

# Lessons from John

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## Dedication

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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## The Word Made Flesh - John 1:1-14

Would you like some clear evidence of the inspiration of the Scriptures? Consider John the Apostle: by all accounts an ignorant, unschooled fisherman. At an old age he decided to take up writing biography. Here are the opening lines:

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

[\(Joh 1:1-14 NIV\)](#)

Tell me: does that sound like an unschooled fisherman? Or the Spirit of God?

### Beginning

Sometimes the hearer listens to this passage, and hears the echoes from the Old Testament.

### In the beginning

Consider it: long before modern science arose, the ancient Jews knew that the universe had a beginning. Not a universe going through endless cycles of reincarnation, but a time at which time started, a place at which all places were defined. The matter sounds so scientific now, but it was a leap of faith for the ancients; they saw a universe which did not change. Why should it not be eternal?

It is not eternal because its creator is eternal. The creator and the creation are not made of the same stuff. The universe is in time. Whoever created it therefore cannot be – or he would be a part of the universe. And if he were a part of the universe, how could he have caused his own creation? No, the eternal God solves the great problems of metaphysics.

Indeed, there is more in this introduction. To echo the words of Genesis, “In the beginning” means that the God spoken of here – the Word – is one with the God who was revealed to ancient Israel. This is no cosmic god proclaiming some pantheistic nonsense from the East. It is the stern Jehovah of Moses and Joshua, of Elijah and Isaiah.

### In the beginning was the Word

Please note the structure of that sentence. It tells us so much:

✚ “The” Word – not a word, or some messages, but “the” word. There is no other; nor will there ever be. He is the way, the truth and the light – and no one comes to the Father except by Him.

- ✦ He is the “Word” – the Greek is *logos* – meaning that he is everything of the mind of God which is now revealed. Who has known the mind of the Lord? But we have the mind of Christ.<sup>1</sup>
- ✦ And – in case you missed it – “was”. Not became after creation, not made for the purpose – but when time began, Christ was.

### With God, and was God

Immediately your ears should hear, “Hear O Israel: the Lord your God is one.” So it is; so it has always been; so it will always be. God is one.<sup>2</sup> If he is not, how can there be anything eternal?

But do you not see that God must also be more than one? For God is love – and love has no meaning if there is only one. “No meaning” does not apply to God.

The Trinity is “confessedly a great mystery.” I can but give you the solution of the ancients, brought to its greatest clarity by Thomas Aquinas. You must not confound the persons or divide the essence. The persons are separate; the essence is one. And that essence is, “I am.”

There you have it. The eternal God, who created all things, has chosen to send us not just a message, but The Message – in the person of The Messenger.

### The Eternal Character of Christ

#### Creator

It is a great puzzle at first. We know that the Creator God cannot be made of matter. Matter is created. If he is made of matter, he cannot be the creator – for nothing can cause its own existence. So God must be not only eternal, but self-existent.

Then who is this Jesus of Nazareth? It is the clear intent of the Scriptures that Jesus is certainly made of matter – indeed, human flesh. How is it that God becomes man? We may certainly concede to God the power of epiphany – but to be honest about it, we ought at least to ask *why?*

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.**

**(Col 1:15-20 NIV)**

It is so that the supreme God would also be supreme in all matters human.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16

<sup>2</sup> Mark 12:28-31

## Life

It sometimes surprises students that the word translated as “life” in this (and many other) passages means biological life. It seems OK to “spiritualize” this passage and talk about spiritual life. But the concept of pink angels and white ghosts finds no place in the Scripture. The angels bring fear – and the resurrection is to bodily life, the fully human life to come.

The real shocker is this: this Jesus of Nazareth has this life “in himself” – that is, it is at his command. His death on the Cross was voluntary; his resurrection by the power of God. He has authority even over life and death itself<sup>3</sup>, for He is the Life.

Indeed, he is not only life, he is life and resurrection.<sup>4</sup> Here in this short passage we begin to understand that the day will come when the Life will come to us; we will be raised from the dead by the power of God – just as He was.

But there is yet time, if you are reading this. During that time you need some guidance.

## Light

God is light; indeed, we know that Jesus is the light of the world.<sup>5</sup> But how do we interpret that phrase so that the light will shine on our paths in this world?

