Him to go to Judaea that the *“disciples may behold thy works which thou doest.”* It is important to note that God’s purposes and plans do not always coincide with the best intentions of men, no matter how noble those intentions might be. “The calendar He and the Father had mapped out called for His death at the next Passover - not at this point” (Taylor, 102).

~~ 7:4 ~~

*“For no man doeth anything in secret, and himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou doest these things, manifest thyself to the world”*

*“no man doeth anything in secret”* - That is, no prophet has ever done anything secretly, unknown to the public. The word “if” suggests that they were doubting, and the next verse plainly states that they disbelieved on Him. Johnson observed, “While the counsel of these brothers, from a worldly point of view, might seem wise, it is in another form the same counsel offered by the devil in the second temptation, and spurned by our Lord” (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 7:5 ~~

*“For even his brethren did not believe on him”*

It is a most curious thing that the brothers of Jesus did not as yet believe in Jesus. They had witnessed more than three years of some of the most astonishing teaching imaginable, such teaching being so unlike that of the Pharisees. In addition, the miracles of our Lord had been witnessed by great multitudes from literally one end of Israel to the other. And yet, with all of this evidence, they still did not believe. It is also evident from this passage that Jesus had physical brothers and sisters (half-brethren). Mary had at least six children besides our Lord. There may have been

more, but we are sure that she had four more boys (James, Joses, Simon, and Judas) and at least two daughters. This stands in stark contrast to the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, as taught by the Catholics.

We cannot leave this verse without commenting on the great discouragement that our Lord must have experienced at the entire disposition of His half-brothers. For some reason they wanted Jesus to go to Jerusalem and manifest His “works” to the disciples there. There is a note of disparagement in their affirmation that “*no man doeth anything in secret.*” John’s note to his readers that the Lord’s half-brothers “*did not believe on him*” must, in some way, be connected to their suggestion to Jesus. Brother Woods has this:

These words and the disposition which prompted them must have been especially painful to the Lord, coming as they did from his own kin. Not infrequently those who seek to serve Jesus faithfully find the most intense opposition from their own relatives (Woods, 142).

I also thought Morgan’s comments regarding the disbelief of the disciples were noteworthy;

They had evidently travelled with Him in those earliest weeks. They had seen the sign at Cana. They had been interested enough to join their mother in an attempt to save Him from Himself. But so far they were not convinced as to His Messiahship. Therefore they came to Him with the advice of worldly wisdom. Everything they said seemed to be reasonable. What they said in effect was, Why are You stopping here in obscure Galilee? If Your claims are justified, go to the centre of things. Their whole thought is revealed in the words, “Manifest Thyself to the world” (Morgan, ESword Module).

~~ 7:6 ~~

*“Jesus therefore saith unto them, My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready”*

Please notice that the words “my time is not yet come,” and “my time is not yet fulfilled,” begin and end the Lord’s verbal

response. The Lord refused to go to Jerusalem in a “public way” because He did not want to draw attention to Himself. There is no indication that He shunned publicity prior to this moment, but the intense hatred of the religious leaders posed a threat to heaven’s time table. In addition, it seems clear to me that God and Christ were working according to a specified time table. Jesus had revealed Himself bit by bit. He had revealed Himself to the apostles, leading them to declare Him to be the Son of God. He had revealed Himself to the Samaritan women and those of her community who might believe. He had even revealed Himself in the synagogue in Capernaum as the “Bread of Life.” Three of the apostles had witnessed His transfiguration, but as Johnson noted, “The time for the grand final lesson of the cross, the tomb, the resurrection and the Ascension had not come” (Johnson, 119).

Had Jesus entered Jerusalem publicly there is the distinct possibility that He would have faced a premature death at the hands of those who hated Him (cf. vs 7). In order to avoid the publicity, Jesus instructed His brethren to “go up unto the feast” without Him. Those seeking Jesus would be looking for Him to travel with friends and family, and their presence would have naturally drawn attention to Him. Second, Jesus waited until He could go to Jerusalem in “secret,” thereby avoiding any contact with the religious leaders seeking His life. Coffman has correctly noted that “Jesus did not say, ‘I will not go,’ the present tense meaning ‘at that time’ he would not go” (Coffman, 197). The Greek word for “time” is *kairos* which could mean “an opportunity; that is, the best time to do something, the moment when circumstances are most suitable” (Barclay, ESword Module). Jesus was saying that it was not the most opportune time for Him to go to Jerusalem.

*“your time is always ready”* – Barnes thinks Jesus was saying, “It makes no difference to you when you go up. Your going will excite no tumult or opposition; it will not attract attention, and will not endanger your lives” (Barnes, ESword Module). But I happen to think there is more to His answer than immediately meets the eye. Keep in mind the advice the Lord’s brethren had given. As Morgan suggested, “It was such wise advice by the standards of worldly wisdom. Do not hug the shadows. Get into

the limelight. Worldly wisdom, yes, quite worldly; and if you want another word, devilish wisdom. Get out to the crowds; go into the limelight; do something that leaves no room for doubt” (Morgan, ESword Module). Please note that their advice was precisely the same temptation the Lord faced in the wilderness following His forty days fasting: “Then the devil taketh him into the holy city; and he set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and, On their hands they shall bear thee up, Lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matt. 4:5-6). Jesus would not yield: “one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Though He must have felt a certain affection for His brethren and their good intentions, divine wisdom knew better.

I come back now to the Lord’s answer: “My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready.” Jesus was not being unkind; He was simply saying that they were not called to the task for which He had come.

~~ 7:7 ~~

*“The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that its works are evil”*

The world hated Jesus because He came exposing their sins. John the Baptist was hated (and eventually put to death) because he plainly exposed the sins of his fellow Jews and called for repentance in preparation of the coming Messiah. When Jesus came exposing the sins of the Pharisees, lawyers, and Sadducees, they sought to destroy Him. Since that time, men have hated Christ and everything He stood for. Voltaire, Thomas Paine, and Robert Ingersol, and others like them, hate Christianity because it exposes their unbelief and the folly of their life. Why are we surprised when men hate the truth today?

*“because I testify of it, that its works are evil”* – Jesus did not mince words when it came to sin. Matthew 23 contains one of the most scathing rebukes of the religious leaders of His age. Jesus called that generation “an adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:38).

~~ 7:8-9 ~~

*“Go ye up unto the feast: I go not up unto this feast; because my time is not yet fulfilled. And having said these things unto them, he abode still in Galilee”*

A more literal translation would be, “I am not now going to the feast.” He uses the present tense. At that point in time He was not going to go. His accompaniment of the disciples, in an open manner, most certainly would have led to an early termination of His ministry at the hands of the rebellious Jews. So He chose to remain behind, not to enter into the city with this great caravan of pilgrims. So He remained in Galilee till after their departure.

~~ 7:10 ~~

*“But when his brethren were gone up unto the feast, then went he also up, not publicly, but as it were in secret”*

Jesus made His way to Jerusalem in a way so as not to attract attention to Himself. Geographically, He may have detoured through Samaria, or entered the city by some obscure path or road. Some have suggested that Jesus misled His brethren, since He plainly said that He was not going to Jerusalem. Brother Woods has as good an answer as any regarding an apparent inconsistency between the Lord’s words and His actions:

Some affect to see a contradiction between what Jesus said to his brothers and his later actions but this is to misapprehend his meaning. It is clear, from the context, that he rejected their suggestion to go for the purpose of declaring himself openly; his subsequent visit, quietly and without ostentation, is vastly different from what they visualized (Woods, 144).

~~ 7:11 ~~

*“The Jews therefore sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he?”*

This verse shows us that the authorities were lying in wait for Jesus to enter the city. We may never know their intent, or their wicked schemes, but we have no doubt that had Jesus been with His family when they entered the city that He would have

immediately been arrested. They were going about inquiring of the multitude, "Where is he?" The verbs "sought" and "said" are both imperfects, literally "were seeking" and "were saying." They were anxious to find Jesus and silence Him.

~~ 7:12 - ~~

*"And there was much murmuring among the multitudes concerning him: some said, He is a good man; others said, Not so, but he leadeth the multitude astray"*

There was evidently much discussion among the "multitude" regarding this one called Jesus. That the multitudes were arrayed against each other in hopeless disagreement is clearly indicated in the text. Failing to use the Scriptures as they should, they had no reference point from which to draw any rational and informed conclusions about Jesus. Thus, to some Jesus was a "good man," and to others He was a false teacher, seeking to lead the multitude away.

~~ 7:13 ~~

*"Yet no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews"*

This is a "true indication of an utterly Jesuitical domination of the people" (Johnson, 120). Fear of human opinions and/or power above a fear and respect for God and His word will cause multitudes of souls to be lost. While we sustain a deep respect for those who have taught us the word and led us to a greater knowledge of God, we must maintain such a respect for Jehovah that we will not allow the traditions and opinions of men to take precedence over the clear teaching of God's word.

The situation in Jerusalem at this time was tense. The signs which Jesus had performed for well over three years, and His teachings among the multitudes, set Him apart from the "prophets" of old. The time had come for logical and rational conclusions to be drawn regarding who this "Prophet" was that had come into their midst; but as Coffman noted, "There was a dreadful air of impending disaster; Satan was in control of the government of the Holy City, reminding one of Paris in the terror" (Coffman, 198). Indeed, the strife between Christ and

Satan was never more dramatic than during the final eighteen months of the Lord's life.

*The encounter with the rulers in Jerusalem*

7:14-24

~~ 7:14 ~~

*“But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.”*

*“But when it was now the midst of the feast”* - Jesus came into Jerusalem some three or four days after the eight day feast had begun. Johnson tells us that “Bengel calculates that on this year the middle of the feast would come on the Sabbath day” (Johnson, 121). That being the case, the temple would now be crowded, and the town buzzing with activity. No doubt the authorities would have ceased looking for Jesus's entrance, and our Lord would be able to enter the city and go up to the Temple unhindered.

*“when up into the temple and taught”* – Malachi had prophesied of this moment in history: “Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts” (Malachi 3:1). Coffman had this note:

Once more the messenger of the covenant came suddenly to his temple (Mal. 3:1); and such boldness frustrated and unnerved the Lord's enemies. They did not know how to deal with it. His learned dissertations in the temple were persuading many to believe on him; and the Pharisees were unable to reconcile such wisdom with the fact of Jesus' never having attended the rabbinic schools (Coffman, Theophilus Software).

Although Jesus had come secretly, refusing to make a show of Himself, He did not hesitate to take advantage of yet another opportunity to teach publically. “He seems to flash upon the Jewish multitude on this occasion with the suddenness of the

lightning flash. How he came to Jerusalem, whether he dwelt in a leafy booth as others, whether his voice was heard in the Hallel, we are not told. All we know is that suddenly he presents himself in the temple, the very stronghold of his enemies” (Johnson, ESword Module). Eighteen months had passed since His last visit to Jerusalem. Now with a multitude of miracles behind Him, and the Cross before Him, our Lord chose this point in time to present Himself to Israel.

~~ 7:15 ~~

*“The Jews therefore marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?”*

*“The Jews therefore marveled”* - The original word means “to wonder; to admire” (Strong, ESword Module). We are not provided the details of the Lord’s teaching, but John does tell us that the words of the Lord caused the people to “marvel.” Sadly, they marveled, not at the words or the message, but rather at how this man, not having “letters” could speak such things. They were not impressed with the message, nor the man, but the mystery surrounding His education. Instead, they were impressed with the fact that Jesus had the “letters”! The *‘grammata’*! The people were impressed because Jesus spoke with authority; as a man having an impressive degree. Here was a man from Galilee who did not speak like the Galileans. Instead, He spoke the language of the learned. It was this intellectual accent at which they marveled. Whether the words “this man” were words of contempt or honest inquiry we may never know.

*“letters, having never learned?”* - The Jews were astonished at the Lord’s learning. The Jews were perplexed by Jesus’ mental ability, acquired without the benefit of any of the notable rabbinical schools. Not only that, it was customary that only a disciple of an accredited teacher was entitled to expound scripture and talk about the Law. Having no “letters,” the Lord was turning tradition on its head. Here was this lowly carpenter, a man with no Rabbinical training whatever, daring to quote and to expound Moses to them. Woods concluded, “They were actually displeased that he, who was not a graduate of their schools, should pretend to teach the law and the prophets”

(Woods, 146). They questioned the right of this man, who had no Doctor's diploma, to appear as a public teacher.

Before we leave this verse it should be noted that these Jewish leaders failed the test once again. It was not divine wisdom of our Lord that impressed the people, but the learned accent; they missed the spiritual intention of the Lord's words completely. When men are more impressed with a man's education rather than the message he might bring, it is a failure on their part.

~~ 7:16 ~~

*“Jesus therefore answered them and said, My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me”*

Here is the Lord's answer to their, “How?” Had He claimed He needed no teacher, that He taught Himself, He may have damaged His credibility among the multitudes who were willing to listen. In effect Jesus told these Jews, “You ask who is my teacher? You ask by what authority I give my exposition of scripture? My authority is God.” It was as if Jesus were telling the multitude, “Grasp the teaching! Focus on the message! It is not mine; it is the Father's.” This would be a recurring theme in the discourses of the Lord (see John 12:49-50 and 14:10). “What he taught, he taught because it was the will of the Father” (Woods, 147). Such was always characteristic of Jesus. He submitted to the will of the Father in all things.

~~ 7:17 ~~

*“If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself”*

*“If any man willith to do his will”* -How does one determine if any teaching is the will of the Father? If an individual has the will to do the Father's bidding, his study of the word will be enlightening. We must have no ax to grind, or any “doctrine” to prove, as we diligently search the scriptures. Without such an attitude and disposition of heart, our minds will be prejudiced and we will not come to a knowledge of the truth of God's word. We agree with brother Woods that “where there is the strong determination to do what God requires the effort will lead to a knowledge of the divine origin of the message and its meaning.

The honest heart, the sincere soul, whose only motivation is to do right will have no difficulty in determining what is right. Such will seek in the right place, the scriptures; in the right way, sincerely; and for the right purpose, to be saved and to do the will of God” (Woods, 147).

It has long been my studied conviction that the soul seeking the will of God will be providentially led to a knowledge of that truth. The tragic and unfortunate situation existing among the masses is the blind acceptance of whatever teaching may come their way, and they receive it at face value, never comparing that teaching with the scriptures in order to determine the validity of the message being presented. This being the case, “unbelief originates in an indisposition to do the will of God” (Johnson, 122). I share here with my readers some choice words by brothers Lipscomb and Johnson:

Does not this involve the conclusion that if anyone in the world really desires to do the will of God, he will be brought to know that will? Is it possible that God would give his Son to die to open the way of salvation, and then leave one to die in ignorance of that way who would accept it if he knew it? (Lipscomb, GA Commentary on John, 111).

I have never heard of one who devoutly sought to know and do the will of God who remained in unbelief (Johnson, 122).

~~ 7:18 ~~

*“He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him”*

Herein is a mark of the true motivation of the false teacher. If he presumes to speak “of himself” (i.e. his own message), he is said to seek “his own glory.” On the other hand, the man that seeks the glory of the Father, as Jesus did, is “true” in the sense he speaks the truth. Of such a man, it is said “*there is no unrighteousness in him.*” Of course our Lord made the application to Himself; the point being that He did not speak “from himself,” but from the Father.

~~ 7:19 ~~

*“Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you doeth the law? Why seek ye to kill me?”*

Surely they respected Moses. No one would doubt the truth of that great patriarch’s message. And yet, they did not keep the law. This illustration was designed to show these Jews that it was not a matter of WHERE the teaching came from, for such was evident as attested by the miracles which Jesus had performed. It was a matter of the disobedient hearts of these Jews. As Johnson noted, “I take it that this remark is designed to convict the Jews of not ‘willing to do the will of God’” (Johnson, 122). Knowing their hearts, Jesus goes right to the evil intention which they harbored in their hearts, namely that of taking the life of the Son of God.

It is at this point that Jesus brings into the public eye the covert attack from the Pharisees that He was a breaker of the Law of Moses. During his former visit to Jerusalem He had healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1 ff.). The Pharisees had, at that time, charged Him with breaking the Law of Moses, a charge which they likely continued to levy against our Lord, and the very charge they would have used to arrest Jesus upon His entry into the city during this feast had they been able to find Him. But why would Jesus bring their plots to kill Him into the open at this time? Foster suggests at least three reasons: (1) To warn His disciples how near His death was; (2) to warn His enemies and try to save them from their terrible purpose; (3) to let all men know that He knew of their plots so that men would be able to understand the gospel (Foster, 784-785).

~~ 7:20 ~~

*“The multitude answered, Thou hast a demon: who seeketh to kill thee?”*

The “multitude” here is probably those of the common people who were not aware of the plot on the part of the Jewish leaders to kill Jesus. It is our Lord’s reference to this particular intention of the leaders that leads me to conclude that this was the primary reason why He delayed His entrance into Jerusalem well after

His family had come to the city. Likely the people were honest in their question. They must have thought that some demonic influence had put this notion into His head. “It said, in effect, ‘You must be under a demonic hallucination to think that somebody seeks to kill you.’ It was an ignorant outburst by those not in possession of information regarding the true attitude of the authorities and deserved no reply” (Woods, 148).

~~ 7:21 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, I did one work, and ye all marvel because thereof”*

The “one work” was the healing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. It had been interpreted as a violation of the Sabbath law, thus angering the authorities. That miracle had taken place eighteen months earlier, on His last visit to Jerusalem (John 5:1 ff.). Their “marvel” was not so much with regard to the miracle, but the marvel that Jesus would (according to their opinion) violate the Sabbath.

~~ 7:22 ~~

*“Moses hath given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of the fathers); and on the sabbath ye circumcise a man”*

The Law of Moses required that a child be circumcised on the eighth day, and if that day happened to fall on the Sabbath, the day was disregarded and the rite performed. “The Rabbis said, ‘Circumcision drives away the Sabbath’” (Johnson, 123). To show the inconsistency in their amazement, Jesus introduces their attitude about circumcision on the Sabbath day. They would, in fact, circumcise on the Sabbath if it fell on the eighth day as the law required. See Leviticus 12:3. If someone could be circumcised on the Sabbath, why could a man not be healed on the Sabbath?

~~ 7:23 ~~

*“If a man receiveth circumcision on the sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken; are ye wroth with me, because I made a man every whit whole on the sabbath?”*

The logical conclusion is a demonstration of the Lord's great wisdom. Brother Woods summed up the whole of the Lord's argument in remarkable fashion:

It was by them concluded that the specific law of circumcision should take precedence over the general law of the Sabbath which forbade work on that day; and, in this they were right, even though the act of circumcision was regarded as a purifying process involving only a part of the body. Jesus, in healing the infirm man performed something much greater since it involved the deliverance of the entire man. The argument put in brief form is this: 'If the act of circumcision, involving only a small portion of the body, must be done to comply with the law of circumcision even if it falls on the Sabbath day, by what right do you condemn me for an act done on the Sabbath which brings healing to the whole body (Woods, 149).

~~ 7:24 ~~

*“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment”*

Judgment must be made on sound Biblical principles. It is not wrong to make judgment about certain acts, but it is wrong to judge one's motives, heart, etc. Any judgment that we may exercise regarding a person and the deeds he might perform, must be “righteous judgment.” All of God's commandments are righteousness. It is necessary, therefore, that our judgment be based upon God's word.

*Encounter with the citizens in Jerusalem*

7:25-44

Having recorded the Lord's encounter with His brethren, and the encounter with the Jewish leaders, John now turns our attention to Jesus' encounter with the citizens in and around Jerusalem.

~~ 7:25-26 ~~

*“Some therefore of them of Jerusalem said, Is not this he whom they seek to kill? And lo, he speaketh openly, and they say*

*nothing unto him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?"*

*"Some therefore of them of Jerusalem"* – John makes a distinction between the rulers in Jerusalem and these common citizens. The citizens were evidently confused. They knew "this is he whom they seek to kill?" Why did the rulers not come and take Jesus? Here He was, teaching in the temple, right in the midst of them, and yet the authorities seem indifferent.

*"Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?"* – Perhaps this is the reason the rulers had taken no action! Maybe they had now concluded that Jesus really is the Messiah.

Before I leave this section it is important to make the following observation. As for the rulers, they indeed DID know who Jesus was! The parable of the husbandman in Matthew 21:23 clearly points out that they recognized Jesus as the "heir," but because He was not what they expected, they crucified Him. They did not know that Jesus was God in the flesh, but I have no doubt that at least some of them were fully aware that He was the Messiah.

~~ 7:27 ~~

*"Howbeit we know this man whence he is: but when the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence he is"*

*"we know this man whence he is"* – Micah had prophesied exactly where the Christ should be born: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). Seeing that Jesus actually grew up in the area of Nazareth, these Jews could not reconcile the prophet with what they had witnessed firsthand. Had they taken the time to search the truth on the matter they could easily have resolved their difficulty. Is not the same true with so many who have been caught up in error, or deluded by false teachers?

*"but when the Christ cometh, no one knoweth whence he is"* - An elaborate theory had been developed from the Old Testament passages of Daniel 7:13, Isaiah 53:8, and Malachi 3:1, that Christ

would make some sort of sudden appearance, arriving with the clouds at the precise moment, unannounced. Living this side of the cross, and having “the word of prophecy made more sure” (2 Pet. 1:19), we know that Daniel 7:13 was actually prophesying of the Lord’s ascension to the right hand of God; not His entrance into this world. We also know that Isaiah (53:8) spoke, not of the Lord’s entrance into this world, but of the injustice the Lord experienced at His trial before Pilate and the Jewish authorities prior to His crucifixion.

The Jews were looking for some kind of spectacular appearance of the Christ; something to astound and astonish. Jesus did not fit this expectation, hence the reason for their confusion. This verse is closely connected to the previous. Keep in mind that they were perplexed as to exactly why the authorities did not arrest Jesus. “We know all about him; we know where he came from, we know of his parents, the city where he was raised, and this proves that he is not the Messiah. So why don’t the authorities arrest him?”

~~ 7:28-29 ~~

*“Jesus therefore cried in the temple, teaching and saying, Ye both know me, and know whence I am; and I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. I know him; because I am from him, and he sent me”*

“Jesus therefore cried in the temple” – The words “cried in the temple” suggest that up to this point Jesus had been speaking in a subdued voice to those who were in close proximity to Him, but now He cries out so that others in the temple area might hear, and be encouraged to draw near and listen. Morgan had this note:

This word “cried” is a very strong word, showing that what was now said was not said quietly, but under the stress of great emotion. Remember all that had preceded this. He had come up to the feast, and had been teaching. He had claimed that the authority for His teaching was that it was not His own, it was the teaching of God. Then this discussion had broken out about the impotence of the

rulers. Then “Jesus cried.” It was a great outburst of emotion (Morgan, ESword Module).

Let’s take a closer look at what He actually says here.

*“Ye both know me, and know whence I am”* - What did He mean by these words? Was Jesus speaking despairingly to these Jews? Some seem to think so. The more reasonable explanation is that He was not taking up their objection in order to refute it. There was a sense in which the words *were* true. He *was* known to friend and foe alike. They knew about His earthly parentage, His home, and His early life; but this was far different from a real knowledge of Him. Yes, they knew Him; but they failed to grasp the purpose of His life and the meaning of the message He brought.

*“I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true”*- The two verses before us reveal the mission that had been given to Him from the Father. The Jews knew Jesus, and from whence He came, but only in the physical sense. There is a sense of irony in Jesus’ answer, as if He were saying, “You profess to know all about me, whence I came; yet if this were true you would believe, for I came not of myself, but was sent by one who is true; you do not even know who sent me” (Johnson, 124).

*“whom ye know not”* – The One Who sent Christ, they did not know. Whatever else these rulers thought they *might* know, one thing was certain: they did not know God.

*“I know him”* – Whereas these rulers in Israel did not know the Father, Jesus claimed an intimate knowledge of God. His knowledge of the Father was from experience, since He came FROM the Father.

*“I am from him, and he sent me”* – These were words of authority. If Jesus were not Who He claimed to be, the words would border on blasphemy. It was this claim of authority on equality with God that so angered these rulers.

~~ 7:30 ~~

*“They sought therefore to take him: and no man laid his hand on him, because his hour was not yet come”*

*“They sought therefore to take him”* – Take note of the word “therefore.” It was because of the claim He made in the previous sentence that they sought to “take him.”

All through this Gospel of John there is the revelation of the fact that the deepest reason of hostility to Him was, as they supposed, His blasphemy. It began in chapter five, when He said, “My Father worketh even until now, and I work.” They then had said, He makes Himself equal with God. Here again for the same reason, they sought to take Him (Morgan, ESword Module).

*“and no man laid his hand on him, because His hour was not yet come”* – The rulers wanted to kill Him. Even some of the citizens were inclined to have Him arrested and bring Him before the Sanhedrin and put an end to His supposed blasphemy; but they could not lay a hand on Him. Take a moment and contemplate the force of what John has recorded here: “no man laid his hand on him.” From a purely physical standpoint this cannot be explained. Here was an unarmed man; a Galilean peasant. Before Him were men of power, wanting to kill Him; and yet, they did not lay a hand on Jesus. We can only conclude that there was a definite time table in the plan of God. The work of our Lord would culminate in His death upon the cross. But the precise moment of that death had been determined by the divine Godhead. The words here imply “a supernatural restraint imposed upon Jesus’ enemies. An overruling providence prevented his arrest, despite the fact that they actually sent a company of men to take him” (Coffman, 204). There are a number possible explanations as to why these officers did not arrest Jesus at this time. (1) There is, of course, the divine purpose, and perhaps associated with this miraculous restraint; (2) there was the very character and manner of Jesus, both in His countenance and His teaching; (3) there is the possibility, as Foster suggests, that “they did not know whether He would suddenly turn on them His miraculous power and destroy them” (Foster, 788); (4) there was the possible backlash

from the multitude (which may have had a great deal of bearing upon their actions seeing that when they did arrest Jesus it was in secret so that the people would be unaware of His arrest until they would learn early the next morning that Jesus had been condemned to death and awaiting crucifixion.

~~ 7:31 ~~

*“But of the multitude many believed on him; and they said, When the Christ shall come, will he do more signs than those which this man hath done?”*

We learn that “signs” were designed to produce belief. The miracles of Jesus could not be denied. And the argument which these people presented here was impressive. Indeed, when the Messiah did come, would He do more signs than those which Jesus had performed? In 1993 I had the opportunity to revisit Barnaul in eastern Siberia. There was a young man by the name of Sergey, whom I had met in the 1992 campaign to that city, who had some doubts regarding this man Jesus. To believe in God was not difficult; to believe in the historical Jesus was easy; but to believe in the “miracles” that were attributed to Him by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? This was something with which this young man struggled. I simply pointed out that IF indeed God came in the flesh, would we expect anything less? My answer must have satisfied his doubt, because I learned later that Sergey was baptized later that month, and now works diligently to further the Lord’s cause in that city.

Unfortunately, these unbelieving Jews were not willing to accept the implications of what they knew was true, and sought to destroy Jesus as quickly as possible. “How great was the blame of those evil rulers who not only rejected the Lord for themselves but were the principle cause of a nation’s failure to receive him” (Coffman, 204).

~~ 7:32 ~~

*“The Pharisees heard the multitude murmuring these things concerning him; and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him”*

With the popularity of Jesus growing, and the possibility that Jesus might sway the multitude, the action on the part of these Pharisees was designed to halt the teaching of Jesus, and prevent any further influence toward belief on the part of the Jews. It was necessary, therefore, that the ruling class take action; so they “sent officers to take him.”

~~ 7:33-34 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said, Yet a little while am I with you, and I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, ye cannot come”*

Jesus was fully aware of the purpose and intent of the approaching officers. Evidently seeing them approaching, Jesus speaks to the multitude.

*“Yet a little while am I with you”* - The “little while” has reference to the short time He would now remain upon the earth. Jesus was saying, “I will be here for just a little longer, and then I will return to the Father. At that time, you will look for me, and not be able to find me because where I am, you will not be able to come.” He was speaking of His resurrection and ascension, and shows that He was aware of His impending arrest and the beginning of the end. Coffman quotes Hovey:

Their longing and looking for the Messiah will continue after the rejection and crucifixion. Vainly will they expect the great Prince foretold in their scriptures; and bitter will be their disappointment, from age to age, because he does not appear. But clinging to their false hope of what the Messiah should be, and hardening themselves against the evidence that he has already appeared in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, they will never find the deliverer whom they seek (Coffman, 205).

*“and where I am, ye cannot come”* - Some critics see a blanket condemnation of those who sought to take Jesus, without so much a glimmer of hope for forgiveness and salvation later. Foster addressed this:

Did Jesus consign to utter despair those who were seeking to kill Him? Could they not hear and obey the gospel and be saved when the historic facts of man’s redemption had

been achieved? But Jesus was speaking here to the crowd immediately in front of Him. The soldiers had been sent to arrest Him so that His enemies could destroy Him. He responded to their purpose by warning them that not only could they not take Him now, they could not even follow Him to destroy Him where He was going (Foster, 789).

And so it has been through the centuries since our Lord's death. The Jews are still looking; still longing. Without a voice from heaven for almost two millennium, they still cling to their deluded expectations that the Messiah will do more than our Lord did while upon this earth.

~~ 7:35-36 ~~

*“The Jews therefore said among themselves, Whither will this man go that we shall not find him? will he go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What is this word that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, ye cannot come?”*

Rather than accept the overwhelming evidence, these disbelieving Jews communicated among themselves. They must have been quite perplexed as to Jesus' statement. Indeed, if Jesus were merely a man, then His statement would NOT make much sense.

Their statement was contemptuous and was intended to make his ministry ludicrous. Here, as often elsewhere, God makes the wrath of men to praise him. In these scornful words there was an unconscious and unintended prophecy of these very things. Under the Great Commission, his banner would indeed be borne to the Greeks and to the entire Gentile world as his apostles carried the gospel of the cross to all men (Woods, 154).

*“Whither will this man go...will he go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks?”* – One can almost hear the arrogant tone with which these Jews might have spoken. There is nothing in the passage to suggest a submissive attitude. To the contrary: “Truth found no place of welcome in their calloused consciences

and dull minds that day. Denseness reached a new dimension with them” (R. Taylor, 108).