- ✚ Light is given as purification.<sup>6</sup> By exposing ourselves to the light of Jesus, we are constantly examined – and constantly purified.
- ✚ Indeed, we see its opposite. Those who choose to live in darkness cannot overcome the light. But they are not ignored; those who want darkness are turned over to their own sinful nature – so that the destruction that nature causes might cause them to seek the light.<sup>7</sup>
- ✚ Why was this light sent? So that all men might believe, and believing, have life.<sup>8</sup>
- ✚ The ultimate result of that light is that we walk not only in light – which purifies our ways – but also in love.<sup>9</sup>

## Word Become Flesh

### A lousy reception

Jesus certainly did not get a welcome reception. Except for those few who followed him, he was ultimately rejected. But in that rejection we can observe some very important points:

- ✚ Both friend and enemy testify to the fact that he was indeed human.<sup>10</sup> Not until the last of the Apostles is gone does anyone dare suggest that he was in any sense ghostly. (False then, false now).
- ✚ Whatever else it might have been, this was a tremendous humbling.<sup>11</sup> Only divine love could have been the motivation for this.

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<sup>3</sup> John 5:21-26

<sup>4</sup> John 11:25

<sup>5</sup> John 8:12

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 1:5-7

<sup>7</sup> Romans 1:28

<sup>8</sup> John 1:5

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 2:8-11

<sup>10</sup> John 1:1-4

- ✦ Even his own people – who for 1500 years had been sent prophet after prophet, foretelling his coming – did not receive him.<sup>12</sup>
- ✦ And, finally, this has been a great mystery since the beginning of the church.<sup>13</sup> It is likely enough that we will not solve it here.

#### The right to become

My father often urged me to become a member of the Masonic Lodge. I am told that his membership qualified me to become such. How much greater is the privilege Jesus has given to us: to become the children of God.

- ✦ Only divine love would have lavished such a privilege on us.<sup>14</sup>
- ✦ This privilege by its very nature includes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – the key to victory over sin in our lives.<sup>15</sup>
- ✦ But this adoption must have a mechanism; that mechanism is faith.<sup>16</sup> When we accept this privilege, we do it by faith in the Son of God. It is therefore not something we do, but something we receive as a great blessing.

#### We have seen his glory

John had the privilege of being eyewitness to the glory of Christ.

- ✦ He saw it first at the Transfiguration.<sup>17</sup>
- ✦ He saw it again at the Ascension.<sup>18</sup>
- ✦ He – and all the rest of those who believe – will welcome that same glory as Christ returns.

There remains but one thing: our reaction to all this. There are three reactions which seem to make sense to me:

- ✦ The first is Peter's, at the sea.<sup>19</sup> Like Isaiah before him, he is a sinner – and therefore wants to be as far away from Jesus as possible. It is a reaction which shows how sin flees the presence of God.
- ✦ The second is that of the disciples when Jesus calms the sea.<sup>20</sup> They were terrified. A man who could command the wind and the waves?
- ✦ The last is that of Thomas, known as "Doubting Thomas." He is known for his doubt; he should also be known for leaping from doubt to complete faith: "My Lord and my God."<sup>21</sup>  
In my own small way I have experienced all three. The last is the one which lasts.

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<sup>11</sup> Philippians 2:6-11

<sup>12</sup> John 1:11

<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 3:16

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 3:1

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 4:6-7

<sup>16</sup> Galatians 3:26

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 17:1-5

<sup>18</sup> Mark 16:14-19

<sup>19</sup> Luke 5:1-9

<sup>20</sup> Mark 4:37-39

<sup>21</sup> John 20:26-28

## Building A Desert Road - John 1:15-36

This lesson introduces us to one of the enigmas of the New Testament: John the Baptist. He is greatest among the prophets of the old covenant, but we know very little about him. We shall examine him today in three ways:

- ✦ The servant of God
- ✦ The workman of God
- ✦ The friend of God

John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'" Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" "I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"  
(Joh 1:15-36 NIV)

### The Servant of God

If you wish to be the servant of God, you must acknowledge his supremacy. It is a natural principle; try telling your boss what to do and see how long you're employed!

### Christ is superior to us because...

- ✦ "He was before me." Before I ever existed, Christ *is*. He is the eternal one, and therefore has a supremacy I can never hope to match. (This also makes it a bit easier to chuck my ego).
- ✦ "He blesses us..." Without a doubt it's the greater person who blesses the lesser person.<sup>22</sup> We don't ask any favors from the down and out, but the high and mighty. And with what does he bless us, but the fullness of his grace. It's his, and it is complete. We cannot match that.
- ✦ Our way is by rule and regulation; his way is by grace and truth. Even the divinely given Law of the Old Testament gives way to the conjunction of grace and truth.
- ✦ Finally, he is superior by position, for he is the one who knows God and sees God directly.

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<sup>22</sup> Remember Melchizedek?