*“What is this word that he said”* – Capture the confusion that must have engulfed their minds. Without a proper understanding of the nature of the Christ, the minds of men will remain clouded and confused. Sadly, these men chose the path of ignorance and as a consequence they remained in darkness. No wonder they asked, “What is this word?”

~~ 7:37 ~~

*“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink”*

*“The last day, the great day of the feast”* - There is much disagreement as to which day of the feast this “great day” might have been. The Feast of Tabernacles was held during the Jewish month of Tisra, corresponding to our September and October. The first and eighth days were regarded as especially sacred. Johnson concludes that it was the eighth day which is under consideration. It is to be noted, however, that each day during the feast the priest would carry a golden pitcher to the pool of Siloam, and accompanied by the multitudes, return to the temple, and pour the water upon the altar. This would be followed by the “Hallel,” consisting of the chanting of Psalm 113-118 by priest and people. Following, there was a pause, and likely it was during that pause that Jesus cried out to the people to come and receive the “flowing rivers of living water.” “In place of the physical water He proffered the spiritual; instead of a ritual He offered a reality” (Tenney, 134).

To “*drink*” would be to embrace the teachings of Jesus. “*Rivers*” suggests abundance, and “*living*” being ever flowing and not stagnant.

~~ 7:38 ~~

*“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water”*

*“He that believeth on me”* – This corresponds to “come” in the previous verse.

*“from within him shall flow rivers of living water”* - Every Christian is a fountain from which the living water of eternal life is to be dispensed to those who thirst. From Pentecost, to the present age, the faithful proclaimers of God’s word furnish abundant commentary on the fulfillment of this promise. We believe, and so we speak; we have drunk deeply from the fountain of living waters; let us share it with others.

~~ 7:39 ~~

*“But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified”*

This verse is John’s explanation of the words of Jesus, inspired we might add. Jesus was “glorified” upon his resurrection and ascension, at which time the Holy Spirit was sent to the Apostles, providing them with the power to offer the living water unto others. There is likely a reference here to the work of the Holy Spirit in providing mankind with the Scriptures, through which access can be gained to the water of life. Brother Woods has cautioned, “We must distinguish between the ‘living water’ which refreshes the thirsty soul and gives salvation and the ‘flowing out’ of this water to others, through those directed by the Holy Spirit” (Woods, 156). This “flowing out” (as brother Woods called it) was fulfilled in Acts 2 initially, and in every consequent sermon since.

*“because Jesus was not yet glorified”* - It should be noted that the Holy Spirit was not given until AFTER the death and ascension of Jesus. Nor did the disciples become “fountains of living water” until after the Holy Spirit came. I wrote the following article in March, 2001, and it was published in the Gospel Journal:

ANOTHER LOOK AT JOHN 7:37-39  
by Tom Wacaster

Whether or not the Holy Spirit personally indwells the Christian is not the point in this article. For years brethren have disagreed

on the mode of the indwelling. We have done so with cordiality while maintaining the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). One of the passages that has come to the forefront of the present discussion over the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is John 7:37-39: “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, from within him shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive: for the Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

There are a number of questions that beg consideration. (1) What is the context of our Lord’s statement here, both immediate and remote? (2) What passage is under consideration when our Lord said, “As the scripture hath said”? (3) What is meant by “rivers of living water”? (4) What did John mean when he wrote, “But this spake he of the Spirit”? (5) What did John mean when he wrote, “They that believed on him were to receive”? (6) What does it mean when it says “the Holy Spirit was not yet given”? And finally, (7) what is meant by Jesus being “glorified”?

Some have been so bold as to claim that this passage is a clear indication of the indwelling measure of the Holy Spirit in every believer for every generation. The conclusion is based upon the relation of verse 38 to verse 39. The former (verse 38) is, as some are suggesting, figurative language in which the Holy Spirit is referred to as “rivers of living water,” while the later (verse 39) is a literal reference to the Holy Spirit. The conclusion drawn is that the Holy Spirit sustains a relationship to the believer in a literal way analogous to the figurative expression “from within him shall flow rivers of living water.” Hence, according to some, we have the literal and personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But let’s take a closer look.

First, a close examination of the context is helpful here. The New Testament was written with the backdrop of miraculous promises and practices. In fact, the promise of the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit in the early days of the church extends as far back as Joel 2:28-32. That Old Testament prophet looked down the road of time to the day of Pentecost and wrote,

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.” Looking beyond John 7:38-39, we see the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the early years of the church. One is impressed with the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles as well as those on whom the apostles laid their hands (Acts 8:17-18). It should be noted that the miracles were designed to “confirm the word by the signs which followed” (Mark 16:20, Heb. 2:2-4). It should also be noted that the immediate context of John 7:38-39 has to do with the teaching of Jesus. John 6:22-65 contains Jesus’ lesson on His being the bread of life, i.e. the “words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life” (John 6:63). In chapter eight we find Jesus in the temple “teaching” (John 8:28). The multitude disputed concerning “this word that he said” (John 7:36). The teaching of Jesus was so astonishing that even his enemies were compelled to confess, “Never man so spake” (John 7:46). Finally, we note that our Lord’s teaching was confirmed by the miracles that He performed. The point being made here is that John 7:38-39 cannot be separated from the teaching and miracles of Jesus specifically, and the general truth that the gospel was confirmed by the signs, wonders, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Second, what passage was Jesus using when He said, “as the scripture hath said”? There is no specific passage in the Old Testament that uses this expression, “from within him shall flow rivers of living water.” The general idea is expressed in passages like Isaiah 58:11, Zechariah 14:8, and Psalms 36:8-9. When Jesus said, “as the scripture hath said,” He was speaking of the general principle taught in the Old Testament regarding the “living water,” namely that the teachings of God are analogous to “living water.” This is especially true when it comes to the truths of the gospel. The “living water” under consideration in John 7:38-39 is the same “living water” promised to the Samaritan woman (John 4:10, 4:13, and 4:14).

Third, what is meant by Jesus being “glorified”? There was some connection between the Spirit being “given” and Jesus being “glorified.” John plainly says, “The Spirit was not yet given;

because Jesus was not yet glorified.” Right here it might be good to study John 16:13-14: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. **He shall glorify me:** for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you” [emphasis mine, TW]. Jesus needed to “go away” (John 16:7). After His ascension the apostles “received” the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6-8, 2:1-4). Under the miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit the apostles proclaimed Christ, His resurrection, His ascension, and His coronation (Acts 2). Jesus was thereby “glorified.” When Jesus spoke in John 7:39 of the giving of the Holy Spirit and His own glorification, He was speaking of the same thing promised in John 16:7-14. He was looking ahead to the miraculous age of the early church, and addressing the proclamation of the words of Jesus (“living water”), and the confirmation of that word by the sending of the Holy Spirit, all of which would “glorify” Jesus.

Fourth, what did John mean when he wrote, “They that believed on him were to receive”? Is this, as some have supposed, a promise of the personal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit? In view of the context and other passages examined, it is my conclusion that John 7:38-39 is parallel to Mark 16:17-20. In Mark there is the great commission to “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel” (16:15); in John it is “rivers of living water” that goes forth (7:38b). In Mark 16:17 there were “signs [that] shall accompany them that believe...” In John 7:39 it speaks of “the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive.” Some have assumed that this reception of the Holy Spirit is the personal and literal indwelling. Why do they draw this conclusion? Is it not at least possible that the reception of the Holy Spirit could refer to the endowment of the spiritual gifts? Similar language is used in Acts 8:17 and Acts 19:2-6. If we keep the passage in context, the only conclusion we can draw is that the reception of the Spirit by the believer in John 7:38-39 is equivalent to the “signs” that followed the believers of Mark 16:17. While some might suggest that this would imply that the miraculous gifts are somehow available today we would point out that neither John 7:38-39 nor Mark 16:17-20 address the duration of the miraculous gifts. The fact that John 7:38-39

promises the reception of the Holy Spirit is no indication that it was promised to ALL believers of every generation, any more than Mark 16:17-19 promises miraculous abilities to all that believe, whether during or after the apostolic era of the early church.

I readily admit that there are strong arguments in favor of the personal, literal, non-miraculous indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But I do not believe that John 7:38-39 supports that position. Let us study the word carefully, drawing out only what the passages clearly say, and be careful that we do not read “into” the text what is not there. I fear that many have made just such an error when it comes to a careful analysis of John 7:37-39.

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~~ 7:40-43 ~~

*“Some of the multitude therefore, when they heard these words, said, This is of a truth the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, What, doth the Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”*

This verse provides us with the immediate effect that the words of Jesus had on those who heard. At least “*some of the multitude*” concluded, “*This is of a truth the prophet.*” This is a reference to the prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15. Others were bold enough to openly declare, “*This is the Christ.*”

“*But some said*” – This was the same group that earlier had erroneously concluded they knew all about Him. “We know his father, his mother, and the place he grew up.”

“*What, doth the Christ come out of Galilee?*” – They were ignorant of the simple facts. They were evidently looking for some mighty king to arise in Bethlehem.

“*from Bethlehem*” - The scripture to which they referred was Micah 5:2, where it is written that the Messiah would be born in

Bethlehem. It was also predicted that Jesus would be of the seed of David (see Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, and Psalms 89:36).

~~ 7:43 ~~

*“So there arose a division in the multitude because of him”*

*“So there arose a division in the multitude”* - They could not agree one with another. “The Greek word for the division which resulted is that from which we derive the word ‘schism,’ a term indicating a sharp and deep cleavage between the two groups” (Woods, 159). Centuries have come and gone, and still people are divided because of “Him.”

~~ 7:44 ~~

*“And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him”*

Once again we see the remarkable providence of God in restraining the multitudes from taking Jesus before the set “time.” It may have been the division which arose that caused some of those in the crowd to provide protection to Jesus so that others could not lay hands upon Him.

### *Report to the Sanhedrin*

7:45-53

~~ 7:45-46 ~~

*“The officers therefore came to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why did ye not bring him? The officers answered, Never man so spake”*

The last part of the chapter is John’s record of the report to the Sanhedrin (vss. 45-53). We learn from verse 32 that the Pharisees had sent officers to lay hold on Jesus. Evidently these men were impressed and moved by the shouts of enthusiasm among the multitude, and the claims of Jesus that He could quench their thirst. These “officers” were the temple police, Levites under the direction of the chief priests. This was the first official attempt to arrest Jesus, the beginning of what would, six months later, culminate in the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of the Lord. These men, rather than arresting Jesus, returned baffled.

“An awe as of unseen things fell on the officers and the people. They could not resist the sense of benediction which, like some sacred perfume, some supernatural glamour, fell upon them in his royal words. These sayings of the Prophet of Nazareth are more than words; they have living powers; they have confounded and disarmed us” (Pulpit Commentary, 321).

The incredible thing about these two verses is the fact that we are provided with the witness of an unspecified number of “officers” who acknowledged the amazing character and teaching of Jesus. The passage seems to indicate that this may very well have been the first time these men came in contact with Jesus and heard His message. If that is true, it suggests that even a few moments at the feet of Jesus will challenge the thinking of those who listen. “It would be difficult to find an incident in our Lord’s life involving a stronger testimony to the power of his personality and the deep impression his teaching made on honest hearts” (Woods, 159). Indeed, there is “no stronger testimony to the moral power of the presence of Christ than this confession of the rough temple police” (Johnson, 129). When our Lord spoke He did so with divine authority. His message addressed the heart and conscience of those in His audience.

It is precisely at this point that the magnificence of our Lord comes to the forefront of this chapter. Jesus was the prophet foretold by Moses; but He was much more than those prophets of old for the obvious reason that He was divine! As prophet, “He was the custodian of the greatest message and the deepest lessons humanity ever contemplated. He came from heaven divinely commissioned of God to instruct the earth in all things needful for man’s salvation; He qualifies under this definition as a prophet” (Harry Rimmer, *Jesus The Prophet* – quote copied into my personal notes; original source lost). It was this prophetic element in our Lord’s ministry that compelled the multitude to stand in awe of the One Who spoke the words of truth. “For He taught them as one having authority and not as their scribes” (Matt. 7:29). Here is a man (if we dare call Him a man) Who derived nothing from human opinion; His teachings were not built upon the teachings of other men. He was not educated in the Rabbinical schools of His time. Yet still He came as *‘The Prophet’* Whose mission was to declare the very words

that God had given to Him. For that reason there was power in His words, which according to Morgan, “manifested themselves in a serene, unshakable authority which no other teacher ever possessed” (Morgan, ESword Module). Magnificent, indeed, is this Holy One of God Who could not only fulfill all prophecy, but could do so in a way that brought God within the sphere of human comprehension. With these four words – “No man ever spake” – these officials, unknowingly and perhaps even unwillingly, magnified Jesus before the Pharisees who had sent them to arrest the very One Whom these Jewish leaders despised.

~~ 7:47-49 ~~

*“The Pharisees therefore answered them, Are ye also led astray? Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude that knoweth not the law are accursed”*

The authorities, having failed in their attempt to have Jesus arrested, turned to the argument of *“intelligentsia.”* “Why, look at those who KNOW better. Have any of these elite believed on Him? Or what about the Pharisees, the scholarly class; have any of them believed on Jesus?” The mentality of the Pharisees is imitated by many an ignorant soul who thinks that something is acceptable for the simple reason that the “rulers” believe it to be so. The implication by the Pharisees was that these temple police were ignoramuses, and easily led astray as were others. “They did not inquire what was taught and why those men reached the conclusion they did; instead, they brought to bear the weight of human tradition, the power of official decrees and the example of others to support their position” (Woods, 160). The Pharisees accused the multitudes of being ignorant of the law, and thus accursed, having been led astray. The astonishing thing about their answer is that it was simply not true. There were some of the Pharisees and rulers who believed upon Jesus. Nicodemus, who was present at that very moment, evidently believed, and had not drawn the conclusions of these blind leaders. John 12:42 tells us, “Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”

*“But this multitude who knoweth not the law”* - The Pulpit Commentary has this note: “This is a most contemptuous expression, equivalent to ‘this scum of the earth,’ ‘the unlettered rabble.’ The Pharisees were accustomed to show sovereign contempt for those who had no admission to their own culture and methods of knowledge” (Pulpit Commentary, 321). When any man, or any group of men, look down their noses at their counterpart, it indicates they have reached a point in their spiritual decline where the heart is incapable of being touched, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

~~ 7:50-51 ~~

*“Nicodemus saith unto them (he that came to him before, being one of them), Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth?”*

These Pharisees could hardly have been prepared for what was about to happen. One within their own ranks steps up to the defense of Jesus. Nicodemus must have been deeply influenced by his encounter with Jesus (John chapter 3). He evidently maintained a favorable opinion of Jesus from that moment forward, and was willing to allow the man Jesus to give some account of himself before the Pharisees before passing judgment. Nicodemus was simply seeking to bring the court back to its senses by an appeal to common sense and past experience. He simply called attention to a fundamental principle of the very Law which the Pharisees claimed to uphold. “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between a man and his brother, and the sojourner that is with him” (Deut. 1:16).

~~ 7:52 ~~

*“They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and see that out of Galilee ariseth no prophet”*

*“Art thou also of Galilee?”* - Rather than answer Nicodemus, they attempted to make the man look like some sort of a “country-bumpkin,” ignorant of the plain prophetic teachings of the scripture. To be classified as a “Galilean” was to suffer severe reproach in the minds of those elite religious rulers. These Pharisees, however, manifested ignorance of history, as well as

the very Law which they sought to uphold. Jonah was from Galilee (2 Kings 14:25), as was likely Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 17:1). We agree with Croskery that “such a charge is more like one of the incomprehensible misunderstandings of the modern critical school whenever a chance opens of assailing the authenticity of the Fourth Gospel” (Pulpit Commentary, 322). One item that we do not want to overlook is the fact that the response of Nicodemus actually nullified the argument they had just made against the soldiers. They implied that none among the religious leaders had believed on Jesus. Consequently, “In their desperation as they were cornered in this heated argument, they had to abandon the position they had just taken in order to meet this new threat” (Foster, 794).

~~ 7:53 – 8:1 ~~

*“And they went every man unto his own house; but Jesus went unto the mount of Olives”*

This is one example of an unfortunate chapter division by the various translators. The student can readily see that there is a natural connection between 7:53 and 8:1. There is a contrast where every man “went to his own house,” but our Lord went up into “the mount of Olives.” The other Gospel writers mention our Lord’s frequent visit to the mount, but this is something unique to John’s record. The Mount of Olives was east of Jerusalem, with the Garden of Gethsemane situated on the western side of the mount, and Bethany, the abode of Martha and Mary, on its east side. I was particularly impressed with Barnes assessment of the connection between these two verses:

There is every mark of confusion and disorder in this breaking up of the Sanhedrin. It is possible that some of the Sadducees might have joined Nicodemus in opposing the Pharisees, and thus increased the disorder. It is a most instructive and melancholy exhibition of the influence of pride, envy, contempt, and anger, when brought to bear on an inquiry, and when they are manifestly opposed to candor, to argument, and to truth. So wild and furious are the passions of men when they oppose the person and claims of the Son of God! It is remarkable, too, how God accomplishes his purposes. They wished to destroy Jesus. God suffered their passions to be excited, a tumult to

ensue, the assembly thus to break up in disorder, and Jesus to be safe, for his time had not yet come (Barnes, ESword Module).

WHO IS THIS JESUS?  
by Tom Wacaster

Born in a stable and raised in meager and humble surroundings, this man called 'Jesus' changed the course of history. He was THE Master teacher, the supreme example and a humble servant. Jesus never made a mistake. He was always in complete control. He loved His fellow man more than He loved Himself. He loved His enemies, excused His murderers, and forgave the penitent. He had no worldly ambition, owned no property, and sought no government position. Had Jesus never claimed deity, His very life would have shouted, "THIS IS THE SON OF GOD!" Napoleon Bonaparte once wrote of this man Jesus: "I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. You speak of Caesar, of Alexander, of their conquests, and of the enthusiasm which they enkindled in the hearts of their soldiers, but can you conceive of a dead man making conquests, with an army faithful, entirely devoted to his memory? My armies have forgotten me even while living. Can you conceive of Caesar as the eternal emperor of the Roman Senate, and, from the depth of his mausoleum, governing an empire, watching over the destinies of Rome? Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love; and, at this hour, millions would die for him." If a man were to claim deity today, he would likely be hauled off to a padded cell. But Jesus spoke with such force that even His enemies were forced to conclude, "Never a man so spake"; and with those words the magnificence of Jesus was declared!



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### “GO THY WAY AND SIN NO MORE”

*The Woman Caught In Adultery, 8:2-11*

Here we have a beautiful story of a woman who received the mercy of the Lord; a story that provides a taste of what would later be offered to all men through the gospel of Jesus Christ. With amazing skill our Lord rebukes the accusations against this woman, and with a tender heart equal to His great wisdom in dealing with the Pharisees, the Lord offers the woman grace in her deepest hour of need.

The controversy surrounding the authenticity of these verses is a rather tedious matter to consider. There is support in favor of the passage as being genuine, as well as evidence which argues strongly against it. We should keep in mind that most of the arguments are not whether or not the incident could have, or did, occur, but whether or not the account belongs in John's record. Without doubt, the words are lacking in most of the very ancient manuscripts. There are also a number of terms used in the passage that John does not use anywhere else. Johnson quotes Abbott:

The whole scene, the arrest of the woman, the demand on Jesus, the Pharisaic contempt of public morality in obtruding the crime and the criminal on the public attention in the temple courts; the attempt to entrap Jesus; the skill of his reply; the subtle recognition of the woman's shame and despair, and the gentle avoidance of adding to it by turning the public gaze from her to himself as he wrote upon the ground; the final confusion of the Pharisees and the release of the woman, bear the marks of real history. It is impossible to believe that any monkish mind conceived of this and added it to the narrative. The deed is the deed of Christ, whether or not the record is the record of John (Commentary on John, ESword Module).

Coffman quoted Hendricksen regarding a possible explanation:

Augustine definitely stated that certain individuals had removed from their codices the section regarding the adulteress, because they feared women would appeal to this story as an excuse for infidelity. Asceticism played an important role in the sub-apostolic age. Hence the suggestion that the section (7:53-8:11) was actually a part of John's gospel but (later) removed from it cannot be entirely dismissed (Coffman, 214).

Tenney weighed in thus:

The style and contents, indeed, in both of which it is utterly different from any of the narratives of the apocryphal gospels, convey an irresistible impression of genuineness; and it is probable that we have a piece of apostolic narrative, upon which the consent of the universal Church has set the seal of canonicity (Tenney, 138).

What is truly interesting is the fact that those who have questioned its authenticity still feel there is something in it that demands their attention; and so, even the critics have left it either in the text, or placed it at the end of John's gospel as a sort of addendum. If the student desires more technical and detailed information, let him consult the Pulpit Commentary notes by Croskery. My personal conclusion is that it is genuine, that it came from the pen of John, and that it is in precisely the place where the Holy Spirit intended it to be. With that in mind we turn our attention to the text.

~~ 8:2 ~~

*“And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them”*

There are three things that capture our attention in this verse. First, there is a chronological note provided by John: *“And early in the morning he came again into the temple.”* This chronological note follows quite naturally the events of the preceding chapter, the last day of the feast when Jesus gave His great call to all those who were athirst. Evidently He had spent

the night in the Mount of Olives. While every man had gone to his own house (8:1) Jesus had gone out to the Mount. I like to imagine that He spent the night in prayer with the Father. However He may have passed the night, John tells us that He came “early” in the morning. The Greek word signifies near daybreak. Perhaps He knew there would be some still lingering, or perhaps crowds gathering early. Whatever the reason, He would not allow an opportunity to teach to pass by.

*“and all the people came unto him”* – Here is the second thing that captures our attention. Keep in mind that the officers had admitted, “Never man so spake.” Like insects drawn to a burning fire, the common people desired to hear more; and so they came.

*“and he sat down and taught them”* – Here is the third thing that captures our attention. In 7:37 it is said that Jesus “stood and cried.” Here John tells us that the Lord now resumes the position of a teacher: “he sat down.” Previously He cried out as a Herald; here He takes the position of a teacher.

As Jesus was teaching the people, a stir began to develop, and “the calm morning was soon overclouded, and the people violently excited, by a very ominous disturbance, planned with subtle care and malicious intention on the part of the authorities, who were ready at all costs and by any device to break the spell which Jesus was exerting over some of the people” (Croskery, Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

~~ 8:3-5 ~~

*“And the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery; and having set her in the midst, they say unto him, Teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such: what then sayest thou of her?”*

*“in the midst”* - There must have been some kind of tribunal that had been quickly assembled to consider this case of the woman taken in adultery. It is quite evident that these men were insensible to the woman. In fact it is impossible to read the story without being struck with the complete absence of compassion on the part of the Pharisees. Yes, she was guilty; of that there was

no question for she was caught “in the very act.” Their motive was only selfish, no doubt with a hidden agenda of catching the Lord in some kind of trap. Jesus was in the temple teaching, and these blustering bullies pushed their way into the presence of Jesus to present this “problem,” no doubt to entrap Him. As Tenney suggested, “This question bore every indication of being the outcome of a deliberate plot” (Tenney, 139).

*“bring a woman”* - The Greek word indicates that they may have literally dragged her by physical force to face Jesus and the crowd assembled. How is it that the woman was brought before this tribunal and yet the man was not accused of the same sin? If the woman was caught in the “very act,” it would suggest that the “man” was also caught “in the very act.” The absence of the guilty man is noteworthy in view of the teaching of the law on the matter of punishment of adultery. Cf Lev 20:10, and Deut. 22:22 in this connection.

*“having set her in the midst”* – They were not concerned in the least about her shame; nor is there any indication they possessed a single ounce of compassion for this woman.

*“what sayest thou of her?”* – This is the only time that the scribes are mentioned in John’s gospel. Though divided among themselves, the scribes and Pharisees now unite to tempt the Lord and lower His estimation in the eyes of the people.

~~ 8:6 ~~

*“And this they said, trying him, that they might have whereof to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground”*

John now tells us that the purpose behind their bringing this woman to the attention of Jesus and the multitude was not to render judgment according to the Law of Moses, but to somehow entrap Jesus. “Here is what the Law of Moses teaches! Now, what do you have to say about the situation?” Tenney had this discerning note: “It is not incredible that the entire situation was designed in advance. How did the Pharisees know where to capture the guilty woman? Was she betrayed for the express purpose of obtaining a cause against Jesus?” (Tenney, 140).

Foster also noted that “they were careful to present their demand when Jesus was in the midst of a public service so that the multitude would all be witnesses against Him to destroy His influence throughout the nation” (Foster, 804-805).

No doubt these Pharisees thought they had Jesus in a dilemma. If He were to say the woman should *not* be stoned, He would stand opposed to the Law, and He would lose the respect of the masses who followed the Law. On the other hand, if He *were* to give approval to the woman being stoned, He might easily have been charged with violating Roman law, which forbade any capital punishment by Jewish authorities. Johnson summed it up like this:

The dilemma...to affirm the binding validity and force of the Mosaic enactment, would be to counsel a course of action contrary to the Roman law...the other hand, to set aside the Mosaic judgment would make him liable to the charge of breaking the law of Moses and would be a powerful aid in breaking down his influence with the people (Johnson, 134).

“*This they said*” - Tenney points out that “the tense of the verb means that they prodded Him repeatedly to make Him commit Himself” (Tenny, 139).

“*But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground*” – I would like to know more about what Jesus “wrote on the ground.” His gesture may have been intended as an indication that He was simply not going to reply to His detractors. Brother Woods pointed out that “he resorted to a practice common in oriental lands to this day of silently scraping with a stick figures on the ground to indicate deliberate silence” (Woods, 163). The Pulpit Commentary provides us with this curious instance:

A youth, who, after playing some practical joke upon an old man, feigned utter ignorance of the surprise and cry of the old man by instantaneously assuming the position of one entirely abstracted from all sublunary thought, in fact, by sitting on the ground and scribbling with his finger in

the dust, ‘as though he heard and saw nothing of what had happened’ (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

We may not know what He wrote; but we cannot help but grasp the attitude with which He answered His critics. It was what Morgan called, “the attitude of attention to something else, and refusal to satisfy His questioners; it was the attitude of dismissal” (Morgan, ESword Module). So far as we know, this is the only incident we have where it is said that Jesus “wrote” something.

~~ 8:7 ~~

*“But when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”*

*“When they continued asking him”* - They repeatedly asked Jesus the same question. The Lord evidently remained silent, waiting for the opportune moment to give an answer. But His answer was not what they expected.

*“He that is without sin among you”* - The law required that the witnesses to the crime be the first to carry out the punishment (Deut. 17:7). “This requirement made it a very solemn matter to witness against another, and would have the effect of discouraging frivolous accusations” (Dobbs, J16.172, FF Lectures on John, 1989).

It was not Jesus Who was in a dilemma, but those Pharisees. Brother Woods’ comments here are without equal:

‘You affect to be dedicated to, and supporters of the law; in the nature of the case those who violate the law are not the proper executioners of it themselves. Let him among you who is without sin step forward and throw the first stone.’ He thus removed the discussion from a judicial level and placed it on a moral plane (Woods, 164).

~~ 8:8 ~~

*“And again he stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground”*

We will never know what our Lord wrote upon the ground on that occasion, but we can be certain that it had its desired effect. Did He begin writing names on the ground? Was it scripture which might have been scribbled in the dirt that day? Or, did He merely “doodle” to impress upon the accusers that He had no intention of answering their carping criticism? Croskery suggests that the “imperfect tense, twice repeated, seems more in harmony with the symbolic meaning of the act than with the record on his part of any special sentence of his supreme wisdom” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module). It was not what was written that is important, for the Holy Spirit chose not to record the words. It is what happens next that is so impressive.

~~ 8:9 ~~

*“And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the midst”*

*“And they, when they heard it”* - Nothing is said as to whether or not Jesus continued to speak, but the use of these words by John suggest a number of interesting possibilities. First, Jesus may have vocally uttered the very words which He was writing so as to give all those present to know the message He wanted to convey. I get the feeling that Jesus bent down to the ground, and began to scribble in the dirt. The Pharisees, curious, perhaps gathered themselves about Jesus, restricting the multitude from observing what was being written. Jesus thought it necessary, therefore, to utter vocally what He was writing on the ground. This would give the opportunity for those who could not see the writing on the ground to hear the message Jesus wanted to convey.

Second, John may have used the word “heard” to mean the *reception* of the message, whether by ear, or merely by eye.

*“went out one by one”* - This is a most interesting response, is it not? Why did these men leave? There are two possible explanations:

First, it is possible that as each saw the portion of message which applied to them, they slowly departed. I recall a number of years

ago watching a western movie on TV where the mob had gathered at the footstep of the Sheriff's office to demand the release of the prisoner. As the Sheriff spoke to the crowd to subdue their mob mentality, they began to "break it up" a little at a time. I think something like that may have occurred here.

Another possible explanation is that these Jews were in a dilemma; and they *knew* they were in a dilemma. The tables had been turned on them. While their intention was to trap Jesus, they found themselves the recipients of the trap. If they did not stone the woman, they stood to be accused by the people for not carrying out the punishment upon this woman; if they did begin the punishment, they would face the Roman authorities for breaking the civil law. Thus, the accusers began to realize the difficulty Jesus had placed them in, and began one by one, to slip away.

*"And Jesus was left alone, and the woman...in the midst"* - Jesus and the woman were left "alone" so far as the *accusers* were concerned. The crowd was still gathered, no doubt impressed by the compassion, and the wisdom, of the man from Galilee.

~~ 8:10 ~~

*"And Jesus lifted up himself, and said unto her, Woman, where are they? did no man condemn thee?"*

Where did these accusers go? Rather than take up a stone so as to "condemn" this woman, and thus begin the procedure of punishment, no one was left to follow through with the requirement of the law to punish this woman. Whether or not Jesus was aware of the departure of the accusing Jews is immaterial. Even if He did not literally 'see' them depart, He was fully aware of what had happened.