Sounds a little obvious, doesn't it? But how often have we treated Jesus as our buddy? As one old friend phrased it to me, it's "Me and Jesus in a telephone booth."

### **The true servant of God knows himself**

Consider the temptation spread before John. The power of his preaching has caused the religious leaders of the land to spread before him the possibility of being Elijah – the quintessential prophet who is to come before the Christ; or perhaps the prophet prophesied by Moses; or indeed the Christ himself.

John knows himself. He knows his mission. Though he has been appointed since before his birth, he knows his own worth. He tells them he is not worthy even to unstick the Velcro on Christ's sandals.

It's the flip side to grace. If you must receive grace, then you are not worthy in and of yourself. The victor does not beg mercy from the vanquished. How, then, does John reconcile this humility with the powerful prophetic ministry?

To know yourself is also to know the tasks to which God has assigned you. John was not a volunteer; most prophets weren't. In fact, they most commonly suggested that God had misread the street address. The task is the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we should have humility enough to accept that – and courage enough to go and get the job done.

### **Give God the glory**

Isn't that the problem? We want people to think we are wonderful (or at least OK.) But John is not concerned about that. He does not concern himself with what the Pharisees think about him; rather, he is concerned with what they will think of Jesus. He gives God the glory. How?

- ✚ First, in sacrifice. To live the life of the prophet in the desert is not easy. It means giving up a lot. (What have you done without for the sake of the Lord?)
- ✚ The easiest way to give God the glory is in praise. (What have you spoken on his behalf?)
- ✚ The most noticeable way to give God the glory is in service. Men may not be impressed with what you say, but your actions are your credibility.

This prophet understood the glory of God. He did not consider himself great, but gave the glory to God. For this, he was privileged to have a task in the kingdom. He became the voice in the wilderness. It is a voice we could use again.

### **The workman of God**

There is an air of virtue about the word, "craftsman." We take it now to mean one who does things right. We as Christians must exceed that; we must not only do things right, but also do the right thing. Then we may be considered the workmen of God.

### **The Shepherd**

See how John tends to the flock given him. His disciples could not have missed his self-sacrificing spirit. In a way he reminds us of Moses, who refused to let God wipe out Israel and make of

Moses a great nation. Rather, he stood before God to beg their lives. Paul had much the same sense when he said he could wish himself cursed if the Jews would come to Jesus.

It is in this spirit that John delivers his disciples to Jesus, or at least those who would be called to it. There is no sense here of resentment on that; rather, there is the sense of being a team player. I planted, Apollos watered – but God gave the increase.

### The Teacher

The true function of the teacher is to prepare his students for the test. The test does not so much measure the knowledge of the student as it does the skill of the teacher. How then does John teach?

- ✚ He begins with the baptism for repentance. This is to clear sin from their lives – for sin is the great barrier between God and man.
- ✚ Before Jesus arrives, he teaches about the Christ. When he arrives, he points him out. John carries through. (What did I tell those little leaguers?)
- ✚ In the end, he delivers his students to the test of the ultimate reality in the universe. He has prepared them for a rough road; now the guide to that road has arrived.

### The Prophet

It is in the role of prophet that most of us see John. This is not surprising; his coming before the Christ is prophesied in the Old Testament. Even the Pharisees recognized this – as we can tell by the questions they asked. Like all prophets, he has two things to say:

- ✚ First, he is forthtelling – warning those around him of the Messiah to come, and calling them to repentance. We know that our Lord is returning soon; what's our reaction to that?
- ✚ He is also foretelling. This is not always negative, like Jeremiah. The warning is there, but also the prophecy of blessing.

### The Friend of God

We don't often think of John the Baptist in this light. But consider: how did he know that Jesus is the Christ? God revealed it to him. He told him that he would see the Spirit descend upon him like a dove. So John encounters all three persons of the Trinity – a rare and personal privilege.

**Purpose:** that he might be revealed to Israel.

We need to remember that John has a purpose. That purpose is that Christ be revealed to Israel; everything he does is towards that end.

- ✚ We see it in the testimony he makes to the Pharisees. He tells them directly who he is, and who Christ is.
- ✚ He baptizes for repentance, so that sin might not stand between Israel and her Redeemer.
- ✚ He also identifies Jesus by the title that proclaims his coming sacrifice on the Cross: the Lamb of God.

### Is the ascetic closer to God?

John is a man of the wilderness, one who eats locusts and wild honey – not a diet that even my doctor would inflict on me. John is ever so much the Old Testament prophet, and it seems to some that this is the key to friendship with God.