*"did no man condemn thee?"* - Our Lord came to save, not condemn, and it would seem that He saw in this woman the tender heart of repentance necessary to receiving forgiveness from the Almighty. His mission was to heal, not to wound; to comfort, not to punish; to reveal the heart of God, not to execute the crude judgments of men; to sooth, not to stone. I was

particularly impressed with Morgan's comments on the question posed to the woman:

According to His own declared principle, He was the only One Who had any right to cast a stone at that woman; He was without sin. If we did not know the story so well, and we were hearing it for the first time, we should almost stop with bated breath, and say, what did He do? First of all He called her by the same name which He used for His Mother, at Cana, and on His Cross, "Woman." Whenever that word fell from the lips of Jesus, it was a word of infinite tenderness. Oh marvel of marvels, Woman! That crowd that had gone would have described her by a harsher word; they would have used the term harlot, or prostitute, or something worse. He said, "Woman"! Then He said, "Where are they? did no man condemn thee?" Then, the only word recorded as falling from her lips, was uttered. We do not know her name. Have you ever noticed every such woman you meet in the course of Jesus' ministry remains anonymous? Mary of Magdala was not a sinning woman in this sense, in spite of the stupid blunder of all the years. All these are anonymous. Their names are never recorded. I do not think they will ever be known, because they will have new names in that land Beyond. The only thing she is reported as saying is, "No man, Lord." If we had looked at the woman when she was being brought in, and then if we had looked at her when she said, "No man, Lord," we should have seen a great change in her face. I know how she looked when they took her in. She was rebellious, she was defiant, she was angry. That method of handling that sort of woman always produces that result. But when she looked into the eyes for a moment of another kind of Man, a Man Who dismissed her accusers, I tell you her eyes were losing the defiant look, and becoming tear-dimmed; and I think there was a quiver in her voice as she said, "No man, Lord"

~~ 8:11 ~~

*"And she said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee: go thy way; from henceforth sin no more."*

The liberals are quick to point out that our Lord refused to condemn her, but silent as a tomb when it comes to the Master's command that she "sin no more."

Regarding the closing words of our Lord to this woman, Tenney had this note:

The interview may not have been private, but it was not encumbered by the presence of tormenting enemies. In it Jesus' method of judging sin can be contrasted with that of His foes. They brought the woman in as a captive; He questioned her as a free person. They regarded her as an accessory to their convenience; He respected her as a human being. They saw only the blackness of her past - 'the very act'; He thought in terms of her future - 'sin no more.' They were eager to stone her; He was ready to save her (Tenney, 141-142).

*"She said, No man, Lord"* - It is particularly interesting that the woman refers to Jesus as "Lord." She did not call Him "Master," or "rabbi," or even a "prophet." Did she follow the Lord after this episode in her life? I would like to believe that she did, for her very response indicates a heart that was touched by the Lord's compassion.

*"Go thy way; from henceforth sin no more"* - Antinomians have often used this verse to attack any suggestion that man must be obedient to divine law in order to receive divine blessings. It should be noted, however, that Jesus did not say to this woman what He said to the repentant harlot in Simon's home in Galilee, *"Thy sins are forgiven thee."* While that woman's repentance was complete, this woman was just beginning her journey toward repentance. As Johnson noted, "In the words 'go and sin no more,' there is an implied rebuke of her past life, a charge to repent and live a better life, and an opening of the door of hope in case she heeded his words" (Johnson, 136). The simple words, "Go thy way; from henceforth sin no more" imply that she was to bring forth fruit worthy of repentance. Jesus did not say, "Go in peace"; instead He gave her a challenge that would prove her love for God. It is this very statement that provides overwhelming evidence that this letter was written by John,

giving the stamp of authenticity upon this remarkable story. It presents the heart of our Lord toward lost humanity. As Croskery noted, “The narrative will remain for all time an illustration of the blending of judgment with mercy, which has received its highest expression in the life-work and Person of the Christ” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module).

In closing, consider exactly what has happened here. The Lord did not ignore her sin; nor did He excuse her sin. Instead, He placed Himself *between* the woman and her sin. As the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), Jesus offered her His redeeming and atoning love that would eventually be offered to all mankind. This entire episode is an object lesson, and the truth being taught is the same truth declared by the Baptist, “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John is the only inspired writer to use the word “Lamb” in reference to the Christ (John 1:29, 1:36, Rev. 5:6, 7:17, 14:10, 15:3, 19:9, 21:9, 21:14, 22:1, 21:22, and 22:3). It is fitting, therefore, that John would be the only writer to record this incident in the life of the Christ that so demonstrates the Lord’s role as the “Lamb of God.” Take the story out of brackets; keep in the text where it belongs, and let us marvel at the magnificence of our Lord and His atoning sacrifice; a sacrifice yet in the future when this story unfolds, but the only sacrifice that could give this woman, or any man or woman who has or ever will live, the hope of going their way, and sinning no more.

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

# “I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

*The Fifth Discourse: The Light of the World, 8:12-20*

Before I take up these eight verses it is important that we look at the broader context, and especially how this section is related to what follows. While many of the commentaries I consulted include verses 12-59 in what is sometimes titled “The Fifth Discourse,” it seems to me that this short discourse actually ends at verse 20, since Jesus makes no more mention of His being the “light” until we get to chapter nine (9:5). Having said that, I think it is important to point out that there is a remarkable progression that occurs as we move through the remainder of this chapter. In the first part the Lord declares Himself “*the light of the world*” (vs. 12), offering the “light of life” to the lost multitude who would hear His voice. He is immediately interrupted by the Pharisees (vs. 13), and a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders ensues (vss. 14-20). This is followed by our Lord’s bold proclamation, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (vs. 24). Faith essential to eternal life finds its basis in the light available to all men. The necessity that men believe on the Lord is the main focus of verses 21-30. Finally, the Lord warns of the importance of remaining faithful, for only if a person *abides* in the word of God can he truly be called a disciples of Jesus. Having received the light, and having believed, it now becomes essential that one abide in truth (vs. 31-32), and that the truth be allowed to have “free course” in their lives (vs. 37). Rather than view the whole of verses 12-59 as the discourse on the “light of the world,” I will treat verses 12-20 as the discourse, and the remainder of the chapter as the response on the part of the Pharisees and the controversy that grows out of the discourse itself. The intense animosity on the part of the Pharisees will eventually boil over and they will take up stones to cast at Jesus (8:59).

~~ 8:12 ~~

*“Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life”*

There are some who link this verse with 7:52. I choose to leave it right where it is and view it as the continuation of the discourse Jesus had begun on the last day of the feast and now resumes the morning after, interrupted only by a night's rest and the incident with the woman accused of adultery. His declaration in chapter seven, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me" (7:37) may have ended that day's discussion but it did not end the Lord's plea to lost humanity. With the incident surrounding the woman now past, Jesus could resume His plea to those hungering and thirsting after righteousness. "*Again*" makes a logical connection between this section and those events in chapter seven.

The setting for what now follows is quite interesting. During the feast it was customary to illuminate the area around the golden chests into which the contributions were cast. Johnson tells us that "in this court were two gigantic candelabra, fifty cubits high, sumptuously gilded, on the summit of which at night during the feast, lamps were lighted which threw their light on the city" (Johnson, ESword Module). Morgan thinks they were lighted every day during the feast, but now that the feast was over, the lights were out, and the Lord, standing in the midst of the temple (8:20) cries out, "I am the Light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but he shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Jesus often fixed the attention of His hearers on some object around them in order to teach an important truth, a most effective method even to this day. The Lord's statement would cast Him into direct confrontation with the Pharisees. They would, in turn, begin a "legal" battle with the Lord, in which they would attempt to discredit His witness and render His arguments and teaching of no effect. In fact, it is conceivable that Jesus may have intended to deliver a more lengthy discussion on His being the light of the world, and that discourse was cut short by the interruption of the Pharisees in the next verse. In answer to their challenge, Jesus would take the time to satisfy the legal and technical portion of the law by providing *more* than enough evidence to satisfy the honest inquirer.

Having declared that He was the fountain of living water, our Lord now tells the multitude that He is the "light of the world" (cf. 9:5, 12:46). It is significant that He did NOT say, "I am the light of Israel," or, "I am the light of this city." Jesus is the Savior

of all mankind (John 3:16, 2 Pet. 3:9). The implications of our Lord's self-affirmation that He is the "light of the world" are deeply significant. Not only does it suggest that the world walks in darkness; it also suggests that Jesus is the only source of light that will lead men out of their bondage to sin. The "light" is the source from which salvation springs. The word is synonymous with revelation and spiritual enlightenment. It is the opposite of ignorance and darkness of mind (Eph. 2:1-3).

There is another implication that we might miss if we hurriedly rush past this verse without reflecting a little on Old Testament history. While the fiery cloud lit the way for physical Israel in the wilderness, Christ makes a more stupendous claim and asserts He is the light of the world. Jesus was actually placing Himself on an equal par with Jehovah of the Old Testament Who led Israel throughout the wilderness wanderings.

Finally, the declaration also implies that there are only two walks, one in darkness, the other in the light of God's word. One leads to "life," the other to death. This verse places the obligation squarely upon the shoulders of the individual to "follow" and "walk" in that light.

Light reveals the beauties and glories and the ugliness and perils which the darkness conceals. Light brightens and purifies. Light makes possible life on earth in the physical sense. Jesus as the Light of the world enables us to walk in the path that leads to eternal life, instead of our stumbling in darkness and perishing. The responsibility for man's fate rests upon himself. Jesus as the Bread of life must be eaten and the Water of life must be taken, just as the Light of life must be followed. If a man shuts his eyes and refuses to see the light, it is his own fault (Foster, 810).

*"the light of life"* - Jesus is the "light" of the world for the simple reason that He is the very source from which light and life emanate. There is, even in science, an inseparable connection between light and life. Plants cannot live without some kind of light such as that of the sun. In the spiritual realm, man cannot live without light. His soul will perish without the heavenly light that leads men to God. The claims made by Jesus would be

absolutely foolish if it weren't for the fact that He is who He claimed to be. Either He was insane, or He is God. If insane, then you would have to attribute some of the most amazing feats to a man who was a lunatic. For more than twenty centuries His teaching has amazed and enlightened the world. He is applauded and admired by all who seriously and soberly study His words. He is the greatest teacher of all time. Such is not the fruit of an insane man. The only alternative is that He is divine.

~~ 8:13 ~~

*“The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true”*

I have no doubt that Jesus would have continued with His discourse had the Pharisees not abruptly interrupted Him. The Lord's proclamation that He is the “light of the world” was immediately met with disapproval by the Pharisees, due in no little part to the implications I mentioned above. In an attempt to throw the words of Jesus back at Him, they respond, “Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true” (8:13). Earlier (John 5:31-32) Jesus had claimed that He did not bear witness by Himself. These Pharisees now sought to turn His argument against Himself and point out that, in fact, Jesus had no other witnesses. Jesus would quickly show them that the Father bore witness of Him, thus throwing the full weight of heaven's authority behind the words that He spoke. Jesus' claims that He could quench the thirst of any and all who would come unto Him, coupled with this claim that He is the “light of the world” were confirmed by the Father's cooperation, and presence of the Holy Spirit “without measure” in the life of Jesus. Unfortunately the only thing these Pharisees could see were His claims, which they had already determined in their own minds, were false. “They said in effect, ‘You support your position in a manner which is by you admitted to be invalid and we therefore reject it’” (Woods, 166). The legal battle had now started, and as the Master Logician our Lord would effectively refute their weak claims.

~~ 8:14 ~~

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, Even if I bear witness of myself, my witness is true; for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye know not whence I come, or whither I go”*

It is a logical axiom that only the divine mind can understand and comprehend the divine nature. Paul asked, “For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?” He then made the application, “Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11). Jesus, being divine, knew the “whence” and “wither” of all that pertained to Himself. Being divine, His witness could not help but be true. When Jesus declared that He knew from “whence” He came, He was declaring His equality with the Father. A mere human being does not have the capability of judging his own nature because he does not know his beginning. Jesus, on the other hand, being divine and possessing an eternal nature, could tell where He had come from and where He was going. No wonder Jesus could speak with such authority. As Johnson noted, “Christ knew all things, and hence never spoke doubtingly, or hesitatingly, never stumbled, or had to change his answers (Johnson, ESword Module).

~~ 8:15 ~~

*“Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man”*

The charge of the Pharisees was blatant, but baseless. The fact that the Pharisees judged “*after the flesh*” simply meant that they judged according to what they could perceive with the physical eye. They were looking at the mere humanity of Jesus when they made the charge that His witness was not true.

“*I judge no man*” - Commentators are divided as to the modification of this assertion. Some have suggested that Jesus was proclaiming His position as Savior here, and not Judge. They would consider this passage as similar to that in John 3:17, and 12:47. The more reasonable position is that Jesus was saying, “I judge no man after the flesh, as you do.” While these Pharisees judged Jesus “after the flesh,” without any serious consideration of the overwhelming evidence that surrounded Jesus, our Lord was not so unfair in His judgment of them.

~~ 8:16 ~~

*“Yea and if I judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me”*

While the Pharisees to whom He spoke judged after the flesh, He did not. Their biased mind drove them to discern only according to their preconceived notions. Their desire for an earthly king was fleshly in nature and void of any spiritual value whatsoever.

Drawing from the “wisdom that cometh down from above” (Jas. 3:17), the Lord declares His judgment to be true. This is because He judged according to a standard approved not only by Himself, but by the Father. The very reason why the words of our Lord could, and should, be accepted, is because of the multiple witnesses which substantiated His claims. Jesus was challenging these Pharisees, as well as those who might have been listening to the conversation, to consider those witnesses. The first witness was Jesus Himself. Only a mad man would make a claim to being divine, to being the water of life, or to being the light of the world; unless, of course, that man were really divine! The second witness was the Holy Spirit. When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon our Lord in the form of a dove, and the voice out of heaven declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16-17). I have no doubt that some of the very ones in this audience were present on that occasion and would have had full awareness of that event. The third witness consisted of the miracles which Jesus performed, evidence of the power and authority of both the Father and the Holy Spirit. The final witness was the Father. “God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners” (Heb. 1:1), had manifested His will to Israel. God had provided sufficient evidence to identify the Messiah when He came. Those prophets, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, served to set forth the “witness” of God the Father. No, Jesus did not stand alone in His claims. He had more than sufficient witness.

~~ 8:17 ~~

*“Yea and in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true”*

*"In your law it is written"* - The law, which these Pharisees claimed to believe and uphold, set forth the principle that every truth was to be established at the mouth of two or more witnesses (Deut. 17:6, Deut. 19:15). By their own law, these Pharisees should have readily accepted Jesus as the Messiah. One important thing to note here is the argument from the lesser to the greater. If two *men* could confirm a case, then the witness of Jesus and of God ought not to be deemed insufficient, seeing both are divine.

I find it rather curious that Jesus did not say "our law," but rather "your law." I do not think He was separating Himself from His obligation to the Law, for the apostle Paul tells us that "when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Seeing that Jesus was "under" or subject to the law, the statement He makes here must be taken as an affirmation of His superiority to the Law; much like the contrast He makes in the Sermon on the Mount when He declared, "Ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you" (Matt. 5:21-22 and 27-28).

~~ 8:18 ~~

*"I am he that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me"*

Jesus reiterates the essence of His argument. It may appear in the form of a syllogism:

Major Premise: By law, every claim established upon the basis of two or more witnesses, is a true claim.

Minor Premise: My claims are established upon the basis of two or more witnesses.

Conclusion: Therefore, by law, my claims are true.

~~ 8:19 ~~

*"They said therefore unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye know neither me, nor my Father: if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also"*

*"Where is thy father?"* - It is significant that these Pharisees did not ask *"Who is thy father."* It is immediately apparent that they

were not asking in order to gain enlightenment; their question arose from a closed heart and mind and a desire to trap the Lord. They assumed that Joseph was the father of Jesus. They were in essence asking, "Where is Joseph? If you claim he is your witness, then why is he not here?" Their implication was that if His Father were indeed this "second" witness, then he should have been present. He was not present. Therefore, he was not a reliable witness.

*"Ye know neither me, nor my Father"* - With the closing words of this verse Jesus touches upon the very root of the problem with the whole of the Pharisaical thinking. Had these Pharisees known Who the Father of Jesus was [and is], they might have readily accepted the witness as true, and the claims thus substantiated. The question presented by the Pharisees was asked in a scornful spirit, thus indicating their biased mindset and bitter hatred of our Lord. How utterly tragic that these Jewish leaders had such a lack of knowledge and disregard for the Father's will. After centuries of manifold blessings from heaven, the bottom line was that these religious leaders of Israel simply did not know the Father from Whom all of their blessings had originated.

This truth applies with equal force to the Pharisees then, and subsequently to all of every generation. Only God could be the Father of such a one as Christ; and the failure of men to behold the glory and godhead of Jesus carries with it the corollary that such men are likewise unable to recognize God (Coffman, 217).

As this discourse draws to a close, there is a sense of deep sorrow in the heart of the Lord. Like the prophet Jeremiah, our Lord must have shed rivers of tears as He spoke these words (Lam. 2:18). The wonderful compassion must not go unnoticed during this period in our Lord's life. Listen to His words for Israel:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto

you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say,  
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord (Matt.  
23:37-39).

~~ 8:20 ~~

*“These words spake he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man took him; because his hour was not yet come”*

The bitter hatred of the Pharisees toward Jesus motivated them to attempt, once again, to lay hands on Jesus. As before, “no man took him; because his hour was not yet come.” We are reminded that God operates on a time table; that the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross was a voluntary offering of Himself. No man had the power to take the life of Jesus. John’s oft repeated reference to the various attempts on the part of the authorities to take hold of Jesus shows that such attempts were not isolated occurrences. Once their mind had been made up, these wicked and evil hypocrites pursued their designs with great intensity and determination. Little did they realize that Jesus’ life would not be “taken,” but that He would “lay it down” of Himself (John 10:18).

*“spake he in the treasury”* – The fact that this discourse was delivered in the very area where the treasure chests were displayed, and where the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews, sat, indicates the Lord’s boldness and determination. Jesus was teaching within hearing distance of the very headquarters of His enemies; the very enemies who had issued orders to arrest Him earlier.

As we close this particular portion of our study, please consider the bold statements that Jesus makes in these verses. “I am the light of the world” (8:12); “I know whence I came and whither I go” (8:14); “I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me” (8:16); and “If ye knew me, ye would know my Father also” (8:19). C.S. Lewis made the following observation about Jesus:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of hell.

Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (*The Case For Christianity*, C.S. Lewis).

These four statements from the lips of our Lord were not just bold statements. They are representative of exactly Who He is, and the magnificence that surrounds Him because of His very nature. Many a tribute has been paid to Jesus of Nazareth. Believers and mockers, skeptics and saints, the mighty and the humble; all have testified to the fact that this Man among men was more than a man. Those who are diligent students of the Bible see in the pages of that inspired book a portrait of One Who was (and is) the epitome of selfless service and supreme sacrifice. Those who refuse to hear the Word of God cannot deny that the life of this One man made an impact upon the world that continues to be felt more than two thousand years later. The ministry of Jesus lasted only three years. Yet in those three years we find condensed the deepest meaning of history and a manifestation of God “come in the flesh.” The impact He made upon history for generations yet unborn is summed up in His own words: “If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto myself” (John 12:32). He chose twelve apostles, not from among the scholars, or from among the leaders of the elite religious hierarchy, but from the common masses. With no possessions to call His own, and no friends among the mighty and rich, He associated with sinners and publicans - not to stoop to their sinful life, but to raise them up to a higher and nobler life. When zealots sought to make Him their king, He withdrew and boldly declared that His kingdom was not of this world. He was an encouragement to the down-trodden, a teacher of those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, a Great Physician to those who suffered from bodily ailments that robbed them of their strength and hope. He was kind and compassionate to those who sought His wisdom; and He was stern and straightforward toward those who were determined not to come to the light. He provided unmistakable proof that He was from God by the miracles He performed. Prompted by compassion for

those who suffered, He demonstrated the power of God to overcome physical ailments so that men could see in Him the same power to overcome spiritual ailments. His miracles were performed without ostentation and served to demonstrate the authority of His words. His life was so holy that He could face His accusers and ask, "Which of you convinceth me of sin," knowing that they could find no occasion of stumbling in Him. Philip Schaff commented on the pure and sinless life of Jesus Christ:

Who would not shrink from the attempt to describe the moral character of Jesus, or, having attempted it, be not dissatisfied with the result? Who can empty the ocean into a bucket? Who can paint the glory of the rising sun with a charcoal. No artist's ideal comes up to the reality in this case, though his ideals may surpass every other reality. The better and holier a man is, the more he feels his need of pardon, and how far he falls short of his own imperfect standard of excellence. But Jesus, with the same nature as ours and tempted as we are, never yielded to temptation; never had cause for regretting any thought, word, or action; he never needed pardon, or conversion, or reform; he never fell out of harmony with his heavenly Father. His whole life was one unbroken act of self-consecration to the glory of God and the eternal welfare of his fellow-men. A catalogue of virtues and graces, however complete, would give us but a mechanical view. It is the spotless purity and sinlessness of Jesus as acknowledged by friend and foe; it is the even harmony and symmetry of all graces, of love to God and love to man, of dignity and humility of strength and tenderness, of greatness and simplicity, of self-control and submission, of active and passive virtue; it is, in one word, the absolute perfection which raises his character high above the reach of all other men and makes it an exception to a universal rule, a moral miracle in history. It is idle to institute comparisons with saints and sages, ancient or modern. Even the infidel Rousseau was forced to exclaim: 'If Socrates lived and died like a sage, Jesus lived and died like a God.' Here is more than the starry heaven above us, and the moral law within us, which filled the soul of Kant with ever-growing reverence and awe. Here is the holy of holies of humanity, here is the very gate

of heaven (Schaff, History of the Church, ESword Module).

Every great story has a tragedy that unfolds in its plot, along with the triumph of the main character. The history of Jesus is not a myth; it is not a novel; nor is it something written for mere entertainment. But the story of Jesus provides the ultimate tragedy and triumph. As God's mystery unfolded in that little, isolated, insignificant country, Jesus began to tell of His death. But His was not a natural death, for He died the shameful death of the cross, the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty. So horrible was the death of the sinless Savior that the sun refused to shine at noon, and the earth shook as its Maker finally gave up the ghost. When He was laid in the tomb, the hopes of His disciples were dashed. An immense stone to seal the tomb, and a powerful Roman legion to guard its entrance, those fishermen returned to their fishing business, their dreams and expectations buried in the tomb with the Man Who walked and talked in their midst for three and one half years. Meanwhile, as the guest of Paradise, Jesus awaited that moment when He would roll back the stone that blocked the exit from that cold dark tomb, and come forth Conqueror over death and the grave. On the third day, He burst the bonds of death. God turned the tragedy into triumph. Today men can have a renewed hope because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The angels in heaven rejoiced at His birth. Men can rejoice today because of His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God the Father. As the light of the world, the Lord holds out hope for those in darkness. Because of that hope, men have magnified, and will continue to magnify, Jesus by their life and their lips. "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

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### NO LIGHTS IN THE TEMPLE

By Tom Wacaster

(written in September 2014)

Traveling late at night is a normal part of our mission efforts here in India. Seldom do we get back into Kakinada and me into bed before 11:00 PM. The advantage of late night travel is the absence of traffic. With the exception of what they call their

“national highway” system, the streets are narrow and not designed to handle the massive traffic of buses, cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and foot traffic. Add to this the bold and daring driving habits of some of the Indian drivers and it is a sure recipe for disaster. I could write a book on the foolishness of some of the drivers. I have often told Nehemiah that some of the drivers over here must simply be tired of living.

I have shared with you on a number of occasions the fact that the overwhelming majority of Indians are of the Hindu persuasion. As with many religions, there are those dedicated devotees and the not-so-dedicated devotees. Sadly, the same could be said about members of the Lord’s church; but that is a subject for another time. September is the month for the Hindu festival week. In years past I have been in India during this time, but I was fortunate to miss it this year due to the time frame of my mission trip. Let me mention one more important item and then I will get to the point of this article. When Paul passed through the city of Athens on his way to Jerusalem, Luke tells us that while he was waiting for Timothy and Silas, “his spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16). Since I started coming to India ten years ago I have come to appreciate those words of Luke, and can relate to the feeling Paul must have had on that occasion. The cities and villages are “full of idols.” Not only do the Hindus go to great lengths to carve out and build grotesque idol images, but their expenditure on the temples to house those idols are elaborate and ornate. Some of the Hindu temples are several stories high and dwarf the other buildings in the town and/or village. Many smaller temples are located on street corners, where the worshippers can gather late in the evening or during the day to offer up their praise to a piece of wood carved out to fit the vain imagination of their hearts. More often than not, the evening worshippers provide lights for their temple god, and when we pass one such temple I can see into the area where the idol sits, adorned with flowers, and what appears to be precious stones and decorative carvings. The idols are even provided a seat on which to sit while the devotees bow at its feet in a vain attempt to gain some blessing. Almost without exception, these temples are well lighted, and often attended by what appears to be a temple guardian of some kind.

We were returning home from an evening service in Burugu lanka, and passing through one of the smaller towns along the way, one of these temples caught my eye. I had, no doubt, seen this temple a number of times since our preaching appointments over the years had taken us through this place on a number of occasions. What caught my eye was the fact that this temple sat in darkness. There were no lights glowing, and both temple and idol sat in darkness. There were no lights in the temple, something out of the ordinary. I am not suggesting that this was the only temple without lights, nor am I implying that the lights in this or any other Hindu temple burn 24/7. What I am pointing out is that on this occasion, what I observed is representative of the spiritual inadequacy of not only the temple, but the idol that sits in that temple. There is no light in the temple; in fact, there are no lights in any of the thousands, perhaps millions of temples that adorn this country or any country, regardless of the religion.

One of the blessings of Christianity is that it enlightens the mind. Jesus declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). On another occasion He proclaimed, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46). Unfortunately, "men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). It is only through the knowledge of Jesus that men can ever hope to be free (John 8:32-34), ever hope to be happy, or ever hope to find purpose and fulfillment in their lives. Before Jesus came into this world, men sat in darkness. When our Lord descended from heaven, "The people that sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matt. 4:16). Rejection of the light of God's word will spell disaster for any person and/or nation. It makes no difference how sincere, how committed, or how enthusiastic a person might be, when men change "the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23) there will not be any light in the temple of their false gods and vain imagination. Unfortunately our once mighty and powerful nation began the trek away from God more than 60 years ago, and the temples of higher education, science and political acclaim have replaced the true temple of God, the church of Christ. Like the idolatrous nations that now fill the

dust bins of history, the United States will soon learn what others have learned: There is no light in their temple!

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## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### “EXCEPT YE BELIEVE THAT I AM HE”

*Animosity, Confrontation, and Ignorance, 8:21-30*

There is a sense of finality in this particular part of the Lord’s encounter with the Pharisees. Their hearts now hardened, the unbelief of these Jewish leaders now gives way to mockery. With it comes an increase in animosity, and the realization that the full denial, arrest and death of the Lord draws ever closer. It is not that they did not seek the Messiah, for the Lord clearly tells them “you shall seek me.” But the Messiah they expected to come, did not come, and would not come. Sadly, there would be no one else to save them. These ten verses contain Jesus’ one last effort to produce belief on the part of these Jews. Some would believe (vs. 30), and to those who believe further words of encouragement and instruction would be given (8:31 ff.). Most, however, would not believe, and as a consequence they would die in their sins.

~~ 8:21 ~~

*“He said therefore again unto them, I go away, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sin: whither I go, ye cannot come”*

*“He said therefore again unto them”* - The “again” of this verse is comparable to the “again” of verse 12, and both indicate a continuation of the thoughts preceding. Reynolds suggests that “this verse introduces a new scene and place, and perhaps a new day” (Pulpit Commentary, ESword Module). Why he draws that conclusion is not clear. He is not alone in that position. In my estimation there is nothing in the passage that indicates such a break. This paragraph, and the one that follows, are both closely related to verses 12-29 [see my comments at beginning of last chapter].

*“I go away”* - A consideration of the events that would eventually occur help determine the meaning of these words. Jesus went back to heaven following His death, burial and resurrection. The Jews to whom He spoke “cannot come” to where Jesus now is, separate and apart from faith, the absence of which characterized their present state of unbelief. Should they continue in their present state of disbelief, they would die in their sin. The

significant implication in this verse is that we should seek the Lord while the opportunity is ours.

*“ye shall die in your sins”* - This is the reason why these Jews would not be able to go where Jesus was going. Heaven’s home is only for those who are pure, forgiven, and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The ‘en’ here (which translates into our English “in”) indicates the condition in which they should die as opposed to the cause of their death.

~~ 8:22 ~~

*“The Jews therefore said, Will he kill himself, that he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come?”*

It is likely that these Jews asked this question in scorn. They completely missed the warning and focused instead on the apparent absurdity of the Lord’s statement. In their minds there was nothing to prohibit them from being able to go anywhere Jesus went. The warning that they would die in their sin was completely over their heads! Their response is quite incredible: “Will he kill himself?” Were they so spiritually depraved that they could not perceive of that heavenly home and the distinct possibility that they would not be permitted entrance where, in fact, Jesus was about to go?

It is remarkable that these Jews sought to make an imagined sin of Jesus (suicide) the grounds of their separation from him! So great is the perversity of depraved human nature it can actually attempt to impute sin to the One wholly sinless in an effort to cover its own sin” (Woods, 170).

~~ 8:23 ~~

*“And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world”*

*“Ye are from beneath”* – The Greek (*katotero*) means downward; beneath...of temporal succession” (Thayer). Robertson provided this word picture:

This language, peculiar to John, could take up the idea in Josephus that these rabbis came from Gehenna whence they will go as children of the devil (Joh 8:44), but the use of *'ek tou kosmou toutou* ("of this world" in origin) as parallel to what we have here seems to prove that the contrast between *kato* and *ano* here is between the earthly (sensual) and the heavenly (Robertson, ESword Module).

By rearranging the words here we might be able to get a better picture of the thought: "Ye are from beneath; of this world. I am from above; not of this world." The mind set of these Jews was earthly; they did not have their mind set on things spiritual, hence the Lord said they "are from beneath." Their suggestion that Jesus was about to destroy Himself proves that they were limited in their ability to spiritually discern the words of the Lord.

In contrast, Jesus spoke of things spiritual, things "not of this world."

This double contrast of himself with his obdurate hearers was stated as an explanation of why it was impossible to reach them with any kind of spiritual message; they were not operating on any wavelength that would have permitted them to receive what the Lord said (Coffman, 218).

~~ 8:24 ~~

*"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"*

The importance that Jesus places upon belief in Himself as the Messiah cannot, and must not, be ignored. Jesus tells these Jews that (1) they would die in their sins, implying that at that precise moment, they were in fact in sin; and (2) the only escape from spiritual death is belief in Jesus as the Messiah. "Jesus is the unique source of salvation. It was the battle cry of the early church that 'There is none other name under heaven given among men' wherein we must be saved. No other system, philosophy, ethics, morals, or anything else can provide the tiniest ray of hope apart from Christ" (Coffman, 218). The implications of this verse are far reaching. Atheists, agnostics,

Muslims, followers of Eastern religions, humanists, and misguided, though zealous, claimers of 'Christianity' will die in their sins. What a loss!

~~ 8:25 ~~

*“They said therefore unto him, Who art thou? Jesus said unto them, Even that which I have also spoken unto you from the beginning.”*

*“Who art thou?”* - Indeed, here is the question of the ages. Just who is this man Jesus? Peter acknowledged that He was, and is, the Christ, the Son of the living God. If Peter was mistaken, then Jesus is the greatest con-man ever to walk upon the face of this earth.

Define thyself! Make thy claims clear and categorical. Give now a direct answer to a plain question. It is very remarkable that the Lord often refuses to respond in the precise form in which his interlocutors demand an answer. He sees the multitudinous sides of every truth, and frequently gives to his questioners the means of answering their question from the ground of deep spiritual conviction, rather than furnishes them with a formula which might easily be abused (Pulpit Commentary, 356).

Indeed, Jesus is incomparable. He was fearless, invincible, calm, and always under complete control of every situation. Someone summed up the Lord's life like this: “He never hurried, He never worried, and He always got the job done.” So majestic and wonderful were the ways of the Lord that even His critics were unable to explain away His miracles, or find fault with His words. By rejecting Jesus, these Jews had thrown away the key to knowledge.

*“Even that which I have spoken”* - The early Greek Fathers saw in this verse a complete rejection by the Lord. It was as if He were saying, “Why am I even speaking to you at all?”

~~ 8:26 ~~

*“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you: howbeit he that sent me is true; and the things which I heard from him, these speak I unto the world”*

*“Many things to speak and to judge concerning you”* - While these critics sought to undermine Jesus, Jesus promised that he would speak many things concerning them. Their true nature would come to light in the not too distant future. These Jews were the embodiment of complete unbelief. When the Lord said that He has “many things to speak and to judge” concerning them, He was, in essence saying, that the chasm between Himself and these Jewish leaders might be made wider, but the words simply had to be said.

~~ 8:27 ~~

*“They perceived not that he spake to them of the Father”*

What an astonishing statement with regard to these men. These were supposed to be the leaders of Israel, and yet they could not perceive that Jesus was speaking about God the Father, not Joseph! Jesus spoke of them plainly, but they simply did not get it. We are given a glimpse of the power inherent in pride and self-righteousness that is able to blind the spiritual eyes of those who are determined to reject otherwise obvious truth. When men reject truth long enough, they reach a point where the brightness of the light of truth cannot be endured. I once read of a man chained in a dungeon for years in abject darkness. After years of such dreadful confinement he finally was released. When he walked out into the light, it blinded him and caused him to retreat to the comfort of the darkness that had been his home. The same can happen spiritually.

~~ 8:28 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things”*

*“then shall ye know that I am he”* - The time would come when these unbelieving Jews would be convinced of the truth of His

claims. Not all Jews came to believe, and so we must take the statement in its limited sense.

*“as the Father taught me, I speak these things”* - If the Son of God thought it important to speak only the words the Father had given Him, how can we do any less? When we speak, we must be “speaking as it were oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11).

~~ 8:29 ~~

*“And he that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him”*

*“for I do always the things that are pleasing to him”* - The Christian should strive to please the Father. Not just occasionally, but “always,” and in all things. In the Greek the word “always” is emphatic showing that Jesus was completely resigned to the will of the Father.

One more point needs to be made regarding the words of our Lord in this verse. Here is an affirmation of His sinless and flawless character. Foster noticed this:

In the portion of the sermon that follows we have one of the grand assertions of Jesus’ sinlessness in a negative form of a challenge to them to state and prove any sin He had ever committed. It is often overlooked that He made this claim at this point in His sermon in the positive form: ‘I do always the things that are pleasing to him.’ No mere human being can affirm such a thing (Foster, *Life of Christ*, 813-814).

We are not provided any information regarding the tone of our Lord’s voice. Personally, I cannot help but feel that our Lord spoke with great empathy to these stubborn and rebellious leaders of Israel. Truly this day must have been one of the saddest in the Lord’s life.

~~ 8:30 ~~

*“As he spake these things, many believed on him”*

The fact that “*many believed on him*” has a close bearing on what follows. While there were many who came to believe in Jesus, they did not continue in that belief; at best their belief was only superficial. Jesus knew the possibility that the seed of belief could be snatched away by the evil one, and seeks next to encourage them to continue in that faith.

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Superficial Christianity  
By Tom Wacaster

Webster defines “superficial” as “(1) being on the surface; not penetrating the substance of a thing; as a superficial color; a superficial covering; (2) shallow; contrived to cover something; and (3) not deep or profound; reaching or comprehending only what is obvious or apparent; as a superficial scholar; superficial knowledge.” Superficial Christianity looks good on the surface, but it is of no “value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:23). Our Lord calls for sacrificial, not superficial faith. There is a marked difference between the two.

First, a superficial faith produces a comfortable Christianity; one that does not interfere with one’s predisposed life style. It is a “Christianity” that places no restrictions upon an individual, requires no repentance, exacts no restrictions, and asks for no sacrifice. Unaccustomed to feeding upon the word, superficial Christians are incapable of taking more than short doses of the spiritual medicine that is needed to cure their sin sick soul. The meat of word makes them gag. Moral principles are rejected for mere platitudes that make them feel at ease, and any sermon that runs more than fifteen minutes is viewed as a waste of time and an imposition upon their busy schedule. Once a week, or in some cases only once or twice a year, these nominal believers make their appearance, pay their dues, and punch their spiritual clock; and all at the church of their choice that meets their personal taste in style of worship and brand of theology. Easter Sunday and Christmas are the apex of their spiritual activity; daily cross bearing means nothing to them.

Second, superficial Christianity will produce a church that is foreign to the blood-bought institution we read about in the pages of the New Testament. The leaders are quick to provide those things that will help increase the numbers, but fall short of improving spiritual maturity. The denominations have long sought to entertain rather than enlighten. The church is viewed as some sort of organization designed to administer spiritual anesthesia; something akin to a haven of rest where the indolent and idle may congregate to escape their moral and spiritual responsibilities in a world of darkness and doubt. Those who have only superficial faith view the church as some sort of safety zone in the midst of the highways of life into which people can go to avoid the dangers they encounter every day. But once the danger is past, the weak in faith abandon the church like the proverbial rat that abandons a sinking ship. The church is nothing more than an old folk's home where the spiritually defective might find shelter and/or food. Someone noted more than a century ago, the church "is not a sort of spiritual Florida to which people can migrate in order to escape the chilling blasts of a cold, unfriendly world." I wish that such misconceptions were limited to those in the denominational world, but so much of this "give me" mentality has infiltrated the Lord's church today. Oh, how I wish it were not so! Having had the opportunity to travel about our country seeking funds for my mission work, I have come to learn that we have spent so much on creature comforts and neglected the Creator's commission to go into all the world. I have visited congregations willing to borrow millions to build an elaborate building, and make long term commitments to mortgage payments, but who are unwilling to commit themselves to more than a year at a time to mission endeavors. One wonders if we have not been the victims of superficial Christianity.

Third, superficial Christianity will not save. I am writing to an audience who knows (or at least should know) the demands from our Father and His Son. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. 16:24-26).

“So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Superficial Christianity is the antonym of genuine saving faith. It is confined to the realm of convenience and comfort. Seldom is there a call for real sacrifice. Suppers, sales and entertainment are the means by which people are brought into the church, and through more exciting and ever increasing entertainment, they are tricked into believing that they are making sacrifices and living the kind of life God wants them to live. No wonder the church has lost its influence in a world that seems to be overrun with evil and ungodliness. The gospel is no longer considered the power unto salvation, but the power unto sensationalism. There are churches out there that are indeed sensational, with their Broadway style productions with all the glamor and glitter that thrill men and tickle their ears, but they do not offer what it takes to save the souls of men. In this they have long ago compromised.

God help us to return to His great wisdom, and build churches that seek and save the lost rather than seek to serve and satisfy the masses. Anything else is only superficial Christianity.



## CHAPTER TWENTY

# “THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE”

*Debate With the Pharisees, 8:31-59*

As the student moves through these twenty-eight verses he is immediately impressed with the polemic nature of this ‘conversation’ between Jesus and the Pharisees. There are four movements in these verses. The first has to do with the Lord’s affirmation, out of which the other three parts are directly related. In this first part the Lord sets forth His affirmation, *“If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (8:31-32). The second movement in the chapter has to do with the initial response of the Pharisees, and is borne out of vain speculation on their part: *“We have never been in bondage to any man.”* This was a blatant untruth, probably uttered in the heat of controversy. I’ll deal with the reality of their political and historical situation when we get to the passage itself. The third movement actually begins with the second half of verse 38: *“Ye also do the things which ye heard from your father.”* Their answer is the result of undue importance placed upon their physical lineage: *“Our father is Abraham”* (vs. 39), and *“We are not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God”* (8:41). The final movement in this section reveals the complete depth of darkness and depravity in which these Pharisees now found themselves. When asked, *“Why do ye not believe me?”* they answered with the blasphemous words, *“Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon”* (vs. 48).

The root problem these Pharisees had was a heart that hated the truth. Like their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts, these religious elite were more concerned about their tradition and false expectation of the coming Messiah than a genuine love for the truth. It is a recognized fact among those who seek to follow God that truth is absolute and attainable. Who would deny this? While some may believe that truth is subjective and elusive, the words of Jesus that *“ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free”* serve as a compass in these matters. In addition to truth being absolute, it is also narrow minded and dogmatic. Two plus two equals four - there is no room for error. Sincerity of heart or

honesty of motive does not annul this fact. Truth is also narrow. A college teacher writes the problem on the board. Twelve divided by two equals six. There is absolutely no room for deviation. The answer is not seven, nor is it five. Society does not argue, nor do they accuse the mathematician of being unloving, unkind, or bigoted. Now we move to the “truth” that makes men free. It is not mathematical truth, nor is it scientific truth, but that which is revealed from God Almighty through holy men “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). Like mathematical truth, or scientific truth, spiritual truth is also narrow minded and dogmatic.

This truth is dogmatic to the core. It will not co-exist with error, nor can it. By its very nature it is narrow in its application. But unlike the mathematical truth that two plus two equals four, or twelve divided by two equals six, this “truth” of which our Lord speaks in this chapter has eternal consequences. But how do men react when faced with this truth? How did these Pharisees react? Sincerity (albeit misguided) was placed above heavenly instruction, and feelings took precedence over fact. Men become angry at the truth because it restricts their freedom to act and behave in their own chosen way; these Pharisees were no exception. Rather than simply accepting the truth and obeying it, they argued with the facts presented, became agitated at the One speaking the truth, and closed their ears and hearts, as if their rejection of the same would annul their responsibility toward those things spoken by the Lord. Since the truth and only the truth will set men free, it would seem that all men, everywhere, would have such a disposition as to receive the truth at all costs. Unfortunately, they do not; and this encounter that Jesus has with the Pharisees demonstrates that fact.

Were truth not *absolute* the Lord could not have declared, “I am the light of the world” (8:12). When He declared, “Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (8:24), He was implying the *essentiality* of truth. In this section, when He declared that “ye shall know the truth” (8:32), He was declaring the *attainability* of truth. As you study this section I hope your appreciation for the Lord will grow; and along with it a deeper appreciation for truth. We will study this under the following headings: the Lord’s *affirmation*, 8:31-32; the *arrogance* of the

Pharisees, 8:33-38; the *allegiance* of the Pharisees, 8:39-47; the *accusation* of the Pharisees, 8:48-58; and, the final *action* of the Pharisees, 8:59. Let's take a closer look.

*The Affirmation*

8:31-32

~~ 8:31 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples”*

There were some of the Jews who came to believe upon Jesus; others remained in disbelief. To those who believed on Him, there were words of encouragement. Yet even while the Lord encouraged some, there were others who attempted to thwart our Lord's teaching at every turn.

*“If”* – This is perhaps the most powerful two letter word in the English language. It teaches us that salvation is conditional. There is something that those who believe must do with their new found faith. If *what?* *“If ye abide in my word.”* Woods' comments on this are on target: “These, in order to become genuine disciples, must ‘abide’ in his word, live in the sphere of it, and be wholly obedient to it. True discipleship is not by profession but by action; it is a life one lives and not simply or solely a doctrine to which one subscribes” (Woods, 172). To abide in the words of Christ is to live a life that is in harmony with the teachings of Christ. It is to have the words of Christ enshrined in our heart and memory as our continual guide and compass that leads our every footstep in our spiritual journey. The resultant blessing is a claim to discipleship. *“Then are ye truly my disciples.”* Discipleship is conditioned upon abiding in the word of Christ.

~~ 8:32 ~~

*“and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”*

There are several things affirmed in this verse: (1) There is such a thing as truth; (2) that truth is attainable; (3) truth is synonymous with the “word” of Christ; (4) truth is that which makes men free.

There is a progression in verses 31 and 32 which is quite significant. Genuine belief compels one to “abide” in Christ’s word; that in turn provides an increasing knowledge of truth; all of this culminates in freedom. “People of the world, though they often boast of their freedom to do as they please, are really the pitiable objects of the most advanced slavery being bound by their passions, desires and fleshly weaknesses from which they are helpless to escape” (Woods, 172).

Take a closer look at the words “knowledge,” “truth,” and “freedom.” These are concepts of major importance in the life and thinking of human beings, regardless of the age or location in which they might live. These words suggest a progress from ignorance to knowledge, from error, misinformation, or uncertainty to truth, and from slavery to liberty. Plant the concept of freedom in the hearts of men who long to be free and that inner longing will not be satisfied until that liberty is obtained.

Before leaving this verse we feel it is also important to say something about “obeying” the truth. We note three passages:

Romans 2:8 - “but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation.”

Galatians 5:7 - “Ye were running well; who hindered you that ye should not obey the truth?”

2 Thessalonians 1:8 - “rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus:”

Here are some important lessons we learn from the passages before us: (1) While God may provide the truth to men, they must respond to it appropriately; (2) It is possible to be drawn aside, “hindered” so that we fail to obey the truth but instead obey unrighteousness; (3) You cannot OBEY truth if you have not heard and believed truth. It is impossible to hear only error and then accidentally obey the truth.

*The Arrogance*  
8:33-38

We move now from the Lord's *affirmation* to an examination of the *arrogance* of those to whom He spoke.

~~ 8:33 ~~

*"They answered unto him, We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?"*

The statement which these Jews made was quite astonishing. Not only had they been in bondage in the past, but they were, at that precise moment, in bondage to the Roman authorities. A study of secular history will show that the Jews had worn the yoke of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Alexander, the Ptolemies, and the Seleucid kings. They may have experienced brief pockets of liberty, but for the most part, national Israel can be identified by a long string of subjugation under world powers that surrounded them geographically. But even so they had completely missed the point in the words of Jesus about freedom by truth. Their response indicates exactly how shallow was the belief of these Pharisees. First, there was their concept of freedom. They could only think in terms of national freedom. It never dawned upon them that they could be free nationally (which they were not) and yet be in bondage to something far more horrible than national or personal slavery. Second, there was the undue importance they placed upon their being the physical descendants of Abraham. Little did they realize that their physical relationship to Abraham had absolutely no bearing upon their spiritual character.

~~ 8:34 ~~

*"Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bondservant of sin"*

One who "*committeth*" sin – more literally, "keeps on committing sin" - continues to live a life of sin. Such a man manifests his subservience to sin, and the fact that he is still a bondservant. We would say of the drunkard that he is the slave of a habit. The

same principle is involved in all evil doing, which tends to engulf the soul in all kinds of wickedness. Sin is progressive, one sin leading to yet another.

Sin is more like a disease. Each fresh outbreak is symptomatic of the virus that is operating within the body, and each attack weakens the body so that subsequent seizures become more intense and more frequent. The decline of resistance accelerates the progress of the disease until finally death ensues if the malady is not arrested. As the sick man is the slave of his disease, so the sinner is the slave of sin; and unless intervention breaks the power of sin, the sinner is doomed (Tenney, 148).

~~ 8:35 ~~

*“And the bondservant abideth not in the house for ever: the son abideth for ever.”*

The connection of the analogy with the context is not immediately apparent. There were evidently some Jews that had come to believe, but were in danger of not continuing in that belief. Like a slave that might occasionally come into the house to serve the master, these Jews were coming into the house of the Master, but not continuing therein. Hence the admonition to “continue in my word.” Johnson wrote, “The Jews, bondsmen instead of children, who claimed that they dwelt in the house of God and enjoyed his favor, would soon be expelled; only those who were made free by the Son and thus become children would continue to abide in the Lord’s house” (Johnson, ESword Module).

The application is obvious. The old dispensation, with all of its special blessings and privileges granted to Israel, was about to come to an end. Abraham’s *true* children would remain in the house [spiritual Israel], and enjoy all the blessings and privileges that would be theirs on a permanent basis.

Only Jesus could set men free. If the ‘house’ represents the presence of God to which the faithful shall one day enter, then the words of the Lord are a subtle admission that He was sinless, since He is free and abides in the house forever.

~~ 8:36 ~~

*“If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”*

Whenever a precious soul escapes the defilements of the world in which he lives, he has obtained the greatest possible freedom available to mankind. Such a one is free indeed. Our beloved America enjoys freedom guaranteed to them by the Constitution of the United States. But without doubt, our citizenry is held captive by sin. The inability to say “no” to the lusts of the flesh is only a small manifestation that we are captives to the worse kind of slavery; that of slavery to sin.

~~ 8:37 ~~

*“I know that ye are Abraham’s seed: yet ye seek to kill me, because my word hath not free course in you”*

These Jews were “Abraham’s seed” only in the physical sense. Their rejection of Jesus was because the word of God did not have “free course” in them. They were not willing to allow the word to take root in their lives. Unfortunately their physical relationship to Abraham had no bearing upon their spiritual status, and the rejection of the word of God led to their intense hatred for the Lord, and consequent plans to kill Him.

*“yet ye seek to kill me”* - Why would Jesus expose their desire to kill Him? Foster addressed this interesting aspect of this incident:

It was most important for the preaching of the gospel that all the world should recognize that Jesus knew the plots against His life. He was not overpowered by evil men, but gave Himself voluntarily for the sins of the world. For this reason and for the purpose of solemnly warning these wicked men against the murderous intents in their hearts, Jesus kept calmly revealing to the multitude the plots these leaders were seeking to carry out (Foster, 815-816).

~~ 8:38 ~~

*“I speak the things which I have seen with my Father: and ye also do the things which ye heard from your father”*

There are two spiritual “fathers” that come into view in these last few verses of this section. Jesus states here that He speaks the things received from the Father in heaven. These Jews, likewise, do those things which they heard from *their* “father,” the devil (8:44).

*Their Allegiance*

8:39-47

~~ 8:39 ~~

*“They answered and said unto him, Our father is Abraham. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”*

The “claim” to heritage did not make it so. The “proof is found in the pudding,” and their failure to do the works of Abraham removed any claim to the inheritance promised that patriarch and his descendants. While they may have been Abraham’s physical descendants, they were not his spiritual children in any sense of the word.

~~ 8:40 ~~

*“But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I heard from God: this did not Abraham”*

How can we equate Jesus’ accusation with the fact that they were said to “believe” (verse 30)? The answer lies in the fact that they did not allow the belief to move them to obedience. Obedient faith is the only kind of faith that will save, and this whole passage is proof of that significant truth. Coffman noted, “Today, the world is full of people who ‘believe’ on the Lord Jesus but would rather kill him than to do what he commanded, being in such a state the spiritual descendants of those ‘believers’ on exhibition here” (Coffman, 223).

~~ 8:41 ~~

*“Ye do the works of your father. They said unto him, We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God”*

These Jews did the works (note the plural) of their father, the devil. The “work” under consideration in these verses is the love of the truth and application of the same to life. Abraham never once sought to destroy the messenger, something that seems to be common place with those who fall into the category of men such as these Jews. Their forefathers killed the prophets, and stoned those sent to them. We learn the importance of respect for the messenger of God’s life giving word.

*“We were not born of fornication”* - What a pitiful state of blindness in which these men found themselves. They simply could not distinguish between their physical and spiritual relationship to Abraham. Woods summarized their pitiful answer thus: “We are not illegitimate children; if you refuse to permit us to trace our descent from Abraham, we have no other spiritual father on earth so we offer God as our Father” (Woods, 175).

~~ 8:42 ~~

*“Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me”*

It is natural for the members of a family, having the same father, to love one another. The same is true in the spiritual sense. If these Jews truly had the same Father as Jesus, they would have loved Him. The conclusion was obvious. They did not have the same spiritual Father.

~~ 8:43 ~~

*“Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word”*

*“Cannot hear my word”* - Failure to hear was due to their hardened hearts. They had reached a point in the downward moral spiral and had reached the point where they simply could not hear or understand the message of the Master. In every life there is a point beyond which an individual cannot return, spiritually speaking. Realization of this truth would go a long way to keeping a man on the upward road. Johnson noted, “they could not understand him, because they were morally incapable of hearing him. Satan, their father, had them captive, and their

minds were so preoccupied, that they could not receive Christ's truth" (Johnson, ESword Module). The verse makes it rather obvious that there are two "households" existent upon the earth. There is the household of God, composed of His children. There is the household of the devil, composed of his children. All men fall into one of these two households.

~~ 8:44 ~~

*"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof"*

In this verse we learn: (1) These Jews were of their "father," the devil; (2) their "father" is one who "lusts"; (3) these Jews desired to do the lusts of their father the devil; (4) the devil has been a murderer from the beginning; (5) the devil does not stand in the truth; (6) there is no truth in the devil's character; (7) the devil's lies are of himself [this very aspect of the devil may give us some insight into the reason for his condemnation, namely that his lies arose from within, and not from any source outside of himself]; (8) the devil is the father of lies. This verse gives us an amazing picture of the devil our adversary (1 Pet. 5:8). He often makes sin look enticing and pleasurable, but in the end it is a taskmaster that robs its victims of any enjoyment in life.

~~ 8:45-47 ~~

*But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God*

The Lord's argument was flawless. Jesus was in effect saying, "If I am a mere man, then I am not perfect. Show me the error in my claims; expose me! But, if you cannot find fault in me, it must mean I am divine. Hence, you MUST obey my words." What a challenge! "Show me where I have sinned!" In every attempt where these Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus, they were answered with force. They had claimed He had broken their traditions, but Jesus showed them that their traditions had made

void the word of God. They charged Jesus with breaking the law and committing blasphemy by forgiving a man of sin. But Jesus answered with a miracle to show He had the authority to forgive. They falsely slandered Him by accusing Him of being a winebibber and glutton, but Jesus ignored the charge and let His life bear witness to the falsity of their charges.

Had he been merely a super-eminently holy man with a conscience as tender as such a degree of sanctity implies, He would not have suffered the smallest sin, whether in His life or heart, to pass unperceived; and what hypocrisy, it would, in this case, have been to put to others a question whose favorable solution would have rested only on their ignorance of facts which He knew to be real (Foster, 818).

### *Their Accusation*

8:48-58

~~ 8:48 ~~

*“The Jews answered and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon?”*

To call a Jew a “Samaritan” was the lowest of insults. But Jesus would not allow Himself to be moved by such accusations, and refused to address the slander. Don’t forget, Jesus used that very epitaph to point out a true “hero” and “neighbor” in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In effect they were saying, “We are not children of the devil! It is you who has a demon!”

It is notable that the discussion takes a downward turn at this point as these hypocritical Jews begin to make wild and baseless charges. To charge Him with being a Samaritan may have been a slanderous charge, but to claim that the Lord had a demon demonstrates the depths of depravity to which men will go in order to avoid the truth. The slanderous charge that He was a Samaritan, in their view, put Jesus in the class of being a half breed, despised of men. The charge that He had a devil suggests, as Woods points out, that He “was a crazed person whose mind had been taken over by another, and that by a spirit of the unseen and evil world” (Woods, 177).

~~ 8:49 ~~

*“Jesus answered, I have not a demon; but I honor my Father,  
and ye dishonor me”*

Jesus plainly states His innocence with regard to their charges. He knew that the accusation of being a Samaritan was intended to hurt rather than to answer Him, and He refused to stoop to their level and even offer an answer. But the charge that He had a demon necessitated a reply because it impugned the Father. Jesus honored the Father, something a demon would not do.

~~ 8:50 ~~

*“But I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and  
judgeth”*

*“I seek not mine own glory”* - There is a connection between this verse and the previous that is not immediately recognized. Jesus had just told them that He honored the Father. In this verse we learn exactly how that was accomplished: *“I seek not mine own glory.”* So long as a person seeks his own glory he cannot honor the Father. Men seek their own glory in a number of ways. The atheist denies the existence of God and places his trust in men. Others may shake their fist in the face of God and refuse to submit to His divine will. Still others seek their own glory when they make excuses for their behavior rather than engage in serious self-examination. These hypocritical leaders of Israel demonstrated that they were not seeking the glory of the Father.

*“there is one that seeketh and judgeth”* – Although they were seeking to kill Him, Jesus was not in the least disturbed. His honor was not in question here. I get the distinct impression in the give and take between Jesus and these Jews, that Jesus remained calm even in the face of intense animosity on their part. He reminds them that there is *“One”* who seeks things out, and it is He Who will properly judge whether or not He had a demon (as they proclaimed), or whether He was honoring the Father.

~~ 8:51 ~~

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my word, he shall  
never see death”*

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you”* - The words “verily, verily” suggest the importance of what He was about to say. It may also indicate that Jesus momentarily turned His attention away from those who sought to do Him harm toward those in the crowd who were more inclined to hear Him.

*“If any man”*- This shows the universal nature of Christ’s invitation, while *“keep my words”* shows the conditionality, and *“shall not see death”* is the promise attached thereto. The Greek contains a double negative, and might be better rendered, “shall by no means see death.” Seeing that Hebrews 9:27 tells us that it is “appointed unto men once to die,” the promise here cannot be referring to physical death, but rather spiritual death; it is separation from God and all that is good. It is referred to as the “second death” in Revelation 20:6, and is synonymous with eternal condemnation. Thus, if a man, any man, will keep the word of Christ, he will *not* see condemnation, the converse being, he shall have everlasting life.

~~ 8:52 ~~

*“The Jews said unto him, Now we know that thou hast a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my word, he shall never taste of death”*

If Jesus was seeking to turn His attention toward those more inclined to listen, then you have here a rude interruption on the part of the Jews. Oh, how sure they were in their analysis of this man Jesus! *“Now we know”* is a strong affirmation that their conclusions were correct. But alas, how mistaken they were! And upon what did they base their conclusion? Upon what they could perceive with the physical eye! The words of Jesus must have seemed to them utter madness. “The whole thrust of the entire interview had been spiritual, but they would have none of it, literalizing his words and mocking him in scorn; there was no way to break through the crust of their hatred” (Coffman, 226). Brother Woods’ summation of their thinking is right on target:

Abraham and the prophets kept God’s word; yet, both he and they are dead; does he think he can do for others

which they, the greatest and most faithful of the race, had been unable to do for themselves? (Woods, 179).

~~ 8:53 ~~

*“Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who died? and the prophets died: whom makest thou thyself?”*

There was a double affirmation on their part regarding the death of Abraham and the prophets in verses 52 and 53. The amazing thing about their statement was, *it was true*. The evidence pointed squarely to the truth that Jesus *was* and *is* greater than Abraham, and the prophets as well. Oh yes, they saw the conclusion; they were not willing to accept and obey the consequences thereof, so they rejected the conclusion as well.

*“whom makest thou thyself?”* - “Who are you claiming to be?” It is not that they were ready to accept Jesus’ affirmation, but they simply wanted to know who He claimed to be. Keep in mind that these religious leaders were seeking to entrap Jesus. If they could get Jesus to openly admit to something with which they could charge blasphemy, I have no doubt they would have arrested Him then and there. One can scarcely image a heart more hardened and calloused than those who engaged in this futile confrontation with the Lord.

~~ 8:54 ~~

*“Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing: it is my Father that glorifieth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God”*

Every argument from the Jews was answered with calm deliberation. Here is Jesus’ answer to the question in the previous verse. To “glorify” means to attribute honor to someone. Their accusation was that Jesus was attempting to give honor to Himself. His answer? *“If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.”*

*“it is my Father that glorifieth me”* – Let the evidence speak for itself! At this point in the Lord’s ministry there was more than enough evidence to suggest that Jesus was more than a mere mortal man. No man ever spoke as did Jesus (John 7:46). So pure was His life that He could ask, “Which of you convicteth me

of Sin?” (John 8:46), and the only response with regard to such an accusation was absolute silence. The miracles attested to His mighty power; His compassion to His wonderful pity for lost humanity! Perhaps it was the Lord’s on-going claim of His special relationship with the Father that angered these Jews the most and aroused in their stubborn hearts an anger and hatred that blinded them to the truth.

*“of whom ye say, that he is your God”* – Any man can lay claim to knowing God, but that does not necessarily make it so. One’s actions speak volumes as to what truly lies within the heart. The contrast between the life of Jesus and these Jews is astonishing. Though these Jews claimed God as their Father, their actions proved otherwise.

~~ 8:55 ~~

*“and ye have not known him: but I know him; and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be like unto you, a liar: but I know him, and keep his word”*

Our Lord’s words were pointed and plain. They had never known the Lord, and at the same time they lied in laying claim to any knowledge of Him whatsoever.

It is significant also that two different Greek words are used here to indicate knowing God. One of these means to know through observation and study; the other, to know intuitively; the former is used to indicate that these Jews had never truly learned God; the latter is used to describe the knowledge Jesus had of him through direct, personal contact. Moreover, the tense of these verbs differs; the Jews *never had known God*; Jesus *knew* (present tense) him because *he always had* (Woods, 180).

Do the words from the lips of Jesus seem harsh? To the contrary, the Lord spoke out of a heart of love and sorrow for the situation in which these men now found themselves. Jesus simply could not have concealed the truth from these men without violating the will of the Father.

~~ 8:56 ~~

*“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it,  
and was glad”*

This is one of the most astonishing verses in all the New Testament. In this verse Jesus declared (1) that Abraham actually “saw” this particular “day,” the “day” of Christ. Implied is the fact that Abraham was at that precise moment alive, and conscious, being aware of the day of Christ; (2) there was something in this particular “day” of Christ which caused Abraham to be “glad.” Keep in mind that the Jews had asked earlier, “Art thou greater than our father Abraham?” (vs. 53). Here is Jesus’ answer. Not only was it true that He is greater than Abraham, but Abraham himself is proof thereof. Consider two important passages with regard to this matter:

And, behold, the word of Jehovah came unto him, saying, This man shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:4-6).

And said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. Because thou hast obeyed my voice (Gen. 22:16-18).

Abraham could only have seen this day if he were alive at the time Jesus spoke. But why the past tense? Why “Abraham saw it” rather than “Abraham sees it”? It is because when the promise was made to Abraham, that patriarch saw it with the eye of faith. What was “by faith” then, was now a reality to Abraham. No wonder it is said Abraham was “glad.”

~~ 8:57 ~~

*“The Jews therefore said unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?”*

*“fifty years old”* – Fifty was the age at which a man was considered mature. There is nothing to suggest that Jesus was older than thirty-three years of age; it was rather an insinuation that Jesus was not mature enough to be teaching them.

*“hast thou seen Abraham?”* - I find it difficult to image a more stubborn and obtuse mind than that demonstrated here. These Jews simply could not see beyond the physical, literal meaning of the words. A careful look at the question will reveal their prejudice minds. Jesus never said, “I have seen Abraham,” but “Abraham saw my day.”

~~ 8:58 ~~

*“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was born, I am”*

The doctrine that Jesus is some sort of a “created being” (as suggested by the Jehovah’s Witnesses) simply will not stand in the face of this scripture.

The verbs are quite significant. That with reference to Abraham signifies ‘to begin, to come to be; that of Christ, to ‘be evermore existing.’ There was a point in history when Abraham came into existence; before this, he was not; but of Christ it is affirmed that he always existed. The tense is timeless present and conveys the same notion as that used of Jehovah when he said, ‘I am that I am’ (Ex. 3:14). It should be observed that Jesus did not say, ‘Before Abraham was born, I ‘was,’ though this would have positioned him in history at a point prior to Abraham; this would have suggested that he had a beginning, even though before Abraham (Woods, 181).

The words “I Am” are an assertion of absolute, timeless existence, equivalent with the Father Who told Moses that He was to be identified as the “I Am” of Israel’s deliverance (Ex.

3:14). Unfortunately our English language does not pick up the essence of all that is involved in the original words.

*Their Action*

8:59

~~ 8:59 ~~

*“They took up stones therefore to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple”*

*“took up stones therefore to cast at him”* – The claims Jesus made were, at least in their eyes, blasphemous. Rather than draw the proper conclusion and act upon it, they allowed their prejudice to blind them and see only those things they wanted to see. The same problem exists in every generation. Why is it that some people simply do not draw the correct conclusions when confronted with the truth? It is because of their preconceived notion of what the Bible *should* say, or what they *want* it to say, rather than what it actually says.

Before drawing this section to a close, it is important to point out the progressive hostility in these Jews. First, there was contradiction. When Jesus made the statement that He was “the light of the world,” these religious leaders quickly affirmed that His witness was not true. Next, Jesus’ statement that they were in need of freedom was met with denial: “We are in bondage to no man.” If the charge cannot be refuted, then just deny it! This was their strategy. Finally, these Jews progressed to outright and deliberate insult. “Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon?” (vs. 48). This gave way to sarcasm in verse 53 when they said, in essence, “Just who do you think you are anyway?” Finally, the enemies of Jesus resorted to outright violence in verse 59, “they took up stones therefore to cast at him.”

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There are three things that stand out in our study of chapter eight that demonstrate the magnificence and majesty of our Lord. One of these is the astonishing patience and compassion with which our Lord sought to lead these Jews to the truth. Jesus lived during a time when brutality permeated society and often

brought out the worst in humanity. Slaves were nothing more than some man's property; babies were often discarded by unloving parents or even ripped from their mother's womb; Roman gladiatorial contests which offered entertainment and amusement at the expense of human life. Such things all indicate an absence of compassion toward one's fellow human being. Yet in the midst of that barbaric atmosphere there came One Who was not only compassionate in His deeds, but in His teaching. If you cannot see in this eighth chapter an animosity on the part of the Jewish leaders, you need take a closer look. Their response to the wonderful words of Jesus is filled with hatred, hidden agendas, and the desire to do the Lord harm rather than give heed to His words. "Where is your father?" "Who do you think you are?" "We are in bondage to no man; how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" "We are not born of fornication." "Thou art a Samaritan." "Thou hast a demon!" "Whom makest thou thyself?" "How have you seen Abraham?" The atmosphere is razor sharp; the motives only evil. In contrast, I do not get any indication that Jesus ever raised His voice, lost patience, or responded with the same kind of bitter and unkind words. The calm deliberation with which Jesus addressed His accusers, and sought to bring them to the truth, and to the Father, demonstrates His deep compassion for the lost; even those who are lost because of their stubborn hearts and rebellious will. On one occasion Jesus "saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34, emphasis mine, TW). On numerous occasions Jesus had compassion on the physical ailments of those who followed, but His compassion reached far beyond their physical needs to the spiritual needs; needs which could only be met by compassionate teaching on His part. Such wonderful compassion lifted Jesus up in the eyes of those who heard this One who spoke with authority.

Second, the student should note the wonderful logic in the Lord's words. He reasoned with these Jews; unfortunately they did not reason with Him. Jesus truly demonstrates that He is the Master Logician. He appealed to the very law under which He lived and to which they claimed respect: "In your law it is written" (8:17). He reversed their '*ad hominem*' absurdities by asking, "Which of

you convicteth me of sin?" Never once did the Lord condescend to their tactics by attacking and accusing them of something which could not be proven. He reduced their arguments to absurdity by pointing out their lack of respect for the Father and their inconsistencies to the law. Though this eighth chapter of John is *hot* with conflict, Jesus remained calm, ever seeking to teach those in error and thereby direct them toward belief. As the Jews threw their accusations at Jesus, it is noted by John that Jesus simply "answered" (vv. 31, 33).

Finally, it is just amazing to observe the majesty with which Jesus honored the Father and exonerated Himself. Jesus came to do the Father's will. Not concerned in the least with His own wellbeing, He lifted up the Father, always seeking to do His will. Even today, those who seek to do the Father's will are noticed by those who, like these Jews, hate God, Christ and all that is good and holy. Men may despise the faithful child of God. They may criticize the faithful Christian. They might even seek to do them harm. But one thing is certain: they cannot ignore them. Jesus spoke the following words in His sermon on the mount: "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Did you catch the last part of that verse? "and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Jesus does not expect any more out of us than He was willing to give Himself. His life glorified the Father. The godly Christian life also glorifies the Father; but in addition, it glorifies the Christ and exalts Him in the eyes of men. An elder in a congregation where I did local work in the early 90's was fond of telling the class: "Our job is to make Jesus and the Father look good!" In keeping with the thrust of this book I would add: "Our job is to lift Jesus up and magnify Him in the eyes of the world." Sometime I wonder: "How are we doing?"



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE “BLIND BUT NOW I SEE”

*The Sixth Sign: Giving Sight to the Blind, 9:1-41*

Still in Jerusalem, our Lord encounters a man born blind. There are three parts in the chapter. In the first the Lord gives sight to the blind man thereby demonstrating divine power. Here is the only time in all the gospels that we read of the healing of a congenital blindness. The man had never seen the light of day, experienced the colors of a sunrise or sunset, or looked into the eyes of those whom he knew and loved. To the disciples he was a subject for theological discussion; to the Lord it was an opportunity to demonstrate compassion and mercy. The second part of the chapter focuses on the interrogation of the blind man by the Jewish authorities. The remarkable thing about this interrogation is the blatant blindness of the leaders of Israel, a blindness that could not be cured with medicine or even a miracle; theirs was a blindness of heart and mind. To the Pharisees this man, on this particular occasion, was nothing more than a pawn to be used to entrap Jesus. When the man would not cooperate with their purposes they cast him out of their presence. The words of the man who had been healed must have cut deep: “Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened mine eyes” (vs. 30). The final part of the chapter focuses on the Lord’s encounter with the young man who had been healed and a closing confrontation with the Pharisees who were nearby. In keeping with His divine mission to seek and save that which is lost, our Lord searched for the man. “And finding him, he said, Doest thou believe on the Son of God?” (vs. 35). While the blind man was given the blessing of light, the Pharisees remained in their blindness, and consequently, their “sin remaineth” (vs. 41).

There is disagreement among some of our sources as to the precise chronological relationship of chapters 9 and 10 with chapter 8. There are some who argue for an immediate association in that the previous chapter closes with the words “and so passed by” (KJV). Chapter nine then begins with the words, “And as Jesus passed by,” making the connection immediate without any lapse of time. Keep in mind that chapter

eight ends with an attempt on the life of Jesus for blasphemy. The miracle in chapter nine would serve to confirm the message of chapter eight. What the Pharisees took for blasphemy, the Lord's miracle showed to be truth, namely that Jesus is indeed God incarnate. As Jesus was removing Himself from a threat of stoning, He took the opportunity to perform the miracle.

Strong evidence has also been presented to suggest that the events in chapter 9 are separated from chapter eight by at least three months. In 7:2 it is clearly stated that "the feast of tabernacles was at hand," setting the events in chapters 7 and 8 in the month of September. In 10:22 it is said that "it was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem," which would place the events of chapters 9 and 10 sometime in December. I tend to lean toward the conclusion that there was a lapse of at least three months between the events in chapter 8 and those in this chapter, but I simply cannot be dogmatic on this. It was during that time that the events recorded from Luke 10:17 through Luke 13:17 occurred. That would put these two chapters (9 and 10) just prior to the commencement of the Perea ministry. The healing of the blind man, and the confrontation with the Pharisees, is an illustration of the ever increasing conflict between Christ and the religious leaders. It makes little difference, however, the exact time frame of this miracle in as much as the truths presented and lessons obtained would be the same.

This chapter consists of (1) the miraculous cure of a man that was born blind, and (2) several discourses that were occasioned by that miracle including (a) the conversation of the neighbors among themselves and with the blind man, (b) the conversation between the blind man and the Pharisees, (c) the conversation between Christ and the blind man (after he was healed), and (d) the conversation between Christ and the Pharisees. There is a marked contrast between belief and unbelief present in these chapters. Belief is demonstrated in the man; unbelief in the Pharisees who thrust him out rather than face the inevitable conclusions demanded by the evidence. We will study this chapter under the following headings:

The Case, 9:1-5;

The Cure, 9:6-7;  
 The Confession, 9:8-12;  
 The Consequences, 9:13-29  
 The Courage of the blind man, 9:30-34  
 The Conclusion, 9:35-41

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*The Case*

9:1-5

~~ 9:1 ~~

*“And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth”*

*“blind from his birth”* - Of the six healing miracles associated with blindness, this is the only case where someone healed a person who was blind from his birth (see Matt 9:27-31, Matt 12:22-23, Matt. 15:30-31, Matt 21:14, Mark 8:22-26, Mark 10:46-52).

Imagine - this man had never seen a smile, he had never witnessed a sunset, nor had he ever been able to enjoy the vibrant colors of spring. He had no colorful ‘mental snapshots’ from his childhood which he could call to memory; he had known only darkness. And yet, despite the severity of his handicap, the blind man, as we shall see, was not the only individual in this chapter who suffered from a sort of ‘darkness’ (Mike Benson, 422).

Someone has suggested that there are no cases of the healing of the blind in the Old Testament. But there is the case where Elisha restored sight to the entire Syrian army after they were struck blind. It might be argued that this is an exceptional case, but it is a case nonetheless, whether the action were the reversal of a punitive action, or a case of healing to prove the power of the one performing the miracle. In the New Testament there is the case where Ananias restored sight to Saul. Other than that we readily admit that there is nothing the equivalent of what we read in John 9, whether in the Old Testament or performed by the apostles of Jesus.

*“And as he passed by”* - How many opportunities presented themselves to the apostles, and to us, “unexpectedly”? One might

take the time and do some research on how many times it is recorded in the gospels that Jesus was simply passing by a place and an opportunity to do good and glorify the Father availed itself.

~~ 9:2 ~~

*“And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?”*

The false assumption on the part of these disciples was the belief that suffering is always the consequence of sin. The Bible actually reveals that there are a number of purposes for suffering. The sins of the parents are sometimes the cause of suffering in little children (cf. Ex. 20:5, 34:7, and Num. 14:18). Although children may suffer from the consequence of the sin of the parents, the child does not bear the guilt of the parent’s sin. Sometimes we suffer because of the sins of another. And then we might suffer simply because God allows us suffer in order to test our faith. No doubt Job did not understand why he was called upon to suffer.

The doctrine, that sickness and physical disabilities are the result of specific sins, and are penalties administered for this reason, is false; it is true that people often suffer the consequences of the sins of their ancestors in weakened bodies and premature deaths; and parents may, by improper physical habits, pass on to their children impaired constitutions, but these are consequences and not penalties for punishment for sins, and ought not so to be classified (Woods, 183).

*“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents”* - The reasoning on the part of the disciples was wrong, because they began with a false premise. They reasoned, “Since it could not be the sin of this man, since he was born blind, then it must have been the sin of his parents.” Jesus would show their starting premise to be wrong. Coffman noted

Like millions today who think that every sufferer and every victim of crime, disease, disaster, or calamity has in some manner deserved the evil that came upon them. Therefore, may those whose child was born handicapped,

or only to die; and those unfortunates whose lives have been overwhelmed with disease and sufferings; and all whose lot has been to walk in weakness, pain, and humiliation - may all of them take heart. Christ sees and knows; and, for many of them, perhaps it is true that they suffer that 'the works of God should be manifest in them' (Coffman, 232).

Notice the varied reactions to the blind man's situation. Different ones saw different things here, depending upon their respective backgrounds. Let us notice:

First, the disciples saw in this man a subject for theological analysis. So they asked the question, "Who sinned, this man, or his parents?" Due to a misunderstanding on the part of the disciples with regard to suffering and sin, they were bewildered by the seeming irrationality of the suffering this man was going through and the absence of any definitive sin in his life or that of his parents. They were more concerned about solving a theological problem than in ministering to this man who was in need. Next, the "neighbors" saw the man as a beggar. They regarded him as more or less a nuisance, and as a result they were not unkind; simply indifferent. The Pharisees, who we shall encounter later, saw this as an opportunity to impugn the Lord's motives and condemn His actions. As it turns out, when they found that the man was not amenable to their purposes, they cast him off and excommunicated him. He actually became a hindrance to their evil schemes rather than an aid.

How did Jesus view this man? Jesus saw here a man who was in need and an opportunity to do good unto the glory of the Father. He saw this man as a living soul. Finally, throughout the chapter it is evident that the man saw himself as truly blessed.

~~ 9:3 ~~

*"Jesus answered, Neither did this man sin, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him"*

*"Neither did this man sin, nor his parents"* - It is not that these were free from sin, but that there was no sin associated with the man's blindness.

*“but that the works of God should be made manifest in him”* - Rather than murmur when suffering comes our way, we should rejoice that such just might be an occasion for God to be glorified. But the question arises as to meaning of the words, *“that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”* Was this man’s blindness inflicted on the man for the express purpose of affording an opportunity for healing him? If such is the case, does it not imply that God would cause an innocent man to suffer half a lifetime of poverty, misery, and scorn that He might later demonstrate divine power? Of course, if it were the case that the man was innocently allowed to suffer solely for this reason, it would seem somewhat repugnant in view of our God’s goodness.

The great problem of why some should be born handicapped, and others not, or why diseases should overwhelm some and not others, and why natural disasters like storms, floods, and earthquakes should destroy some and not others - all such things, affecting in their aggregate every life on earth, not parceled out to men on a measure-for-measure basis related to the number and degree of their sins. All such elemental things are related to man’s constitution and to his environment by the all-wise God who created both man and the world where he lives; and they have the design of encouraging all men to take account of the power of God in their lives. The reason would seem to be that God intended that man should never get too cozy, as far as his hope of tomorrow is concerned (Coffman, page 232).

It is interesting to note that so far as John’s record is concerned, the miracles performed by our Lord manifested the glory and power of God. The synoptics (Matt, Mark, Luke) regarded the miracles as a demonstration of the compassion of Jesus, and so mentioned His compassion in connection with the miracle (cf. Mark 6:34, Mark 1:41).

~~ 9:4 ~~

*“We must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day:  
the night cometh, when no man can work”*

The “works” are the Father’s works, and the disciples, as well as the Lord, were to be instruments in carrying out that work. The “day” and “night” do not have reference to literal day or night, but life and death. Consequently, these two terms set the bounds of activity with regard to the work of our God. The latter metaphor (“death”) is the time of cessation. Jesus was looking to the time of His death. So far as the record is concerned, there is no indication that Jesus performed a single miracle of healing following His death and resurrection. We, likewise, should contemplate the limits placed upon us for doing God’s work in our own life. Indeed, “the very definite indication of urgency in the words, ‘the night cometh,’ ought not to be lost upon us” (Woods, 185). Once death’s cold sullen stream has swept over our earthly existence, every opportunity to do good will have forever ceased.

~~ 9:5 ~~

*“When I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”*

Taken with the previous verse, the words of Jesus were referring to His earthly sojourn and the opportunities, such as this one, to manifest Himself to the world through His teaching and miracles. But I cannot help but feel that there is a much deeper, and richer meaning attached to the words. When Jesus’ word is allowed to have free reign in society, He provides spiritual light to men. Restrict that word, and there is nothing else available by which men can find their way in the utter darkness that engulfs the world. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire the world entered into a lengthy period of time known as the “dark ages”; a period of spiritual and intellectual darkness, and economic regression that occurred in Europe following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. The Bible was banned and/or burned in many places, and the “light of the world” was taken from the greater portion of mankind. In the latter 15<sup>th</sup> century the word of God was made available to men in far greater abundance than during those dark ages, and it was not long before the world came out of that darkness into a spiritual awakening that not only gave greater access to the word of God, but produced a dramatic change in society in almost every area of life. Nothing can change society like the word of God. Give it free reign, and

there is light indeed. Restrict it and how great is the darkness that follows.

*The Cure*

9:6-7

~~ 9:6 ~~

*“When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay”*

Why did Jesus spit on the ground, and make the clay to put on this man’s eyes? I’ll not take the time to list the so-called explanations for what Jesus did; some of them border on absolute lunacy. There was a common belief that saliva had some medicinal value. It does not seem reasonable to conclude that it had any bearing on this man’s healing in light of the sudden nature of the healing. Since the man could not see, what he felt placed upon his eyes may have communicated to him that healing was about to take place on his eyes. “It is probable that this means was adopted in order to send the man to the pool of Siloam to wash” (Johnson, 150). My studied conclusion is that Jesus did this to impress upon this man the *need* to wash; to remove the *dirt* (symbolical of sin), and receive sight. The action was an object lesson. That there was no medicinal power in the mud is obvious from the fact that there is no record of anyone else attempting to receive his sight by making mud, putting it on the eyes, and then washing. In addition, it has always been God’s design to have men do something as a test of faith. This case is no exception.

~~ 9:7 ~~

*“and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went away therefore, and washed, and came seeing.”*

The command to go and “*wash in the pool of Siloam*” was a test of the man’s faith. The Pool of Siloam was located near the southeastern corner of the city. The word “Siloam” means “sent,” emphasizing the higher origin of the waters in the pool. Interestingly, the blind man received a blessing “sent” from the higher source of heaven itself.

*“He went away therefore”* – Had the record ended here we may have never known the extent of this man’s faith. The test of this man’s faith came in the form of a very simple command: “Go, wash.” Similar commands appear in God’s word for you and me. “Go, wash”; not in the pool of Siloam, but in the waters of baptism (Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16). If a man expects to receive the blessings from God for the healing of his sin sick soul, then the commands of Jesus MUST be obeyed. This is implied in the record of this blind man, and certainly taught in other passages as well. “The divine power healed, but the act of obedience was demanded of the man” (Johnson, 150).

*“which is by interpretation, Sent”* - John’s interpretation of the word Siloam is interesting in that this name had three forms: Shiloh, Shiloah, and Siloam. All of them had great symbolic meaning and without doubt, pointed to Jesus as the Savior of the world.

The attitude of this man is indicative of saving faith needed by all who would expect to receive heaven’s blessings. Had this man responded like so many enamored with a “faith only” doctrine, he would never have received his sight. He might have argued, “Well, we all know that water cannot give sight; and any attempt to do anything on MY part would be a meritorious work. Since my sight will come solely by God’s grace, there is not one whit that I can do to attribute to my sight anyway.” Brother Coffman had this discerning comment:

If a man can understand why the blind man can receive his sight after washing in the pool of Siloam, and wholly apart from any power of those waters, and without in the least supposing that the waters of the pool had anything to do with his healing, then such a person should have no difficulty with the analogy of the way one is saved in the washing of the waters of baptism, when he is baptized into Christ, and yet without supposing the water had any efficacy. The blind man did not go seeing and then wash; but he went and washed and came seeing (Coffman, 236).

Before leaving this section I thought it might be good to share with our readers some wonderful lessons from the pen of the late Frank Cox:

When you stand in the presence of human misery, be cautious concerning your conclusions. A man's misery does not necessarily mean that he has sinned or that his parents were sinners.

Finding ourselves in the presence of affliction, our primary concern should be in giving relief. Not the cause, but the cure is the important thing. This was Jesus' attitude.

We can escape a certain amount of illness by living as Jesus lived. Let us be pure and temperate in our manner of life.

When illness comes we should be patient, allowing God to over-rule our misfortunes in the perfecting of our character.

*The Confession*

9:8-12

These verses describe the "effect" upon the multitudes as they witnessed this most amazing miracle. The neighbors were well acquainted with this man born blind. There was some confusion as to whether or not this was the same man, some agreeing, others disagreeing.

~~ 9:8 ~~

*"The neighbors therefore, and they that saw him aforetime, that he was a beggar, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?"*

*"The neighbors...saw"* - The word "saw" translates a Greek word that is stronger than our English word. It is present active in its tense, and conveys the idea of scrutinizing something minutely; to look at it intently. Upon seeing this man, now healed, they looked carefully lest they might be guilty of mistaken identity.

*"he that sat and begged"* - The present active participle here suggests that this beggar occupied a usual place and position.

~~ 9:9 ~~

*"Others said, It is he: others said, No, but he is like him. He said, I am he."*

The man, himself, settled the issue by telling them, “I am he.” The testimony of the man settled the issue as to whether or not he was indeed the one who had been blind, thereby immediately removing any doubt.

~~ 9:10 ~~

*“They said therefore unto him, How then were thine eyes opened?”*

It is interesting that they were inquiring as to the *manner* of the miracle, and not the *fact*. They no longer questioned the man’s ability to see; they simply wanted to determine the cause, and thereby deal with the consequences.

~~ 9:11 ~~

*“He answered, The man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to Siloam, and wash: so I went away and washed, and I received sight.”*

The facts are plain enough: (1) Jesus made clay; (2) He then anointed the eyes of the blind man; (3) He told the man to go wash in Siloam; (4) the man went as instructed; (5) the man received his sight. Several of our sources pointed out that the literal rendering of the account of what he, himself, did is, “And going, and washing, I see.” It is curious that he calls Jesus “the man.” It is clear that, at this point, this man did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

It should be noted that there are two aspects of his confession. First, there is the personal. He knew what happened because it happened to him. Any denial that a miracle had taken place was simply not possible. The second aspect of his confession is the factual. This would be for the benefit of those inquiring about what had happened. When these two factors are combined, it produces a faith that grows even under opposition and persecution. As the story unfolds we will see the man’s testimony progress to the point that He eventually acknowledges Jesus as the Messiah (9:35-38). Even at this point in the man’s spiritual journey, he must have realized that this “man” of whom they spoke was more than an ordinary man.

~~ 9:12 ~~

*“And they said unto him, Where is he? He saith, I know not”*

“Where is he?” – They may have wanted to know where Jesus was, but the reason for wanting to know was motivated by hatred and an intense desire to destroy Him.

*The Consequences*

9:13-34

~~ 9:13-14 ~~

*“They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.  
And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and  
opened his eyes”*

To the Pharisees, here was an opportunity to employ this man as a witness, if possible, against the Lord. The inquiry by the Pharisees was motivated from hatred. The whole thing was malicious, intimidating, and hypocritical. Those who “brought to the Pharisees him that was aforetime blind” were the people mentioned in verse 8. We may never know why this man’s neighbors brought him to the Pharisees. Likely it was out a sense of duty to report what they regarded as a violation of the Sabbath. It was not secret that the Pharisees were looking for Jesus.

The first thing the Pharisees would do is attack the man’s faith (vss. 13-17). The questions that follow were intended to discredit the man’s testimony and destroy his faith. This entire incident would be the catalyst to stir up the multitudes.

~~ 9:15 ~~

*“Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see”*

“Then again the Pharisees also asked him” - The interrogation of this previously blind man has moved from the street into the religious court. Having heard of the report of the neighbors, the Pharisees now asked this blind man to give explanation as to how he received his sight. It is rather curious, is it not, that, like the

neighbors, they were more interested in how the man came to see, rather than the miracle itself. The imperfect verb (translated “asked”) suggests that the Pharisees asked him repeatedly to give an explanation.

~~ 9:16 ~~

*“Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them”*

*“This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day”* - It was not the Sabbath that Jesus did not keep, but the Pharisaical interpretation of the Sabbath law; an improper interpretation at that. Tradition held that certain forms of medical treatments were forbidden. Like every other part of the Mosaic Law, intricate theories abounded to regulate the practice of medicine on the Sabbath, and evidently the application of saliva fell into that class of medical procedures forbidden on that day.

*“Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?”* - It would appear that the “others” stood in contrast to “some” of the Pharisees. The Greek word (*allos*) here translated “others” means “others of the same kind.” Though not named, these Pharisees would fall into the same group of those Pharisees who were a little more honest with the evidence, such as was Nicodemus and Joseph.

*“and there was a division among them”* - The word *schisma* (translated “division”) is the word from which we get our English “schism.” It denotes a cleft, or a rent. Human traditions, when bound in matters pertaining to religion, produce division in the body of Christ. “Although the name of Jesus dominated that hearing, neither the healed man nor the examiners mentioned it, suggesting that they had forbidden any mention of the Lord’s name” (Coffman, page 238).

~~ 9:17 ~~

*“They say therefore unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, in that he opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a prophet”*

They were asking, “What is your view concerning this man that opened your eyes?” I really doubt that they were interested in his answer. The question took on a form of intimidation, pitting his opinion against theirs. The blind man’s faith was gradually increasing. Having referred to Jesus as “the man called Jesus” earlier, he is now willing, after contemplation of his healing, to admit that Jesus “*is a prophet.*” This admission that Jesus was a prophet must have been particularly irritating to the Pharisees, for, as Clarke pointed out, “according to a Jewish maxim, a prophet might dispense with the observance of the Sabbath” (Adam Clarke, ESword Module).

At this point in the procedure these Pharisees must have been utterly frustrated. Their questioning of the blind man had gotten them nowhere. What would they do? They would simply deny the miracle itself.

~~ 9:18 ~~

*“The Jews therefore did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight, and asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see?”*

Their attempt to question and discredit the man’s faith failed. This man had experienced the miracle; he knew what he was talking about. His faith was unmovable and had, at this point, progressed to the point that he admitted that Jesus was more than a “man”; in his mind Jesus was at least a prophet. The Pharisees now turn their attention to the man’s family with the same vile hatred and contempt they had for the man himself.

*“The Jews therefore did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight”* - What incredible blindness and hardness of heart. They were unwilling to believe the man’s testimony until such a time as all evidence pointed to the truthfulness of the man’s claim.

*“until they called the parents, and asked them”* - The interesting thing here is that in their attempt to *disprove* this whole incident, they actually played a role in adding abundant evidence to what had happened to the blind man.

The ease with which these men shifted ground and backed away from their earlier admission of the FACT of healing evidences their hypocrisy and insincerity. They were not interested in truth; their design was to discover some way by which to ensnare Jesus (Woods, 191).

*“Is this your son, who ye say was born blind?”* - The force of the nature of the miracle had far reaching implications. These Pharisees recognized that if this man had truly been born blind that the miracle far exceeded the healing powers of the prophets of old. The only way to negate these implications was to prove that the man had *not* been born blind, but had, perhaps, become blind in his early youth. So, they would begin this line of inquiry by calling his parents. The astonishing thing about their inquiry of the man’s parents is the manifestation of this council’s total unwillingness to see the truth, though it stared them square in the face.

Such unbelief on the part of the majority of the Sanhedrin suggests the quotation ascribed to Voltaire: ‘If in the market of Paris, before the eyes of a thousand men, a miracle should be performed, I would much rather disbelieve their two thousand eyes and my own two, than believe it.’ The attitude of the Pharisees here shows the folly of supposing that evidence of any kind can persuade men whose purpose is to disbelieve. Faith is a moral thing, as well as intellectual (Coffman, 240).

~~ 9:20-21 ~~

*“His parents answered and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but how he now seeth, we know not; or who opened his eyes, we know not: ask him; he is of age; he shall speak for himself”*

The claim on the part of the parents that they did not know how their son came to see is, in a certain sense, true. They did not witness the healing. It would seem reasonable, however, that the

parents of this young man would have been the first to receive the good news of their son's healing, and that in the man's excitement he would have surely told them who it was who healed him. At this point they seemed to be more interested in maintaining a neutral position so that they could not be charged with misrepresentation of the facts, while at the same time making sure that they could not be accused of favoritism toward Jesus.

This was a blow to the Pharisees since it set at rest two matters either one of which left unsettled, would have raised serious doubts regarding the miracle itself. Had it turned out that the man was not the son of this couple, or that he had not been born blind, then Jesus and the man could have been charged with collusion. Either way, the Pharisees would have achieved their desire to discredit the Lord in the eyes of the people.

~~ 9:22-23 ~~

*“These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man should confess him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him”*

*“they feared the Jews”* - The apostle uses the word “Jews” to refer to the ruling class, those who had the authority and power to “put one out of the synagogue.” To be put out of the synagogue would have shamed a Jew. Such discipline involved 30 days of expulsion, but in extreme cases excommunication was permanent.

*“Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him”* - Rather than accept any responsibility regarding this matter, including any hint of affirmation of the healing power of Jesus, the parents simply told the Pharisees to ask the son. One cannot help but stand amazed at the callused heart of this man's parents. It is also possible that this man's parents might have equated an admission that Jesus had healed their son as a confession that He (Jesus) was, indeed, the Christ.

~~ 9:24 ~~

*“So they called a second time the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give glory to God: we know that this man is a sinner”*

The Pharisees first attacked the man's faith. This was followed by an attack on his family. Returning to the man himself, they now attempt to attack the only friend the man had - Jesus. While his family would not give him the support he needed at this time, it would turn out that Jesus would seek him out and befriend him.

*"Give glory to God"* is simply an adjuration for the man to speak the truth. But in addition, there may be in these words one last effort on the part of these leaders to discredit Jesus. Since the Pharisees realized by now that the miracle simply could not be denied, they moved to rob Jesus of any credit.

~~ 9:25 ~~

*"He therefore answered, Whether he is a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see."*

I am simply amazed at this man's calm and courageous response to their questions. He never once wavered from the simple fact that he had been healed. Whether or not this "man" who had healed him were a sinner, he was not in a position to answer. But one thing of which he was certain, namely his healing, he was willing and ready to discuss. Brother Woods has noted, "The effort to shift ground had failed; the attempt to turn attention away from the FACT only served to make more pointed the testimony of the courageous man. His conduct throughout this narrative is highly commendable" (Woods, 194).

~~ 9:26 ~~

*"They said therefore unto him, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?"*

*"What did he to thee"* - It is possible that the Pharisees were seeking for details of the healing so as to have something more concrete of which to accuse Jesus. Details other than the use of clay and the healing would have been lacking, however, because being blind, the man himself would not have known everything that took place in the process of his healing.

The persistence with which they pursued the effort is remarkable and explained only by the fact that they were so embittered toward Jesus that in spite of the utter failure thus far characterizing their attempts to raise some question of the truth of the claim of the once blind man they returned again and again with the hope that repeated questioning might lead to some contradiction or inconsistency (Woods, 194).

The astonishing thing throughout this narrative is the complete unwillingness of these Pharisees to accept the truth of this miracle in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. No doubt many of us have witnessed sinners so deluded by error that they are unwilling to see the truth on a particular subject, no matter how plain it might be, or how carefully such is presented. Some simply refuse to believe.

~~ 9:27 ~~

*“He answered them, I told you even now, and ye did not hear; wherefore would ye hear it again? would ye also become his disciples?”*

There must have been “some testiness in his reply” (Woods, 195). He probably realized by now that the Pharisees were not in the least sincere. The man’s question must have irritated these religious leaders. His words, “would ye also become his disciples” implies that this man admitted to now being a disciple of the One Who had healed him. The progression of this man’s faith continues, having now reached the point of being a “disciple” of Jesus.

~~ 9:28 ~~

*“And they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are disciples of Moses”*

It has already been demonstrated that those blind leaders were not going to acknowledge the miracles of Jesus. Their determination to remain in the dark now brings out the worst. “*We are disciples of Moses*” is indicative of their complete rejection of truth. Some years ago I had the opportunity to study with a Mormon lady whose family were descendants of Brigham

Young. The presentation of the truth was so overwhelming, and her answers so futile and weak, that she began to demonstrate agitation to what she was hearing. When it was evident that what the Bible taught and what she believed were so in contrast one to the other, like these Pharisees, she rejected the plain teaching of the Scripture and held fast to her Mormon doctrine. Her response was both sad and typical of a lost world that refuses to receive a love of the truth: “If I am lost and end up going to hell I really won’t have to suffer because I will have all my Mormon friends there with me to comfort me.” I looked her straight in the eyes and told her, “Sadly, you will have all eternity to remember the words you just spoke.”

~~ 9:29 ~~

*“We know that God hath spoken unto Moses: but as for this man, we know not whence he is”*

*“But as for this man”* - Their allusion to Jesus was contemptuous at best. The word “man” is not in the original. It is simply “this.” The idea seems to be, “We have the fullest assurance that the commission of Moses was divine; but we have no proof that this man has such a commission: and should we leave Moses, and attach ourselves to this stranger? No!” While it is true that they did not “know, whence he came,” their lack of such knowledge was their own choosing; they knew not, neither did they care!

### *The Courage of the Blind Man*

9:30-34

~~ 9:30 ~~

*“The man answered and said unto them, Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened mine eyes.”*

The closing part of the exchange between the Pharisees and the man born blind reveals the astonishing faith and courage of this man. “Here, incidentally, is a wonderful demonstration of the power of truth and of the strength as awareness of possessing it provides. This man, only a few hours earlier, was a pitiful beggar, dependent on the charity of others for his livelihood and without

any influence whatsoever; now, he has successfully challenged and refuted the most skilled theologians of the Jews by appeal to principles derived from the scriptures themselves. He who has truth on his side need fear no man” (Woods, 196). No doubt this man found comfort in the words of the Psalmist:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. He will cover thee with his pinions, And under his wings shalt thou take refuge: His truth is a shield and a buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, Nor for the arrow that flieth by day; For the pestilence that walketh in darkness, Nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, And ten thousand at thy right hand; But it shall not come nigh thee (Psa. 91:1, 4-7).

Johnson also addressed this astonishing feat of the man who had now received his sight:

Now follows a marvelous scene, a ragged mendicant who was only that morning begging his bread, in this conclave of the great ecclesiastics, expounds theology to the very men who ‘sat in Moses’ seat’ and shows a better knowledge of the Scriptures than the self-righteous Pharisees who prided themselves so much on doctrinal knowledge! (Johnson, 154).

*“Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened my eyes”* - The stubbornness of the Pharisees in the face of such undeniable evidence is the truly great marvel. Acceptance of the truth is only natural to a man who truly loves the truth. The incredulity of these religious leaders evidently astounded this man in light of the miracle that had been performed.

~~ 9:31 ~~

*“We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and do his will, him he heareth”*

The argument of this “common man” is quite logical. The major premise: “God does not hear sinners.” Minor Premise: “God hears this man.” Conclusion: “This man is not a sinner.” The

conclusion that these Jews had drawn was, therefore, illogical and unscriptural.

*“God heareth not sinners”* - It is sometimes argued that the statement of the blind man carries no weight since the man himself was not inspired. Though the man was not inspired, he spoke words that are nevertheless true, and supported by passages in the Bible.

The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous, And his ears are open unto their cry (Psa. 34:15).

If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear (Psa. 66:18).

Jehovah is far from the wicked; But he heareth the prayer of the righteous (Pro. 15:29).

The misunderstanding revolves around the use of the word “hear.” God certainly “hears” in that He is aware of the prayers of sinners, but He does not GRANT them spiritual blessings in their lost condition. No sinner was ever instructed to PRAY for salvation, but rather to ACT in compliance to God’s commands. The fact that this miracle was performed upon this man implies that God listened to, and answered, the prayer of Jesus.

~~ 9:32 ~~

*“Since the world began it was never heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing”*

Was there any record of such being done by anyone, much less a reprobate sinner? Even the mighty men of God, men who would be regarded as faithful patriarchs, never performed such a miracle. How then could these Pharisees conclude that Jesus was a sinner? Indeed, the conclusion is correct. “If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

~~ 9:34~~

*“They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out”*

Likely these Pharisees attributed this man's blindness to sin, yea even sin of which guilt had been imputed prior to his birth. The word 'altogether' means fully, wholly, completely. These Jews actually charged this man with having been totally born in sin and completely unworthy of giving them any kind of advice whatsoever. How ironic (perhaps more like poetic justice) that the very man whom they sought as a witness against Jesus turned out to be a witness for the Lord and against them!

*"they cast him out"* - They forcibly expelled him from their presence. Johnson had this most interesting quote from Tholuck:

The narrative of this miracle has a special value in apologetics. How often do we hear the wish expressed that Christ's miracles had been put on documentary record; and had been subjected to a thorough judicial examination! Here we have the very thing desired; judicial personages, and these too, the avowed enemies of Christ, investigate a miracle of Christ in repeated hearings and they can find no flaw (Johnson, 154-155).

Here the members of the highest order examine the facts. Their attempt to discredit the once-blind man, and the miracle itself, failed miserably. Recorded for our examination, it stands as one of the invincible proofs that Jesus is indeed, the divine Son of God.

### *The Conclusion*

9:35-41

The kangaroo court is over; the man born blind has come forth victorious. His courage is worthy of imitation, and the blessing he is about to receive is far greater than the physical sight provided in the miracle.

~~ 9:35 ~~

*"Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and finding him, he said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"*

Jesus gave the man time to wrestle with his new found faith. It is implied by the words “finding him,” that Jesus was actually searching for this man. It may be that the Lord wanted to solicit a further statement of faith on the part of the former blind man. “The man had lost the world, but Christ was ready to give him heaven” (Johnson, 155).

~~ 9:36 ~~

*“He answered and said, And who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?”*

His question would suggest that he did not, at that precise moment, believe Jesus to be the Son of God, simply because he did not know who Jesus was at this point. His journey toward the moment when He would confess his faith in the Christ was quickly reaching its terminus point. What remarkable growth this man demonstrated along the way.

~~ 9:37-38 ~~

*“Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him”*

At first the blind man viewed Jesus as nothing more than a man. As his association with Jesus draws to a close this man now makes full confession with his lips that he believes Jesus to be the Son of God. These two verses contain one of the clearest affirmations on the part of Jesus that He is, indeed, the Son of God. One thing I find intriguing is the fact that John only records one other incident in which Jesus spontaneously reveals exactly Who He is, and that was to the outcast woman of Samaria. The former was a social outcast; this one a spiritual outcast.

*“thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee”* – “I once was blind, but now I see,” are the words of one of the most beautiful songs in our hymnal. This young man had experienced something none had ever done before, namely the blessing of sight to one having been born blind. In addition, he had now experienced something few would ever enjoy, namely the blessing of having one’s eyes opened spiritually.

*“Lord I believe”* - John provides no details as to whether or not this man’s faith led him to greater service to the Lord, or whether he, like so many, never allowed his faith to mature. Personally, I cannot conceive of the man having done anything other than give his life as a disciple of Christ. We are provided a beautiful mosaic of this man’s ever increasing faith. When the chapter began, this man referred to the Lord as, “The man that is called Jesus” (9:11). As the chapter ends, he makes the good confession, “Lord I believe” (9:38). The progress from unbelief to belief is now complete. His faithfulness to that confession is suggested by the last part of the verse: “And he worshipped him.” A clearer demonstration of one’s belief in the Deity of Jesus cannot be imagined. In fact, these two verses provide us with clear evidence that Jesus is, indeed, the Son of God. Not only did Jesus proclaim Deity, but He received worship from this man, something that would have been forbidden had Jesus merely been a prophet, or some angelic host. The word translated ‘worshipped’ translates a term properly applied only to divine worship.

~~ 9:39 ~~

*“And Jesus said, For judgment came I into this world, that they that see not may see; and that they that see may become blind”*

The precise timing of this short discourse is not certain. Were these words spoken immediately following his conversation with the blind man? If so, how is it that the Pharisees came to be present? Or, do the closing three verses of the chapter suggest a time period subsequent to the events in the preceding portion of the chapter? In either case, these words represent the great divide in all of humanity, often referred to as the “sheep” and the “goats,” the “lost” and the “saved,” and such like terminology. Here they are referred to as those who are “blind” and those who “see.” If the words were spoken immediately following the Lord’s final encounter with the blind man, then Jesus would be addressing those who had persecuted that poor man; and what stern words they were.

*“For judgment came I into this world”* - How do we reconcile this with the statement made earlier in 3:17, “For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world

should be saved through him”? It must be remembered that chapter three is focusing upon the mission of Jesus to save those who are lost (cf. John 3:16). The express purpose for our Lord’s coming in His early ministry was to save men from their lost state. This chapter, however, focuses upon that time when men will be *judged* by whether or not they accepted and obeyed the Lord during what time they were allotted in this life. Jesus came as Savior first, and He will come as Judge upon His return.

*“that they that see not may see”* - The miracle in this chapter, as with all miracles, was designed to teach us those greater truths relating to the spiritual man. What Jesus could do for this man physically, He is able to do for all spiritually. Physically, the man born blind was among those that “see not.” He was only one among who knows how many blind people there were in Israel. But because of our Lord’s compassion, and in order that “the works of God should be manifest in him,” he was provided sight. And what did he see? Yes, he did see all the beauties of God’s creation; he saw his parents for the first time; he saw Jesus and the Pharisees. But he saw much more than these physical things, yea much more. He saw the inevitable conclusion to which that miracle pointed, namely that Jesus is the Son of God, and he admitted such at the conclusion of his encounter with Jesus.

*“they that see may become blind”* - Those who refuse to hear will, no doubt, find their hearts hardened even further, in spite of the evidence. Pharaoh is just one example of this. “They that see” has a reference to those who, with the physical eyes, are blessed to observe the miracles, but whose hearts are just the opposite of this man born blind. Thus, the miracle becomes the means by which the judicial hardening takes place with regard to those who have not a love for the truth. The worst kind of blindness is that which is spiritual. “The hopelessness of the situation in Jewish circles in that day is to be seen in the ironical fact that those who fancied themselves the guardians of the light were themselves in total spiritual darkness, wholly unwilling to walk in the light which Jesus offered” (Woods, 201).

~~ 9:40 ~~

*“Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things,  
and said unto him, Are we also blind?”*

“The form of the query in the Greek text, shows that they expected a negative answer; in their arrogant minds they could not imagine anyone thinking that they were spiritually blind! Jesus had mentioned two groups, (1) those who were blind but who would be made to see; (2) those who fancied they saw but who would, by rejecting the truth, confirm their blindness” (Woods, 201).

It evidently never occurred to the Pharisees that they could be spiritually blind. Even worse is the fact that these Jewish leaders *willfully* chose to be blind.

~~ 9:41 ~~

*“Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see: your sin remaineth. “*

“*if ye were blind*” - Why the “if”? Jesus was referring to a state of mind similar to that of the once-blind-man. The blind man represented the honest soul who, though once physically blind, was now willing to accept the evidence that pointed to Jesus as the great prophet and Messiah. This man manifested an attitude of heart and disposition that is essential to a right relationship with God. The blind man was blind in the sense that he refused to “see” the kind of hatred and ignorance demonstrated by these Pharisees. Had these Pharisees been “blind” in the same way, having the same heart and disposition as this blind man, then they would have no sin.

“*But now ye say, We see*” - Their arrogance and pride is summed up in the words, “We see!” Consequently, their sin remains. “The entrenched pride and conceit of the religious leaders were utterly repugnant to the Lord; and, as long as men were wrapped up in such a cloak of self-righteousness, there was absolutely no hope for them” (Coffman, 247). Johnson had this alternate interpretation: “If they were blind, utterly without knowledge, they would have no moral responsibility, but they claimed to see and had the highest opportunities for knowing; hence, when they closed their eyes and thus willfully refused to see, they were guilty. To other sins was added the sin of rejection of the light.

Our responsibility is measured by our opportunities” (Johnson, 156).

What if Jesus had said, “Yes, you are blind”? How would they have reacted? I have no doubt that they would have attempted yet one more time to take the Lord by force and stone Him.

“*Your sin remaineth*” – I can scarcely imagine a more fearful pronouncement with the regard to the kind of spiritual blindness to which our Lord referred. These three words describe the full effect of a hardness of heart that will cause God to send “a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:11-12).

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In keeping with the overall theme of this book, I think it appropriate to consider this wonderful chapter from the viewpoint of the magnificence of Jesus Christ our Lord. I cannot read this chapter without seeing the compassion of our Lord toward the blind man. Nor can I read it without being amazed at the patience of our Lord toward those who so adamantly refused to see what the blind man saw. Time and space would fail me if I attempted to expound on the power of Jesus, His patience with His disciples, or even His courage to perform this miracle in the stronghold of His enemies and in the presence of the people who had been instructed to report any activity or the whereabouts of Jesus. I want to focus your attention right here on exactly how Jesus was exalted in the heart of this blind man, and how he magnified Jesus by his response to the animosity of the Jewish leaders.

As the encounter with Jesus begins, there is no indication that the blind man realized, much less believed, that Jesus is the Son of God. His journey to the point of magnifying Jesus as the Son of God was incremental, though by no means gradual. Was he expecting a miracle that day? Was he aware that Jesus was in the city, and that given an opportunity, he would receive sight as had Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52)? Or had this man simply grown accustomed to someone leading him to the temple area so he could beg for bread for his very survival? Those are questions

that intrigue us, but are questions that will have to wait for an answer.

On this particular day, this man (among so many ill and infirmed who lived in the city of Jerusalem) was no doubt desirous of healing. Perhaps he had stationed himself along a public thoroughfare in hopes of contact with Jesus the “miracle worker.” So-called miracle working *shysters* were a dime a dozen in that day and age, though genuine miracles seldom occurred. The chapter begins with some very interesting words: “And as he passed by”; and with those words the spiritual journey of this man began.

John does not tell us if the man cried out to Jesus. In fact, the first words that this man spoke, so far as the record is concerned, occurred *after* the healing. When asked whether or not he was the one healed, he responded, “I am he.” Trusting in the Lord’s simple instructions to “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (verse 6), he was not ashamed to later admit that he was indeed the one who had been blind, but now could see. Exactly who asked the man, “How then were thine eyes opened?” is not known. In answer, the blind man answered, “The man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go wash in the pool of Siloam: so I went away and washed, and I received my sight” (verse 11). As the story of this man’s encounter with the Jewish authorities unfolds, “the man” Who had healed him would quickly become more than just a “man.” It was not long ere the once-blind man would see Jesus as a prophet (verse 17). The closer this man looked at Jesus, and what He had done, the greater the Lord looked in his sight and in his mind and heart. Acknowledging his loyalty to Jesus, he would ask the Jewish authorities if they, too, would become one of the Lord’s disciples (verse 27). Growing in his faith, and increasing in his boldness, this once obscure man would face the enemies of Jesus on their own turf and rebuke them with these powerful words: “Why, herein is the marvel, that ye know not whence he is, and yet he opened mine eyes” (verse 30). Don’t tell me Jesus was not magnified in this man’s eyes. So wonderful was Jesus in the heart of this man that when given the opportunity he acknowledged, “Lord, I believe.” However, the ultimate expression of the man’s recognition of Jesus was not found in his words, but in what

follows: “And he worshipped him” (verse 38b). If one cannot see the process by which Jesus was ultimately lifted up in this man’s eyes, he has missed one of the important lessons of this chapter. The stark contrast between this man born blind and the Pharisees, who refused to believe, is astonishing. While the blind man exalted Jesus, the Pharisees denied Him; while the blind man gave allegiance and worshipped the Creator, the Pharisees ignored the evidence. I stand amazed that the Pharisees concluded, “this man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath day” (verse 16), rather than declare, “This man *must* be of God for He can open the eyes of a man born blind.” Their reaction and that of the blind man manifests the difference between those who are willing to magnify Jesus in their heart, and those who refuse to do so.

I once read of a program that appeared on television which featured blind skiers being taught how to slalom now ski. Paired with sighted coaches, the blind skiers trained on snowy flats and learned how to make left and right turns. When turning was finally mastered, the blind skiers were then taken to the slopes and encouraged to put their newly-developed skills into practice. Sighted partners skied alongside them and would give directions: “Right!” “Left!” The blind were solely dependent upon the words of those who could see. As long as the blind skiers adhered to the directives of their seeing partners, they were able to negotiate the course and cross the finish line at the bottom of the hill. Is this not a good illustration of what is involved in magnifying our Lord in our own lives? Unless, and until, we submit to the instructions of the Lord in every aspect of our lives, we will not enjoy the intended blessings. Dear reader, if you would exalt Jesus, “Go, wash in the pool.” Believe in the Christ, trust His word, give Him the praise due His holy name.

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### WORKING WITH JELL-O

By Tom Wacaster

(originally written December 2011, and adapted here)

Representative John Boehner used this analogy some months back when referring to attempts to “negotiate” with President

Obama and his staff in matters concerning the economy, taxes, and balancing the budget. More precisely the Speaker of the House pointed out, “Dealing with them the last couple months has been like dealing with Jell-O,” Boehner said. “Some days it’s firmer than others. Sometimes it’s like they’ve left it out overnight.” I have been preaching for almost four decades now, and I can attest to the frustration that comes with trying to reason with folks in a logical, analytical manner. Some folks simply cannot be taught; not because they are incapable of receiving the facts, but because they have become so close-minded that the truth cannot penetrate their thick skull. Pride and selfishness play an important role in hardening the heart and closing the mind to truth. It is even possible for a person to so harden his heart that he no longer loves the truth (2 Thess. 2:10). When a man reaches that point in his life, “God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Frankly, that frightens me!

I used to say that reasoning with some folks is like trying to wrestle with an octopus - about the time you get hold of one arm in an attempt to tie the creature down, another one grabs you from an altogether different direction. Liberalism has a way of avoiding truth while making you think it is addressing the issue. Politicians are good at this. If you have some time to waste, tune in to talk radio, CNN, or C-SPAN and listen to the news conferences with any of our leading politicians on any issue whatsoever. Try to pin a politician down on any issue and you will quickly learn that it really is like trying to work with Jell-O. It is astounding how a liberal can call in, be asked a simple “yes” or “no” question by the host, and in an attempt to answer the question actually avoid the question all together! Every attempt to press the point of the discussion is like - well, like working with Jell-O!

Liberals in politics have their counterpart in the sphere of religion. Trying to reason with purveyors of false doctrine is like working with Jell-O; you can’t pin them down on any single issue, and simple “yes” or “no” questions are avoided like the plague! I have had opportunity to conduct two public debates in

more than forty years of preaching. One thing I have learned from those debates is the inability (or unwillingness) of my opponent to stay with the subject. It is like working with Jell-O, and most of the time it is Jell-O in its liquefied state! Reason flies out the window, emotion takes hold of the disputant, and you end up chasing rabbits more than addressing the subject at hand. It can be frustrating!

Some time back I had the opportunity to discuss a religious matter with someone I met while eating breakfast at Whataburger. I have learned from practical experience that arguing with someone over a religious topic accomplishes little. So, when I come across a prospective student, I attempt to get an appointment to come into their home and have an open Bible study. This will provide opportunity for the student to see what the Bible teaches, rather than listen to what I might think on the matter. On this particular occasion I asked the question, "Why do you suppose there are so many strange churches popping up everywhere?" Rather than address my question, he took the same kind of approach a politician might take on a sticky issue, and commenced to discuss how his fiancé has some really "weird" ideas about religion. When I asked him what might motivate a person to pursue such radical and far-fetched ideas, he asked if I believed in prophets today. Attempting to keep him on the subject and move toward an in-home Bible study, I asked if he would like to see what the Bible had to say on the matter. He changed the subject again - this time he wanted to discuss the unreasonableness of some women when it comes to having a normal conversation on husband and wife responsibilities. I felt like I was trying to work with Jell-O. It was difficult (if not impossible) to pin him down on any single point, and our conversation ended with an invitation to visit our worship assembly or public Bible study opportunities. As expected, there was no definite commitment, but the typical response, "I might just do that someday!" "Someday" - but then that's a topic for another discussion.

Some weeks back I watched a portion of Walt Disney's, *Alice In Wonderland*. It reminded me, in an amusing way, of how illogical some folks can be. Some years ago Jefferson Airplane produced a song titled, "White Rabbit" - a definite reference to

Alice in Wonderland and the complete lack of logic demonstrated in the story. The last stanza of the song is thought provoking:

When logic and proportion  
Have fallen sloppy dead,  
And the White Knight is talking backwards,  
And the Red Queen's "off with her head!"  
Remember what the dormouse said;  
"Keep YOUR HEAD"

Next time you are in a discussion with someone who cannot seem to stay on the subject, "keep your head," and remember - trying to reason with some people is like working with Jell-O!



## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### “I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD”

*The Sixth Discourse: The Good Shepherd, 10:1-21*

This particular section is a continuation of the closing part of chapter nine. Jesus had made the general statement, “For judgment came I into this world, that they that see not may see; and that they that see may become blind” (9:39). That declaration was immediately followed application to the Pharisees: “But now ye say, We see: your sin remaineth” (9:41). As this chapter begins, Jesus employs those attention getting words, “Verily, verily!” It simply is not possible, in view of verse 21, to disconnect these verses from chapter nine. What, then, is the connection of this parable of the Good Shepherd with the closing words of chapter nine? In my estimation, it is further application of what Jesus had said in 9:39-41. The Pharisees had rejected Jesus outright. All the evidence in the world would not melt their hardened hearts. All that awaited those Jewish leaders, and the nation as a whole, was utter and complete destruction. They were false shepherds; thieves and robbers who, like wolves in the midst of the flock, were devouring the very soul of Israel. There is a notable contrast in the parable of the Good Shepherd between Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, and those who were “strangers” (vs. 5).

There are four parts in this wonderful discourse on the Good Shepherd. The first three parts blend together in an almost imperceptible way. Jesus speaks of the “shepherd,” the “door” and the “sheep,” thereby providing us with a wonderful portrait of Jesus. In the first part we are provided a picturesque view of a shepherd over his sheep. The symbolism would be something with which the disciples would be familiar because shepherding was a common occupation in Palestine. The tender care the shepherd gives the sheep, as well as his personal attachment to each of the sheep, stands in contrast to the thief and robber whose intention is to do the sheep harm. In addition, Jesus provides us with the deep love and admiration the sheep have for their master, so much so that they “know his voice” and “a stranger they will not follow” (vs. 4-5). In the second part Jesus likens Himself to the “door of the sheep” (verse 7). While the

“shepherd” represents the authority over those who enter, the “door” emphasizes the way of entrance. Once again the Lord draws a strong contrast between Himself and anyone who “cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy” (verse 10). Returning to the metaphor of the shepherd, Jesus plainly declares, “I am the good shepherd” (verse 11). The focus in this third section is the protection and care Jesus gives to His sheep, with particular emphasis upon His willingness to sacrifice His life for the sheep. The fourth and final part reveals the perverted reasoning on the part of the Pharisees (verses 19-21). We will study this section under the following divisions:

*The Parable Presented, 10:1-6;*

*The Parable Applied and Expanded, 10:7-18;*

*The Parable Perverted, 10:19-21.*

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*The Parable Presented*

10:1-6

~~ 10:1 ~~

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber”*

“Verily, verily” is simply an emphatic way of saying, “What I am about to tell you is indeed true.” The parable of the “Good Shepherd” was designed to present the contrast between the false teachers (the Pharisees) and the true Teacher (Jesus). Jesus points out that the “door” is the only legitimate means of entering the “fold.” The “fold” is the wonderful fellowship we sustain with the Father. If anyone attempts to enter this fold in some way other than that authorized by the word of God, he is nothing more than a “thief and a robber.” A “thief” is someone who goes about seeking to take what rightly belongs to another, and acts in such a way as to avoid detection. He performs his evil deed by stealth; in secret as it were. The “robber” on the other hand, would use force to take that which belongs to another. Jesus was implying that the Pharisees, then in charge of Israel, had usurped God’s authority over Israel, and had done so by coercive means.

~~ 10:2 ~~

*“But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep”*

The proper entrance into the fold is through the door. It is the only authorized entrance; any attempt to enter the fold of the sheep through some other avenue immediately brands himself as a usurper in the eyes of God. There are several possible applications with regard to the “door.” It could be representative of truth in general. Seeing that Jesus will later say, “I am the door of the sheep” (verse 7), I am inclined to view the *teaching* of Jesus as the only means by which men can enter into the fold of God’s fellowship. This is certainly taught in a number of other passages, John 8:24, John 14:6 being two examples.

*“the shepherd of the sheep”* – Exactly who is the “shepherd” here? It cannot be Christ for He plainly says He is the “door” in verses 7. He would not change the metaphor and take on the role as the “good shepherd” until verse 11. The most reasonable position seems to be that the “shepherd” here is a reference to those who lead God’s people. The fact that the translators in the King James, American Standard, and New King James do not capitalize the word suggests that they did not view this as a reference to Christ. Keep in mind that these first six verses present the parable; the application would come later. The Pharisees refused to enter through the “door.” They rejected the Christ, disobeyed the Father, and sought their own terms of entrance into the fold, namely their tradition. Christ, on the other hand, would prove Himself true to the Father, always submitting to the divine will. This would give Him the authority to declare Himself the “Good Shepherd” when He makes the application (verse 11). Peter would later refer to Christ as the “chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4), and the elders who “tend the flock of God” which is among them (1 Pet. 5:2) would be faithful shepherds. Faithful adherence to the word of God by such godly men is the way both they, and the sheep, enter into the fold of God’s fellowship.

~~ 10:3 ~~

*“To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out”*

It was not unusual for several shepherds to share the same “fold,” and several flocks would enter into a single fold for protection and the night’s rest. The next morning, when a shepherd was ready to take his flock to pasture, he would call out to his sheep. As the sheep heard the familiar and trusted voice of their shepherd, they would go to him and follow as he went into the field. The “*porter*” has been variously interpreted. Some suggest it refers to the Father, others to John the Baptist, or even to Christ. Likely it is simply a part of the parable and is designed to help us get the overall picture, and make proper application. The close association of the Savior to those who are His is like the close relationship of a shepherd and his sheep. The sheep hear their master, and recognize his voice. Just such a characteristic of sheep has been observed in oriental lands. In fact, eastern shepherds actually assign names to their sheep as we do with our domesticated dogs and cats, and those animals respond when we call them by name.

In the parable, the shepherd appears at the fold. The “*porter*” knows the shepherd, and allows the door or gate to be opened, and access be granted to the sheep. The shepherd then leads the sheep, and they follow him because they recognize his voice. In the application which comes later, the “fold” is spiritual Israel, the Shepherd is Christ, and the sheep are those honest Jews who have diligently studied the prophecies and know the voice of the Shepherd. The voice of the “stranger” is the false teaching of the Pharisees; these the faithful (and we might add, knowledgeable) do not follow. This is true in every detail. Thompson noted, “The sheep are so tame and so trained that they follow their keeper with the utmost docility. He leads them forth from the fold just where he pleases” (Johnson, 158). Johnson provides us with this remarkable true life incident:

The shepherds led their flocks forth from the gates of the city. They were in full view and we watched and listened to them with no little interest. Thousands of sheep and goats were there in dense, confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out. Then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path, and uttering, as he advanced, a shrill, peculiar call. The sheep heard them. At first the masses swayed and moved as if

shaken with some internal convulsion; then points struck out in the direction taken by the shepherds; these became longer and longer, until the confused masses were resolved into long, living streams, flowing after their leaders. Such a sight was not new to me, still it had lost none of its interest. It was, perhaps, one of the most vivid illustrations which human eyes could witness of that beautiful discourse of our Savior recorded by John (Johnson, 159).

~~ 10:4 ~~

*“When he hath put forth all his own, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice”*

The significant thing about this verse is the leadership which the shepherd provides for the sheep. He “goeth before them.” Christ, our Good Shepherd, has gone before us. He has shown us the way. He has been tempted in all points like as we. In addition, the sheep “know his voice.” Do not miss the close connection between knowledge and acceptably following the Lord. A good knowledge of the word of God is absolutely essential to one’s salvation. Without a good grasp of the truth, one simply will not be able to discern truth from error, and as a consequence he will be blown by every wind of doctrine that might come along (Eph. 4:14).

~~ 10:5 ~~

*“And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers”*

*“A stranger will they not follow”* – I once read that a traveler told a Palestinian shepherd that it was not the voice which the sheep followed, but the dress. The shepherd invited the traveler to exchange clothing. The two of them would then go among the sheep, and call the sheep. When the traveler called them, though dressed in the shepherd’s dress, the sheep did not follow, for they did not know his voice. On the other hand, they *did* follow the shepherd’s voice. So it is with God’s sheep. “They will not listen to the voice of a stranger who would call them away. The proof that we are Christ’s sheep is that we hear his voice and follow him” (Johnson, 159). False teachers are dangerous. They seek to

devour and destroy. Consequently, once it has been determined that what is being spoken is not the Lord's voice, it would behoove us to flee from the false teacher. Even within the body of Christ there are too many sheep who listen to the "voice" of strangers. They cannot distinguish the voice of truth from that of error. So, rather than flee, they extend companionship to those who are thieves and robbers. Coffman correctly noted that "The voice' is mentioned three times here in six verses and refers to the distinctive quality of Jesus' teachings. The voice of strangers brings philosophies, theories, and speculations; but only the voice of Jesus brings salvation" (Coffman, 251).

~~ 10:6 ~~

*"This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them"*

The Pharisees did not understand the meaning of the words which Jesus spoke, nor did they make proper application. Their blindness is astonishing. It would not be long, however, before they grasped the full implications of our Lord's teachings, and their hatred for Him would finally be vented in Jesus' crucifixion.

The word translated "*parable*" is not the usual '*parabolee*,' but rather '*aproimia*,' and is likely an '*allegory*' that is given. Johnson was of the same mind, and he points out that "there is not a true parable in the whole gospel of John. This is rather a simile" (Johnson, 159).

There are some important truths that emerge from a careful study of these six verses. First, it is at least possible that a false teacher might be able to pass himself off as a shepherd. Paul warned of that possibility in his second letter to the Corinthians:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light. It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Second, a false teacher will seek to steal the sheep away from the protection of the shepherd and do them great harm. Jesus called false teachers “ravens wolves” (Matt. 7:15). Finally, faithful “sheep” will have studied the word of God, laid up the word in their hearts, and remain faithful and true to its teachings. This is the only way they can become familiar with the voice of the Good Shepherd and avoid being drawn away.

*The Parable Applied and Expanded*

10:7-18

The biggest difficulty with this portion of the chapter is the change in the metaphor from “shepherd” to the “door.” Various attempts have been made to address this difficulty. Likely what we have here is a shorter parable of the “door” (verses 7-9) encased in the longer parable in which our Lord compares Himself to the shepherd. I have no difficulty with Jesus making a double application from a single parable. Take, for instance, the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. That parable is more often than not referred to as “the parable of the prodigal son.” But is it not also a parable about the Father’s wonderful love? We might even speak of it as “the parable of two sons.” In the application Jesus would speak of Himself as the “door of the sheep” and “the good shepherd.”

~~ 10:7 ~~

*“Jesus therefore said unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep”*

The shepherd often slept near the entrance to the fold to guard the sheep. Here Jesus extends the analogy and states that He is the “door of the sheep.” It is through the door that the shepherd passes into the fold. By making Himself the door Jesus implied that salvation is found only in Him. This echoes the words Jesus spoke earlier when He said, “I am the way” (14:6). Of course our Lord’s claim to be the “door of the sheep” corresponds with every claim that He had made previously, that He is the fullness of the Godhead, the Messiah, the Logos, the prophet, and King of Israel. He is the means, the agency, by which men come to the Father, and in that sense He is the door of the sheep.

~~ 10:8 ~~

*“All that came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them”*

The “all” is obviously limited. Jesus did not mean to suggest that *everyone* who came before Him were thieves and robbers. This view would mean that Moses, the prophets, and even John the Baptist were in the class of spiritual robbers. It refers to those who preceded Him who were *claiming* to be the true shepherds of Israel while showing themselves to disregard the word of God. These “thieves and robbers” were the members of the Jewish *establishment* who had, by their unbelief and hardened hearts, shown themselves to be unworthy shepherds of God’s people. The “sheep” of this passage are those who remained faithful to God, refusing to “hear” the voice of the false shepherds.

~~ 10:9 ~~

*“I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture”*

Here Jesus compares Himself to the “door” of the sheepfold, rather than the Shepherd. But He is also the “pasture,” being the source of all spiritual blessings. Notice at least three blessing referred to, all of which find their fulfillment in following Christ. First, “he shall be saved.” Salvation is found only in Christ. The words may sound exclusive, but they are in harmony with every single reference in the New Testament where salvation is unequivocally linked to Christ, not the least of which is Ephesians 1:3. A second blessing is freedom. The man that is saved had freedom to “go in and go out.” The sheep of God do not feel a sense of dread, nor do they feel restricted. Someone once said that the faithful child of God puts his trust in God and does what he wants. The key to that kind of freedom is found in the fact that such a man recognizes a good pasture when he sees one and he has no desire to graze where the grass is not green. Clark pointed out that the phrase, “go in and go out” was often used by a Hebrew to refer to all the actions of a man’s life and the liberty he enjoys in acting or not acting. When Jesus told His disciples, “Ye shall know the truth and truth shall make you free” (John 8:32), He was referring to the same thing. The third

blessing in this verse is the wonderful sustenance that shall be ours. “Shall find pasture” is a promise of abundant living.

~~ 10:10 ~~

*“The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly”*

Unlike the good shepherd, the “thief” comes for no other purpose than to steal, kill and destroy. His motive is malicious, having no concern whatsoever for the wellbeing of the sheep. This is true of any thief, and it is certainly far more significant when application is made to the spiritual realm. Spiritually, the “thief” is the false teacher, of whom the inspired writers are unified in their strong denunciation of such (cf. Matt. 7:15-20; Romans 16:17-19; 2 John 9-11, to mention but a few).

*“may have it abundantly”* - Our English word “abundantly” translates *‘perissos’* and has the meaning of “over and above; exceeding abundantly; extraordinary” (Thayer, E Sword Module). The idea here is that of continuous overflowing - “a never ceasing supply of life for every faithful soul” (Woods, 208). These blessing the thief would take away. Any man who teaches a doctrine contrary to the truth, or suggests a way of salvation other than that which our Lord provides, has perverted the gospel and robbed his victim of eternal life.

~~ 10:11 ~~

*“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep”*

*“I am the good shepherd”* - The same title was applied to God in Psalms 23:1 and Ezekiel 34:12. Christ thus laid claim to deity. It is also noted that Jesus claimed to be *the* Good Shepherd, and not one among many. Brother Woods points out that “the Greek gives special emphasis to this fact, literally ‘the shepherd the good one’” (Woods, 209). The word translated by our English “good” does not adequately convey the description intended. The Greek denotes that which is wholesome, beautiful, noble and good in every sense of the word, as opposed to that which is

unlovely and wicked. It denotes not only that which is good inwardly, but that which is lovely outwardly as well.

*“layeth down his life”* - Johnson related an incident in which one had actually witnessed a shepherd lose his life while battling with some Bedouin robbers. The good shepherd is one that is willing to face the dangers, and even to give his life for the sheep. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, would eventually give His life for the sheep by dying on the cross for the sins of the world.

~~ 10:12-13 ~~

*“He that is a hireling, and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, beholdeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth, and the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them: he fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep”*

*“He that is a hireling”* - While the thief or robber are both malicious in their attack upon the sheep, the hireling simply does not have the care for the sheep that the true shepherd has. Here is a man who is simply in it for the personal benefits he might derive. He may perform his duty, and even do it well; but when danger draws near he is more interested in his own safety than he is in the wellbeing of the sheep. Some have misused this passage to oppose pay for preachers and/or elders. But it is not the fact of a man receiving pay that makes him a hireling. Since *“the laborer is worthy of his hire”* (Luke 10:7, 1 Tim. 5:18), then a *“hireling”* must be something other than someone who receives pay for his services. The difference between *“the laborer who is worthy of his hire”* and a *“hireling”* is that a hireling is someone who would *not work were it not for this compensation*.

*“the wolf snatcheth them, and scattereth them”* - False teachers inflict their damage on (1) the individual, by snatching them, and (2) on the congregation, by dividing and discouraging them. Any man who uses his religion for his own personal gain falls into this category. Our modern day *“tele-evangelists”* are a telling example of those who are not only *“hirelings,”* but thieves and robbers as well.

Individuals and organizations abound which prey on people in the name of religion whose sole purpose is the

personal profit they derive. And the church today is not without those who feel no obligation to defend the truth against false teachers and godless philosophies and who flee at the first approach of such in their congregations because they love the “peace” and tranquility they enjoy, being in perfect harmony with denominational bodies round about. All who do this are hirelings (Woods, 210-211).

It should be noted also that these “hirelings” do not seek the destruction of the flock; rather they neglect and forsake the flock when any danger arises. Those preachers who are not willing to confront error and deal with it forthrightly, who seek “peace” and thereby neglect preaching on those “touchy subjects,” are hirelings. Elders who tolerate uncertain sounds from the pulpit, or who bow to the pressure from members for a more appealing gospel, in order to keep from rocking the boat, or to keep the contributions in line with the budget, are likewise hirelings.

~~ 10:14-15 ~~

*“I am the good shepherd; and I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep”*

Jesus almost completely drops the allegory, and plainly states, “*I am the good shepherd.*” The word “know” appears four times in verses 14-15, and each time it is the present tense of ‘*ginosko.*’ The present tense suggests what we might call “timeless action.” The same eternal knowledge that the Father and Son have for one another is extended to those who embrace the Son and obey His will. “*I know mine own, and mine own know me, even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father.*”

There is a communion existing between the disciples of the Lord and the Lord himself of understanding, love, fellowship and regard that may properly be compared, in degree, at least, with that existing between the Father and the Son (Woods, 211).

*“I lay down my life for the sheep”* - As the Good Shepherd, our Lord was willing to expose Himself to danger for His sheep, and to eventually die in their stead.

~~ 10:16 ~~

*“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice: and they shall become one flock, one shepherd”*

The “other sheep” are the Gentiles. Take a look at John 3:16, Matthew 8:11, and Luke 13:28-29 and see if you do not get the impression that our Lord’s *mission vision* reached far beyond the nation of Israel. It was, and still is, the Lord’s intention to save all men, Jew and Gentile alike. That these “*other sheep*” are nations other than Israel is clear from John 11:51-52: “Now this he said not of himself: but, being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad.”

*“them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice”* - This promise of the Lord came to pass when the gospel was taken to Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11), who came to enjoy the same spiritual benefits as the faithful Jew who obeyed the Lord. Three significant passages in this regard are worth quoting in full:

Galatians 3:26-29: “For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.”

Ephesians 3:1-8: “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles, - if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward; how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the

gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Colossians 3:11: “where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all.”

*“One flock, one Shepherd”* - The ASV renders this “flock,” which is far superior to the KJV rendering with “fold.” The “fold” is the place where the “flock” is housed. In this instance, the Jews had to be led out of the “fold” of Judaism, so that they could, along with the Gentiles (the sheep in another “fold”) be gathered into one flock, thus making up the church. Those entering into the new “fold” (the church) would be “one flock,” following the Shepherd (cf. Eph. 2:14-22; Eph. 4:4-6).

~~ 10:17-18 ~~

*“Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father”*

These two verses constitute one of the most amazing prophecies made by our Lord during His ministry upon the earth. His sacrifice was voluntary; no man would TAKE His life! He would “lay it down” of Himself. Dear reader, here is the very heart of the atonement. Our Lord’s death was voluntary on His part and not the consequence of human malice. Consider the following circumstances that prove the accuracy of His statement.

First, on more than one occasion Jesus was “delivered” from the hands of an angry mob that sought to kill him. Just such an occasion occurred only three chapters previous when it is said “some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him” (7:44).

Second, there was the occasion in the Garden when the guards came to arrest Jesus. When Jesus identified Himself as the One Whom they sought, it is said of the guards, “they went backward, and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). That one miracle (and I am convinced it was a miracle) would no doubt impress upon those guards the power that was available to Jesus to withstand their evil intentions *until he was ready to be taken*.

Third, even in His death, every indication is that Jesus yielded up His spirit to God voluntarily. It is said in Mark 15:37, “And Jesus uttered a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.” The fact that Jesus uttered His last words with a “loud voice,” proves that He did not die as a *direct result* of the crucifixion. A victim of crucifixion died of asphyxiation. Jesus was still in possession of His physical strength, and able to cry out in a loud, clear voice.

The Pharisees may have thought they would be the ones to bring about the death of Jesus. Contrarily, Jesus was saying, “I am laying it down, not in consequence of my impotence before the powers of darkness, but ‘from myself’” (Reynolds, *Pulpit Commentary*, ESword Module). This truth is confirmed by a careful examination of the physical cause of the death of Christ.

*“Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life”*  
- The Father loves the Son because of the Lord’s complete and utter denunciation of self, even to the point of giving His life. The voluntary sacrifice of His life would result in the glorification promised by the Father (cf. 17:5 and 12:23). Only by dying could the Lord be made alive, and thereby offer full salvation to His sheep.

*“I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”*  
- While it is true that the Lord’s enemies killed Him, in a deeper sense He laid down His life willingly, of His own volition. In similar fashion it is said that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:32; Rom. 6:4; Heb. 13:20). But here Jesus affirms that He was raised by His own power and will. The difficulty disappears when we recognize a principle exercised in the earthly sphere in which we live. When someone does something by the power or authority invested in him from another, it can be said that the higher authority is the cause of that thing which is done.

I once read that this is the only place in all the gospel of John that Jesus claimed to do anything of Himself. But if we read the entire statement, Jesus immediately qualifies His statement with three little words: “I have power.” Jesus was saying “I have authority to lay down my life; I have authority to take it again.” That authority was given Him by the Father. He may have been acting of Himself in dying; but the authority to do so was given Him by the Father. Bruce also picked up on this:

John does not contradict the testimony of other NT writers; the difference is one of emphasis. If Jesus by his own choice resumes the life that he laid down, his choice is (in this respect as in all others) to do his Father’s will, to obey his Father’s commands. It is by the Father’s authority that the Son acts as a free agent (John 5:19-30). This is no doubt a paradox, but it is a paradox inherent in the unique relationship subsisting between the Father and the Son (Bruce, 229).

*The Parable Perverted*

10:19-21

The last three verses of this section present one of the most despairing, dark portraits of those wicked and evil leaders who had so hardened their hearts that all they could do was attribute the mighty works and deeds of the Lord to a demonic spirit.

~~ 10:19 ~~

*“There arose a division again among the Jews because of these words”*

The Jews must have been amazed at the words spoken by the Lord. Paul wrote to the Romans, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man someone would even dare to die” (Romans 5:7). It is a rare case that anyone would die for another. But our Lord had just declared that He would lay down His life.

*“there was a division among the Jews”* – And what a sharp division it must have been! It would appear that there were some unprejudiced Jews in the audience who broke with the religious

elite. This is the second “division” among the Jews. The first was in chapter 9:16. The previous division was over whether or not Jesus had broken the Sabbath restriction; here it has to do with whether or not the Lord was possessed by a demon.

~~ 10:20 ~~

*“And many of them said, He hath a demon, and is mad; why hear ye him?”*

The fact that some of the Jews would attribute the power of Jesus to a demon is, without doubt, one of the most astounding manifestations of a hardened heart. The fact that “*many*” are said to have made such an accusation shows that the majority still opposed Jesus. Their purpose, of course, was to destroy any influence Jesus might have over the multitude. Such a tactic remains an effective tool in the hands of Satan even to this day. While my wife and I were working in Poltava, Ukraine in the mid 90’s, it was not uncommon for the disbelieving element in that city to actually suggest that those who believed in God were radical, unstable, and utterly mad.

~~ 10:21 ~~

*“Others said, These are not the sayings of one possessed with a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”*

This verse ties this section to the events in 9:1-38. The question of these “others” was about the blind man in the previous chapter. Their answer was based upon two fundamental flaws in the argument of those who claimed Jesus had a demon: (1) The “sayings” of Jesus simply could not be those of a demon possessed man, and (2) the works of Jesus were not the works of Satan or an evil being of some kind. It is significant, however, that while these Jews admitted that such sayings were not the sayings of a man possessed with a demon, they failed to acknowledge in any positive way the deity of the Lord.

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The real value of this section, so far as magnifying the Lord is concerned, is to be found in verses 10:19-21. It is not the verses themselves, but the fact that John draws our attention to this division that arose between the “*many of them*” who accused

Jesus of demon possession, and the “others” who were willing to ask the obvious: “Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” The contrast between the “many” and the “others” is what William Barclay calls, “a dilemma which is for ever confronting men” (Barclay, ESword, *Daily Bible Study Series*). I am glad that John tells us about “the others” (verse 21), because it helps me see that the words Jesus spoke, and recorded by John, were convincing to at least some of those religious leaders. As for those who were foolish enough to claim Jesus had a demon, let’s just say that God uses their foolishness to help us magnify Jesus. What it boils down to is this: Either Jesus was a megalomaniac, or He truly *is* the Son of God. It seems to me that those are the only two choices. There is no alternative, so far as I can see. If a man were to speak about himself the way that Jesus presents Himself in these verses, either he is deluded, deranged, or divine. If He is deluded or deranged, He is not worthy of any degree of respect or honor. But if He is divine, then He is worthy of all the praise and honor we could muster with every ounce of our being. Let’s briefly consider the possibilities.

First, the *words* of Jesus simply do not qualify as those of a lunatic. The teaching of Jesus demonstrates the thoughts of a person who is not only sound in his thinking, but far and above the thinking of mortal man. Take as an example the Sermon on the Mount. R.L. Whiteside had this note:

It seems certain that no other speech ever delivered has so influenced man as has this sermon on the mount. Its contents, so superior to any production of man, proved the Deity of its author. Its teaching is out of harmony with any school of religion or philosophy of that day; hence, their brightest lights could not have produced it. It is not eclectic, that is, its contents are not a collection of the best thoughts of that and previous ages. Its teaching is distinct, revolutionary, challenging every school of religious thought of the times, both Jewish and heathen. It is not a product of the times, but of Deity.” (R. L. Whiteside, *Bible Studies*, Vol. 4, p. 117).

John T. Fisher is credited having written the following tribute to Jesus’ words on that occasion:

If you were to take the sum total of all the authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene - if you were to take the whole of the meat and none of the parsley, and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount. And it would suffer immeasurably by comparison.

The teachings of Jesus clearly declare our Lord's divine wisdom and omniscience.

Second, the *deeds* of Jesus are not the deeds of a demon possessed man. It is obvious that the deeds of a mad man are essentially selfish in their nature. Were Jesus possessed by a demon, as these Jews suggested, He would not seek the good of others. He would seek His own glory. Even at the very shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). His words of self-denial were backed up with deeds of compassion for others. His miracles reached out to others, always seeking their well-being both physically and spiritually. No, the deeds of Jesus are not those of a megalomaniac!

Finally, the fruit of Jesus' words are not those of a demon possessed man. No man has ever influenced the course of human history as has Jesus Christ; in fact, no one has ever even come close! James A. Francis wrote the following tribute, well known but worthy of including here for your consideration:

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty when public opinion turned against him. He never wrote a book, He never held an office, He never went to college, He never visited a big city, He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness. He had no credentials but himself. He was only thirty three when His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He

was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While dying, his executioners gambled for his clothing, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today Jesus is the central figure of the human race, and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life.

To believe that Jesus said what He said, and did what He did because He was possessed by a demon, one would have to believe that a rotten tree could bring forth good fruit.

The verses we have just studied stand as a monument to the magnificence of Jesus. Thank God that Jesus has come! I close this chapter with the following tribute to our Lord.

Christ has come, the Light of the world: the Revealer of the snares and chasms that lurk in darkness, the Rebuker of every evil thing that prowls by night, the Still of the storm-winds of passion; the Quickener of all that is wholesome, the Adorner of all that is beautiful, the Reconciler of contradictions, the Harmonizer of discords, the Healer of diseases, the Saviour from sin. He has come: the Torch of truth, the Anchor of hope, the Pillar of faith, the Rock for strength, the Refuge for security, the Fountain for refreshment, the Vine for gladness, the Rose for beauty, the Lamb for tenderness, the Friend for counsel, the Brother for love. Jesus Christ has trod the world. The trace of the Divine footsteps will never be obliterated. And the Divine footsteps were the footsteps of a Man. The example of Christ is such as men can follow. On! until mankind wears His image. On! towards yon summit on which stands, not an angel, not a disembodied spirit, not an abstract of ideal and unattainable virtues, but THE MAN JESUS CHRIST (Peter Bayne, source unknown).



## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### “MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE”

*Conflict At The Feast of Dedication, 10:22-42*

The events surrounding the healing of the blind man occurred during the feast of tabernacles, whereas the events in this section are associated with the feast of dedication. When Syria came to power in the second century B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes was determined to eradicate Judaism. The temple and city were taken by this Syrian emperor in the year 167 B.C. He killed more than 40,000 inhabitants, and sold as many or more into slavery. In addition to this, he sacrificed a sow on the altar of burnt offerings, and making a broth, he sprinkled it all over the temple, thus defiling both the city and the temple. Three years later the city and temple were recaptured by Judas Maccabaeus and his band of zealots, and the temple was purified with great pomp and solemnity. The ceremony of purification continued through eight days, during which Judas presented magnificent victims, and celebrated the praise of God with hymns and psalms (Josephus, Ant., b. xii. ch. 11). “They decked, also, the forefront of the temple with crowns of gold and with shields, and the gates and chambers they renewed and hanged doors upon them” (1 Macc. 4:52-59). For this reason it was called the feast of renovation or dedication. Josephus calls it the Feast of Lights, because the city was illuminated as expressive of joy. The feast began on the 25th day of Chisleu, corresponding to the fifteenth day of December. The festival continued for eight days, with continued demonstrations of joy. The events in 7:1 thru 10:21 occurred during that feast of Tabernacles, whereas what is about to follow are events associated with this feast of dedication. That being so, there is a lapse of about two months between verses 21 and 22.

There are four easily recognizable parts in this section. First, we have the *challenge* from the Jews regarding whether or not Jesus is the Christ (verses 22-24). I do not get the impression that they were all that sincere in their inquiry. No doubt there were lingering memories on their part of the strong rebuke Jesus had given when He was last in Jerusalem (see Matthew 23). The fact that they “*came round about him*” suggests an intense conflict

was brewing. In their mind there was no better time for Jesus to present Himself as the Messiah than during this feast. If He really were the Messiah, He should declare it, and rid the nation of Rome and the domination it had over Israel once and for all. Their geo-political concept of the Messiah may have urged them to attempt to get Jesus to declare Himself.

The words of our Lord that follow are the heart of this section. Herein the Lord presents an amazing contrast between these unbelieving Jews who refused to listen to the voice of the Lord, and the Lord's sheep that hear His voice and follow Him (verses 25-30).

The third part in this section is a repeat of what we have seen so often in the Lord's ongoing confrontation with these Jews (verses 31-39). Once again their ears were closed to the wonderful message Jesus presented. What should have softened their heart actually hardened it, and in rage they "took up stones again to stone him" (verse 31). Additional words from the Lord would fall on deaf ears, and, as they "sought again to take him, he went forth out of their hand" (verse 39).

This section closes with the departure of the Lord from the city (verses 40-42). The Lord would find the soil around the Jordan more receptive, for John tells us "many believed on him there" (verse 42).

We will study this section under the following points:

Demand: "Tell us plainly," 10:22-24;

Discourse: "My sheep hear my voice," 10:25-30;

Denunciation: "Thou being a man, makest thyself God," 10:31-33;

Directive: "The Scripture cannot be broken," 10:34-39;

Departure: "He went away beyond the Jordan," 10:40-42.

Demand  
*“Tell us plainly”*  
 10:22-24

~~ 10:22 ~~

*“And it was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem”*

As noted earlier, the feast was established by Judas Maccabaeus, in the year B.C. 164, to commemorate the purification of the temple after its defilement by the Syrian Greeks. It was observed for eight days, was a patriotic observance much like our Fourth of July in spirit, and was celebrated in all the towns and cities of Judea as well as Jerusalem. The feast may have had a prehistory as a festival of the winter solstice, but from then on it was given a place in Israel's religious calendar, and to this day it is celebrated as the Feast of Lights, or *Hanukkah*. The general consensus is that Jesus continued His ministry for a short period after this feast in one last effort to lead the nation to salvation.

~~ 10:23 ~~

*“it was winter; and Jesus was walking in the temple in  
 Solomon's porch”*

*“it was winter”* - This explains why Jesus was walking in “Solomon's porch.” It would provide cover from the cold and dreary weather. This incidental detail provided by John is a proof that this was an eye witness account, and attests to the genuine nature of the report. Solomon's porch would have been in the southeast part of the temple enclosure, overlooking the Kedron valley.

~~ 10:24 ~~

*“The Jews therefore came round about him, and said unto him,  
 How long dost thou hold us in suspense? If thou art the Christ,  
 tell us plainly”*

The multitudes were still divided as to the exact identity of Jesus. The “Jews” here were the ruling class who sought to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the multitude. Their desire that Jesus tell them “plainly” if He were the Christ was hypocritical. They were

determined to bring matters into focus, and so they came and surround Jesus so as to question Him and press for an answer.

To this point Jesus had never used the term “Messiah” to refer to Himself, although His description of Himself as the Good Shepherd carried the same connotation. Bruce noted:

It was one thing for him to tell the woman at the well of Sychar who he was (John 4:26); to her the term ‘Messiah’ (or its Samaritan equivalent) had purely religious connotations. But among the Jews it had political and military implications, which Jesus was careful to avoid. In this Gospel indeed he never makes an explicit messianic claim before the Jewish authorities - not even at his trial” (Bruce, page 230).

Discourse  
*“My sheep hear my voice”*  
10:25-30

~~ 10:25 ~~

*“Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believe not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, these bear witness of me”*

*“Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believe not”* - Their inability to see exactly who Jesus is, was due, not to lack of evidence, but to hardness of heart. Jesus HAD told them, both by His teaching (7:14, 10:18, and 8:36-38) and His deeds (5:36). The problem of unbelief lay in their stubborn heart. Consequently each successive miracle served only to harden their hearts even more. Assume for a moment that the Lord had told them He was the Messiah. I do not think they would have understood Him even then because their idea of the Christ was one of an earthly nature.

*“the works that I do, bear witness of me”* – In view of the fact that Jesus uses the plural “works,” it is reasonable to assume that He was not referring to any single miracle, but to the totality of His miracles. The Lord had demonstrated His power to restore health, sight, and in the next chapter He would demonstrate His ability to restore life itself. All of these miracles, and many more

which were not recorded (John 20:30-31), bore witness to His deity and authority.

~~ 10:26 ~~

*“But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep”*

The Calvinistic doctrine of pre-election is false to the core. God never predetermined anyone’s eternal destiny or individual choice in the matter of either believing or disbelieving the Christ. If Calvinism were right then Jesus would have said, “You cannot believe me, because ye are not of my sheep.” There was no eternal decree that rendered them incapable of believing. Their unbelief was their choice, not God’s mandate.

~~ 10:27-28 ~~

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:  
and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish,  
and no one shall snatch them out of my hand”*

They are His sheep because they hear His voice, and respond by following Him. Whereas in 10:10 He promised “abundant life,” here the promise is eternal life. Similar terms were employed by John to describe this wonderful blessing of life. To have eternal life is to live forever (6:51, 58). Those who have this life will “never see death” (8:51), never “taste death” (8:52), and “never die” (11:26).

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### My Sheep Hear My Voice

by Tom Wacaster

While working in India over the past decade or so, I have had opportunity to witness firsthand how small animals, even in large herds, respond to the call of the herdsman. The small village roads in India are ideal for driving goats from one grazing field to another. Even the National Highway (India’s equivalent to our Interstate Highway system) is used to get rather large herds to some other destination. When travelling the small back roads to some isolated village, we obviously had to travel much slower than on the super highway. When we encountered a herd of goats on the road they were usually spread across the road,

blocking our passage, and we had to stop, and slowly make our way past the flock of goats and those attending to their safety. I never asked Nehemiah to translate what a particular herdsman was saying, but I could hear the voice calling out to the goats. Occasionally it took a little nudge with the herdsman's rod, but usually the goats respond to the sound of the voice of the one leading and caring for those goats.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). Was Jesus speaking about literal sheep? Was He a herdsman keeping watch over a flock of sheep? I think not, and I think you know better. We are the sheep of His pasture, the “flock of God” over whom shepherds keep watch, with Jesus as the chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:1-4). Here are some wonderful lessons we can draw from our Lord's words in John 10:27-28.

First, we belong to Christ. “My sheep!” There is great comfort and consolation that comes with knowing we belong to God, and that He cares for us. Willing to leave the ninety and nine, He sought us out, paid the price for redemption, and gathered us into His flock. The compassion and love our Lord has for each one of us is summed up in those two words: “My sheep!” It was late one evening and Nehemiah Gootam and I were on our way home from a preaching appointment. We passed a herd of goats, now being led home in order to be bedded down for the night. One young man led the flock, and an older gentleman was following at the rear with staff in hand. Over his shoulder he cradled a small goat that had evidently grown weary with the journey. Although the goat was fast asleep, it lifted its head only briefly as we passed by. I thought to myself, “How much like our Lord who will carry us, protect us, feed us, and care for us,” all because we are *His* sheep! Beloved, don't ever lose sight of the fact that we belong to Christ, that we “were bought with a price,” and that we are to “glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Second, we are God's “sheep.” The metaphor is so fitting. Sheep are completely defenseless against the wolves that would seek to devour. Without the protection of our Lord, we are vulnerable to

those things that would destroy us. If you doubt that for a moment, take a look at the multitudes of lost souls that have refused to draw near to God, whose lives have been ravaged by the wolves that are out there, “separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12). Drugs, alcohol, materialism, pride, lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the vainglory of life, hedonism, and humanism. Though the words are spelled differently, the bottom line is that each one represents the dangers that lurk in the shadows of the dark places of a world without God. Unfortunately, sheep are ignorant and gullible. Not recognizing the dangers that exist, a sheep will keep his head to the ground, grazing on the grass, while ignoring the dangers about him. Humans are like that. We get so consumed with our daily activities, the cares of this life, the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, that we keep our heads to the grindstone, unaware of what dangers threaten, or exactly where it is we are headed; unaware, that is, until we suddenly lift up our head and notice our world is crashing in upon us.

Third, as God’s sheep, we “hear” the voice of our Lord; not “have heard,” and since ceased to listen; not “might hear” if we get the opportunity to squeeze in a few moments late at night to read a small portion of our Bible. We are identified as Christ’s sheep because we heard the gospel, responded to it, and *keep on hearing* His voice. It does not come as some small, still voice in the night. Neither does it come as a bolt of lightning out of the sky. We hear Christ’s voice in His words; words revealed to the apostles and prophets, recorded for our reading and examination by divine inspiration, and laid up in the heart by practical application and holy living.

Fourth, as sheep, we “follow” the Lord. We follow in full expectation of receiving eternal life, “whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). We follow Him submissively, obeying “from the heart that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered” (Rom. 6:17). We follow Him exclusively, realizing that He is “the way, and the truth, and the life,” and that “no man cometh unto the Father” but through

Him (John 14:6). We following Him in “fullness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22).

Finally, as His sheep, we “know” Him. I am not denying that He knows us! He does; in fact He knows us better than we know ourselves. But we cannot *be known* by Christ without our knowing Him in return. Paul put it this way: “For I know him whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12b). Knowledge of Christ goes much deeper than a superficial awareness of the facts surrounding the life, death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. “Yea verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:8-11).

Tom Moore shared the following story with his readers:

I read of an American tourist who was traveling in the Middle East. He came upon several shepherds whose flocks had intermingled while drinking water from a brook. After an exchange of greetings, one of the shepherds turned toward the sheep and called out, “Manah. Manah. Manah.” (Manah means, “follow me” in Arabic). Immediately his sheep separated themselves from the rest and followed him. Then one of the two remaining shepherds called out, “Manah. Manah,” and his sheep left the common flock to follow him. The traveler then said to the third shepherd, “I would like to try that. Let me put on your cloak and turban and see if I can get the rest of the sheep to follow me.” The shepherd smiled knowingly as the traveler wrapped himself in the cloak, put the turban on his head and called out, “Manah. Manah.” The sheep did not respond to the stranger’s voice. Not one of them moved toward him. “Will the sheep ever follow someone other than you?” The traveler asked. “Oh yes,” the

shepherd replied, “sometimes a sheep gets sick, and then it will follow anyone.”

The Lord is speaking. His voice is loud and clear. Are you listening?

~~ 10:29 ~~

*“My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand”*

While it is true that “no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand,” it is equally true that one may choose to depart the fold. The devil has no power over our own volition; nor does obedience to the gospel rob a man of his ability to still exercise that free will.

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### A Special Study on The Possibility of Apostasy

Since this passage is often used to teach the doctrine of once-saved-always-saved, it might be good to take a closer look at the doctrine itself and whether or not this passage, or any passage, teaches such. Who is the “them” to which eternal life is granted? Who are the “they” who shall never perish? And who is the “them” that shall never be snatched out of His hand? If one will answer these questions he will immediately see that Jesus was not teaching the impossibility of apostasy. The previous verse identifies the “they” and “them” of this verse. It is that class of individuals who “hear” and “follow.” But one may, at any point in time this side of eternity, cease to follow Christ. Regarding whether or not a person, once saved, can fall from grace, Guy N. Woods has pointed out

Such a view necessitates the conclusion that eternal life is equal to, and is bestowed on one at the moment of salvation. These were already sheep; these sheep were faithfully following the Lord; to these the Lord gives eternal life, the actual possession being in the life to come, and not here (Titus 1:2, Mark 10:30; 1 John 2:25). This is demonstrated by a look at the parallelism Jesus uses. Those who follow him shall never perish; that is, they shall

by no means lose their souls in the world to come. The converse is that those who do not hear his voice, who do not follow him SHALL perish - hereafter in the eternal fires forever. Thus, the life he gives is eternal; the destruction awaiting these who will not follow is eternal and the two states are contemporaneous” (Woods, 219-20).

Regarding the words “eternal life,” Johnson had this note: “It occurs forty-four times in the NT, and of these occurrences seventeen are in the Fourth Gospel and six in the First Epistle of John, making twenty-three instances of its use by this single author. It never means simply endless existence, but always implies a blessed immortality. Our Lord set “eternal punishment” and “eternal life” together in order to show the contrast between the two. In both cases “everlasting” has the meaning of endless existence, either in a state of punishment, or a state of bliss (Matt. 25:46). The word rendered life (*zoeē*) means, in its primary sense, “existence” as opposed to non-existence or annihilation. In this sense it occurs thirteen times in the New Testament, of which 1 Corinthians 15:19 is a good example: “If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable.” Finally, “eternal life” is the inheritance of all who have been born again. It is immortality, and the phrase is never applied to those who are in a state of condemnation.

There are an abundance of passages that teach beyond a shadow of a doubt that those who have been saved not only have the ability to return to the world, but should they chose to do so, the later state is worse than the first. Consideration will be given here to only a few of those passages, along with some observations.

## 2 Peter 2:20-22

Particular attention should be given to the following words and phrases in this passage having to do with apostasy:

*“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world” -* Though the word “they” speaks of false teachers, the truth would apply to any individual who has believed and obeyed and thereby

“escaped the defilements of the world.”

*“they are again entangled therein and overcome”* - Our English word “entangled” translates the Greek *‘empleko,’* and means “to in-weave” (Thayer). It is the same word used in 2 Timothy 2:4 that warns against the soldier being “entangled” in the affairs of this life. The fact that these false teachers and their followers are “*overcome*” indicates the absolute bondage into which they had entered. The Greek *‘hettao’* means to “be conquered by one; forced to yield to one” (Thayer). The image is that of someone being captured by their enemy and thus forced into slavery and bondage.

*“The last state is become worse with them than the first”* - As to why the later state is worse, let me suggest the following: (1) Once an individual returns to the world, recovery is much more difficult, and in many instances impossible; (2) apostates are usually more abandoned in their sin than those who have never walked in righteousness; (3) the influence for evil and harm to the church on the part of an apostate Christian is much worse than one who is NOT a child of God. Coffman concluded, “The thing in view in this verse is a spiritual condition described as worse than being lost; and the only thing that answers to such a condition is that of being lost *without the possibility* of being saved” (Coffman, 327).

*“For it were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered unto them”*

*“For it were better for them”* - We can scarcely imagine a state in which it could be said that it is “better” that they never had come to know the way of righteousness. When we consider the fact that with greater knowledge comes an increase in responsibility, and with greater responsibility comes greater punishment in the failure to fulfill that responsibility, we conclude that Peter was speaking of the final state of these false teachers and those who follow them. They had “known the way of righteousness,” but were determined to cast that aside in exchange for a lie. The Greek word (*‘epistrepho’*) here translated “turn back” means “to turn one’s self about” (Thayer). By turning back they bring

reproach upon the name of Christ.

*2 Peter 2:22 - "It has happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog turning to his own vomit again, and the sow that had washed to wallowing in the mire"*

Peter quotes from Proverbs 26:11, though the wording is somewhat different. We must remember that the apostles were *writing* scripture as much as they were quoting it, and the elaboration on the original proverb is well within the authority of those being guided by the Holy Spirit. The image itself is quite despicable, designed to enforce and illustrate the point made in the previous verse. Those who advocate the impossibility of apostasy find no solace in this passage, though they may attempt to do so. Brother Woods addressed the misuse of the passage thus:

It should be noted that in both instances the animal was changed, that each returned to its former offensive habits does not alter the fact that a change had occurred. Advocates of the doctrine of impossibility of apostasy, in an effort to avoid the obvious force of this passage, insist that the dog remained a dog, the sow a sow. Such is not the point of the proverb. The dog had ejected that which was foul; the sow had been washed. That each returned to its former manner of life reveals that the old nature returned (Woods, 178).

#### Galatians 5:1-4

Here we will examine the words and phrases that have to do with the possibility of apostasy:

*"and be not entangled again"* (5:1) - Tindal renders this, "And wrap not yourselves again." They were not to allow a yoke of bondage to be placed upon them as they had done to this point. The "yoke of bondage" was the Law of Moses, with its rites and ceremonies. Paul was reminding the Galatians that they had been delivered out of a prison, so to speak, and set free to serve their God. He issued a strong warning that, having obtained freedom, they were not to be overtaken and imprisoned in the

burdensome system being espoused by the Judaizers. The “yoke” to which these Galatians had previously been enslaved was probably the practice of multitudinous pagan rituals by which they had previously sought salvation. Having come out from under that burdensome yoke of pagan practices so prevalent in Galatia, why in the world would they again want to be entangled in yet another yoke, namely that of Judaism?

*“Christ will profit you nothing”* (5:2) - Paul did not mince words. The danger was too great to beat around the bush, and so the apostle set before the Galatians the ultimate end of the choices which then lay before them. If they were to receive circumcision, then Christ would be of no value whatsoever to them. Their whole religion was in danger of becoming nothing more than that of “ritualism with a slightly Christian tinge,” as Hendriksen called it (Hendriksen, 195). Urgency demanded this forceful conclusion, for “a Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted” (Hendriksen, 195).

*“Ye are severed from Christ”* (5:4) - The word here means to render inactive, idle, useless; to do away, to put an end to, and here it means that they had withdrawn from Christ.

*“ye are fallen away from grace”* - If they received circumcision (indicating that they chose to follow the false teachers), then (1) they would be entangled in a yoke of bondage, (2) Christ would profit them nothing, (3) they would be debtor to keep the whole law, (4) they would be severed from Christ, and (5) they would have fallen from grace. On the other hand, if they chose to renounce the teaching of the false teachers they would (1) be free, (2) gain the benefits (or profit) of Christ’s work, (3) be released from the whole law, (4) continue to be joined to Christ, and (5) they would be justified by grace rather than by some legal system. If it were impossible for these Galatians to “fall from grace” then why in the world was Paul writing this letter? The very nature of the letter was to PREVENT an apostasy among the churches in Galatia.

1 John 3:15

*“Whosoever hateth his brother”* - Notice John’s use of “loveth

not” in the previous verse, and “hateth” in this verse. Where there is no brotherly love, there is hate. Just as you have light and darkness, good and evil, so you have love and hate. There is no middle ground.

*“is a murderer”* - One does not need to literally commit murder in order to be classified as a murderer in God’s eyes. Jesus told us that anger, harbored in the heart, places one under judgment of God (Matt. 5:21-22). The child of God who hates his brother has exhibited the disposition and spirit of a murderer; he has allowed passions to arise in his heart which, when carried to their ultimate end, result in murder. One might reply, however, that hatred can exist in one’s heart without murder ever having been committed. This is because there are restraints which keep him from doing so. One may lack opportunity, or even the courage to carry out the hatred harbored in his heart. But given the opportunity, the hatred in the heart will eventually pour forth in action.

*“no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him”* - Those who advocate the impossibility of apostasy have difficulty with this passage. A “brother” (one who at one time was in right standing with God) who hates his fellow Christian no longer enjoys the prospect of eternal life. The hope no longer abides in him. He has forfeited heaven’s promise of eternal life. John’s argument is this: where love is not, there is hatred; where hatred is, there is murder; where murder is, there can be no eternal life.

#### Hebrews 6:4-6

The section now before us is one of the most sobering and solemn of all the passages in the letter. It describes a state of apostasy from the faith so severe that it is described as a state from which it is “impossible” to bring a person again to repentance. The writer is about to enter into a description of a class of once faithful Christians who had rejected Christ as High Priest, and had instead returned to their previous state. In this passage the writer makes reference to (1) The person’s *past*, verses 4-5. They had been “enlightened,” had “tasted the heavenly gift,” “were made partakers of the Holy Spirit,” “tasted the good word of God,” and in some way enjoyed “the powers of

the age to come.” (2) The person’s *present*, verse 6a - “and then fell away.” (3) The person’s *future*, verses 6b-8, “it is impossible to renew them to a state of repentance.”

Advocates of the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy would have us believe that those whom our author describes here had never actually become Christians in the first place. Such a position not only twists and perverts the words of the sacred writer, but simply cannot be sustained with the overall teaching of the New Testament. The context demands that this be viewed as a description of a Jew who had abandoned the Christian system for the old Mosaic Law. Of course the *principle* applies to the Christian who abandons God for the things of the world; but that is not what the author had in mind. There are some significant truths that emerge from these verses that are applicable to every generation and a sober warning to every single child of God. It behooves every child of God, regardless of the generation in which he might live, to give careful consideration to what is contained herein. Let’s take a closer look.

*“For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit”* (6:4) -The apostle begins this section by giving a detailed description of the *past* state of these Hebrews. No stone is left unturned; each item presents to his audience a clear and precise description of someone who had at some previous point in time, obeyed the gospel and entered into fellowship with the Father.

*“those who were once enlightened”* - The New Testament uses such language to describe one who has learned and obeyed the truth of God’s word. These people who had “sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light sprung up” (Matt. 4:16). To turn away from that truth is a sin against the light, the one sin which by its very nature is incurable. In this connection notice the following passages:

John 8:12 - “Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life”;

Ephesians 5:8 - “For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light”;

Colossians 1:12 - “giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”;

1 Thessalonians 5:5 - “for ye are all sons of light, and sons of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness”;

1 Peter 2:9 - “But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”;

1 John 2:9-11 - “He that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in the darkness, and walketh in the darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

*“tasted of the heavenly gift”* - This is the new life in Christ (notice John 6:33, 3:36, and 11:26). This is indeed a gift beyond measure! This little band of Hebrew Christians had learned what it meant to be the *true recipients* of the promise to Abraham.

*“were made partakers of the Holy Spirit”* - The early church possessed the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and I think that is what the author is speaking of here. The argument of the apostle is forceful. These Hebrew Christians actually possessed the manifestation of God’s great power which enabled them to perform miracles, speak in tongues, et al. Tragically, they were contemplating casting all of that aside for the old Mosaic Law.

*“tasted of the good word of God”* (6:5) - Milligan points out that the accusative case used here probably emphasizes the deepness of the “tasting” or the experiencing nature of their background. These were ones who had drunk deeply of the word of God, and thus were influenced by its teachings. This suggests that those

to whom the author was writing had indulged deeply in a study and application of the word to their life. Theirs was not a *superficial* involvement in the “good word of God.” It was a deep and thorough participation in those things concerning Christ.

“(tasted) *of the powers of the age to come*” - To the Jew, the “age to come” was that time when the Messiah would rule on His throne. These Hebrews were living in that age, and witnessed the “powers” of that dispensation. Included in these “powers” were the miraculous, as well as the “power of God unto salvation,” the revelation of the soul saving gospel of Christ!

There is no doubt in my mind that the author is describing a group of people who had, at one time, enjoyed all the blessings that come with faithful obedience to the Gospel. Every divine incentive that could draw and attract one to God and the Gospel had been experienced (tasted) by this group of people. They had been “*enlightened*” (spiritually taught), “*tasted of the heavenly gift*” (spiritually involved), “*made partakers of the Holy Spirit*” (spiritually empowered), “*tasted of the good word of God*” (spiritual experience), and tasted “*the powers of the age to come*” (divine demonstration). Indeed, what a glorious *past* they had enjoyed.

“*and then fell away*” (6:6) - There are some who think that the writer was presenting a hypothetical case that could not and would not happen to a real Christian. Calvinism has prejudiced their minds to the clear teaching of this passage. This bias is reflected in the KJV, “If they shall fall away” (emphasis mine, TW). If such were the case, why all this earnest warning about a matter which never did occur, and from the very nature of the case never can occur? Why spend our time in solemnly warning the people to beware lest the heavens fall, if by the decrees and ordinances of Jehovah it is made absolutely impossible that they ever can fall?

Some flatly state that “this sin cannot be committed today.” These attempts to soften the message of the inspired writer are totally inadmissible. Our English translates the Greek ‘*parapipto*,’ meaning “to fall beside...to slip aside; hence to deviate from the right path, turn aside, wander...to err. In the

Scriptures to fall away (from the true faith)...Heb. 6:6” (Thayer). It is an indisputable fact that one CAN fall away from God’s grace (cf. Gal. 5:4). This passage is a real warning against a real danger.

“*it is impossible*” - This word gives no little trouble to those who have determined to embrace Calvin’s doctrine of once-saved-always-saved. The word is thus softened so as to make the passage mean, “it is difficult.” But the “Greek word here translated “impossible” is *‘adunaton.’* It occurs ten times in the New Testament, including three other passages in Hebrews (6:18; 10:4; and 11:6). In all other places the word plainly means nothing less than “absolutely impossible,” and that must also be its meaning in Hebrews 6:6. On the surface it would appear that the apostle is warning of a state of apostasy so severe and so final as to make it absolutely impossible to bring that lost soul back to a saved relationship with God. In light of other passages that teach that God can, and will forgive virtually any sin we might commit so long as we have obeyed the gospel and continue to walk in the light, how might we harmonize what is said here with such promises of hope?

First, if these Christians abandoned the system of Christianity and went back under the old system of things, it would be impossible for them to be brought to repentance and salvation under that system. This interpretation is certainly in keeping with the context of this letter. Keep in mind that the immediate context has to do with leaving the old Jewish fundamentals that were designed to bring them to Christ, and press on to perfection. The writer is warning them that should they do this (i.e. cast off their Christian faith and return to the Old Mosaic Law), that it would be impossible for that old law to renew them to repentance.

Second, the writer may also have had in mind the danger of harboring a hardened heart. The scriptures plainly teach that it is possible for one to live in sin for so long a time that he finally hardens his heart beyond the point of recovery. Consequently his heart can no longer be touched by the sweet message from God (cf. 2 Pet. 2:14; 1 Tim. 4:1-4). While it is hard to imagine such a state of depravity and hardness of heart, it is nonetheless true that one can become so overwhelmed by sin that the message

that once enlightened him can no longer reach his heart. The late Guy N. Woods addressed this very point in the open forum at Freed Hardeman University. His answer was included in the two volume set of "Questions and Answers." His comments were worth including here:

Why then, in this case is no forgiveness promised, or possibility of repentance granted? The answer is to be seen in the nature of the apostasy characteristic of these people. Their helpless situation resulted from no failure on God's part, but from an unwillingness on theirs, to comply with God's plan. By their permanent rejection of the Christian system, they had made it impossible to be saved by the only plan possible - through Christ. They erected the barrier; not God" (Woods, Questions and Answers, Volume I, 133-135).

To this it should be added that persistence in sin will inevitably lead to a state where the heart has become seared, the point of no return passed, and the possibility of restoring them to a right relationship with God, an utter impossibility. Such a state of impossibility is due to the unwillingness of men, not the inability of God!

Some years ago I came across the following poem. It has appeared a number of times in various brotherhood publications, but the author has never been named:

There is a time, I know not when,  
A place, I know not where,  
Which marks the destiny of men  
To Glory or Despair.

There is a line by us not seen,  
Which crosses every path;  
The hidden boundary between  
God's patience and His wrath.

Oh, Where is that mysterious boundary  
By which each path is crossed  
Beyond which God himself hath sworn

That he who goes is lost?

How long may men go on in sin  
How long will God forbear?  
Where does hope end and where begin  
The confines of despair?

One answer from these skies is sent,  
Ye who from God depart,  
While it is called today - repent  
And harden not your heart

We return now to our study of John.

~~~~~

~~ 10:30 ~~

*"I and the Father are one"*

The word "one" asserts, not the identity (as a single Person), but the essential unity of the Father and the Son. The context helps us understand that the Father and the Son are "one" with regard to their providential protection and care of the sheep. While the "oneness-holiness" folks use this verse to affirm that the Father and Son are one in the same person, the verse simply does not teach it. Additionally, such an interpretation goes against a host of passages which show a distinction between the two. John 1:1-2 shows that the Word was WITH God, and there is no way one can be with himself. In addition, one is the Father, the other the Son.

Denunciation

*"Thou being a man, makest thyself God"*

10:31-33

~~ 10:31 ~~

*"The Jews took up stones again to stone him"*

*"took up stones again to stone him"* - These Jews recognized quickly the implications of Jesus' declaration that He is the Good Shepherd. This is the second time in this gospel that we read of the Jews actually picking up the stones in their attempt to stone

the Lord. The first occurred in 8:58-59 following the declaration by the Lord, "Before Abraham was born, I am." In both cases the implications of the words of the Lord were clear and concise. It is rather ironic (perhaps even hypocritical) that this same mob had asked Jesus to tell them "plainly" whether or not He was the Christ. When Jesus replied, "I told you, and ye believe not" (10:25a), His *plainness* was intolerable. While there certainly were other occasions when these Jews might have desired to destroy the Lord, it is not specifically stated that they had picked up stones. Here John tells us that they were on the very brink of carrying out their murderous intentions. But as they were about to begin the stoning, the Lord spoke. So awed were his enemies that, once again, they were restrained, at least for the time being, in carrying out their intended purpose. I get the impression that these Jews, with the stones already in hand, had raised their clinched fists to cast stones at Him, when the very words the Lord spoke caused them to give a moment of pause and cease from their evil intentions.

~~ 10:32 ~~

*"Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?"*

The works referred to here were the miracles of Jesus, and were called "good" because of the blessings it brought to those upon whom the miracles were performed. It may have been the question He presented that provided a stay of execution. Who among them would set forth the accusation, or make a charge? Where was the witness that heard the blasphemous words they claimed were spoken by the Lord.

~~ 10:33 ~~

*"The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God"*

The charge of blasphemy was based upon the words in verse 30 that He and the Father were one. Likely they took the words to mean that They were one in the same either bodily or person.

Directive

*“The Scripture cannot be broken”*

10:34-39

~~ 10:34-36 ~~

*“Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken), say ye of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?”*

The passage to which Jesus referred is Psalms 82:6. In that passage the civil authorities were referred to as ‘*gods*,’ or persons of great dignity. “The conclusion the Lord drew from this, known in logic as ‘*a minori ad majus*,’ is that in keeping with this rare, but occasional usage in the law, he might properly call himself God’s Son without being blasphemous; if this concept was permissible for magistrates and other civil authorities, he, being far greater than they, ought not so to be charged” (Woods, 223). It was not the Lord’s intention to use the passage in Psalms 82 as *proof* of His deity. His argument might be summed up thus: “If God Himself calls magistrates ‘*gods*,’ why should it be counted a capital offense if someone sent by the authority of God calls himself the Son of God?” But there is more to this argument that must be examined. Those who were addressed in Psalms 82 were *unjust judges*. But Jesus was sent into the world to fulfill the mission of the Father (and Son for that matter). Seeing that the works Jesus had performed bore witness of His claims to be the Messiah, the logical conclusion is that any claim to be the Son of God was not blasphemy.

*“And the scripture cannot be broken”* – This implies the permanency of God’s word. Men may change, but God does not change, nor does His word falter in any way. This is also a testimony to the inspiration of the Old Testament. Again, from Johnson:

Some have regarded this whole passage as an explanation of the Sonship of Christ in a way that would make it possible for any good man to be a Son in the same sense. If it were the only passage in the NT bearing on the subject

it might be so explained, but if the circumstances are regarded, it will be seen that there is nothing that conflicts with the statements of his divine character elsewhere. The Jews were about to rush upon him in a mob to stone him to death, because of his affirmation that he was the Son of God, and one with the Father. He arrested them by an appeal to those Scriptures that they held in such sanctity. He neither affirms nor discusses the difference of his relation to God from those whom the Scriptures had spoken of as gods because they were appointed judges of men, as God is Judge of all the earth, but demands why they should pronounce him a blasphemer for declaring that he was the Son of God, when their Scriptures had called men gods (Johnson, ESword Module).

This whole situation demonstrates the thorough knowledge which Jesus had of the Old Testament, even of the minute details and relatively obscure passages. His position is unanswerable.

~~ 10:37-38 ~~

*“If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father”*

The works of Jesus were undeniable proof that He was indeed the Son of God. It is astonishing that these Jews would actually admit the reality of the miraculous workings of Jesus, but failed to see the truth of Jesus’ Messiahship.

~~ 10:39 ~~

*“They sought again to take him: and he went forth out of their hand”*

It is not clear whether their intent right here was to kill Jesus, or simply to arrest and bring Him before the authorities. It may very well be that they were so overwhelmed by the Lord’s logical argument that at this point it might be best to turn Him over to someone who could find some fault in our Lord’s reasoning.

*“and he went forth out of their hand”* - This serves to impress upon us the fact that Jesus’ life was not taken, but offered willingly.

Departure  
*“He went away beyond the Jordan”*  
10:40-42.

~~ 10:40 ~~

*“And he went away again beyond the Jordan into the place where John was at the first baptizing; and there he abode”*

It was clear that any further teaching among the multitudes was now impossible. As Johnson put it:

He could as little descend to their notions of a Messiah, as they could rise to his. To stay among them was but to daily imperil his life to no purpose. Judea was, therefore, closed to him, as Galilee was now closed to him. There seemed but one district to be remaining in his native land which was safe for him, and that was Perea, the district beyond the Jordan (Johnson, ESword Module).

The antagonism of the Jews may have caused Jesus to depart from the city, but it did not cause Him to cease His preaching and teaching. On this occasion He went to that area where John had baptized.

Thus ends three months of a stormy and controversial ministry in Jerusalem. On two occasions there were attempts to stone Him (8:59, 10:31). Twice the people sought to arrest Him (7:32, 45; 10:39). In addition there were secret plans for His arrest and murder (7:19, 8:37). Our Lord thus departs from the city, and would not return until that Sunday of the Passion week.

~~ 10:41-42 ~~

*“And many came unto him; and they said, John indeed did no sign: but all things whatsoever John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there”*

These people believed the things that John had foretold concerning Jesus. His ministry in Perea was much more fruitful than that in Judea or Galilee.

*“John did no sign”* - Here is one aspect in which John did not manifest the power of Elijah. So far as the record tells us John the Baptist never performed a single miracle, and John the apostle so attests that to be the case here.

*“whatsoever John spake of this man were true”* - The reliability of John’s words proved true, thus establishing John as a true prophet of God. It has been noted from various sources that the “successive references to John in this gospel are progressively shorter, from the first chapter to this - a curious illustration of John’s own words regarding Jesus: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (Bruce, 237). Here is the test as to whether or not a preacher is fulfilling his duty faithfully. Does his preaching lead people to Christ? If not, then it makes little difference how eloquent he may be, his work is a failure.

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## EPILOGUE

When the Queen of Sheba came to investigate the wisdom of Solomon, she said to the king, “It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thine acts, and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame which I heard” (1 Kings 10:6-7). We have reached the half way point in our study of John. And while precisely half of this wonderful gospel has been examined, it is true that the “half has not been told.” It has been my intention to magnify Jesus; to help our readers have a greater appreciation for the magnificence of our Lord. The gospel of John accomplishes this in a most wonderful way. John begins with the pre-incarnate Word, residing in heaven and in sweet fellowship with the Father (John 1:1-3). The magnificence of our Lord’s love for humanity is demonstrated in the fact that He “became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). “Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” With those words from John the Baptist, the Lord launched His earthly ministry; a campaign designed to turn men to the Father, to drink from the living water offered by Jesus our Lord, and to feed upon the Bread of life. The footsteps of Jesus move ever onward toward the cross. From the marriage at Cana to the close of chapter ten when our Lord left Jerusalem for the last time, it is said of Jesus, “He hath done all things well” (Mark 7:37).

At this point in our study the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). On the other hand, the antagonism of the Jewish leaders continued to increase with every passing day. By the end of chapter ten the die is cast; what follows in the remaining chapters of John demonstrates what happens once men have determined to ignore the evidence and stubbornly refuse to submit to God. It should be pointed out, however, that whether men accept or reject the Savior is no reflection on His magnificence and beauty. So clearly has Jesus been magnified before all by the apostle John, that even an infidel was compelled to write the following tribute to Jesus:

It was reserved for Christianity to present to the world an ideal character, which through all the changes of eighteen

centuries, has filled the hearts of men with an impassioned love; and has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions; and has not only been the highest pattern of virtue, but the highest incentive to its practice; and has exerted so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the exhortations of moralists. This has been the well-spring of whatever is best and purest in the Christian life. Amid all the sins and failings, amid all the priestcraft, the persecution, and fanaticism which have defaced the Church, it has preserved in the character the example of its Founder's enduring principle of regeneration (as quoted by Bales, 194-195)

How wonderful the Magnificence of our Lord!

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End of Volume I

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