But consider Abraham, the man originally called the friend of God. He was rich; he was well fed. How then can self-denial and asceticism be a path to God?

The secret is simply this: neither man put anything between themselves and God. Abraham even went to the point of sacrificing his own son; John lived the life of an ascetic who gives up everything for God. The issue is not what's in your life; it's what in your life is between you and God.

### Make straight the way

Did you ever conceive of your task like that? That the thing God wants you to do is to make the path smooth – so that someone else can come to God? How many search for God in all the wrong places. They look at us and say, "That doesn't look like the path!" The path we show them is twisted; visibility is short. But what if we straightened that path, so that they could see clearly just who Jesus is?

But how? Let us return to the Old Testament to learn:

**A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isa 40:3-5 NIV)**

Do you not see it? It is ours to work – real, actual work, not just in theory – to smooth out the obstacles in the path of any who would follow Jesus. But if we are to smooth out his path, then is it not obvious that we must be *on* that path? To fill in the potholes, you must be on the road. Find the potholes between someone and Jesus – and fill them in with your own hard work.

All this is to a purpose: that the glory of the Lord be revealed. (Basses will recall Handel's magnificent handling of these words in *The Messiah*). If you are working for his glory, he will bring your reward.

### About us

- ✚ Do we give God the glory? Do we acknowledge Christ as superior to us in every way (including the advice we give and take?)
- ✚ Are we craftsmen for God, whether shepherd, teacher or anything else? Do we perform the tasks given us to the best of our ability, or with what we have left over?
- ✚ Do we clear the obstacles out of the way so that others might see Jesus?  
"If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to me." Let us therefore lift him up.

## Come and See - John 1:35-51

In the simplest of actions we can often learn much for our own time. Christ here begins to gather disciples around himself. We can see much for our own time in the methods and manners used.

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. It was about the tenth hour. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me." Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you." Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You shall see greater things than that." He then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (Joh 1:35-51 NIV)

### Man, the social animal

With the exception of the random curmudgeon, our species is a social animal. We have forgotten it, but our word "civilized" comes from a Latin root which means "a city." It is strange, therefore, that when we speak of evangelism, we usually have in mind a powerful preacher standing before a crowd – alone amidst a mob. But even those evangelists would tell you that there are hundreds or even thousands of workers who make that sermon possible. Indeed, thousands more are needed to bring those who should hear the Gospel. The Gospel came in a time of peace for a civilized society – so that it might better spread.

Despite our pride, not one of us is self-sufficient. (If you think not, try refining your own gasoline). We live in civilized societies because in so doing we can remedy each others' weaknesses and supply each others' needs. This is in accordance with God's plan; he likewise makes it clear that there is no solo flight in Christianity. As we become "self-sufficient" only within a civilization, we also become complete only in the church. So it is that God uses the normal processes of civilized behavior to gather up his people, the church.

### The nature of the call

We are sometimes so engrossed in the concept that all are sinners in need of repentance that we forget the example of our Lord. Not all those who receive Christ are drunks or prostitutes. Most of the people we meet don't have an overwhelming sense of shame; just a little nagging guilt. What does Christ do about this?

“Come and see.” Alone among the major religions of the world, Christianity invites the inspection of its doctrines by means of fact. For some, this means apologetics – defense of the origins of the faith by factual means. But for others, who don’t care two cents for which ancient manuscript says what, the facts which are apparent to them can be seen in the person who brings the call. This, as we see, is Christ’s own method in gathering disciples.

It evidently rubs off, for Philip repeats it. Perhaps the reason for this is that Philip is one whose eyes are open for the facts. He’s discovered the truth, and now he shares it – in the same way it was shared with him. Christ’s church still uses the method today

“We have found...”

Andrew is a man with his priorities straight. John tells us that “the first thing” he did was to go get Peter. He clearly understood, as we evidently do not, that it is of first importance for us to go to those we know and bring them to Christ, in whatever way we might know. This sense of urgency is almost completely lacking in the church today. That lack explains much.

In that simple phrase we can see much:

- ✚ “We” – Andrew’s discovery of the Christ is not his alone. He is not the sole witness testifying. Rather, there is more than one witness, so that the person hearing may not dismiss it as being one isolated opinion.
- ✚ “have found” – to find implies that you were searching for something. It also means you did not invent that which you have found. It says to anyone who will listen that you did not invent this Jesus; you didn’t find him a drug haze, but that rather he has been there all along. You simply came upon the truth.
- ✚ “the Messiah” – the one and only. Christ is unique. He does not say that he is one who has the answer. He says he IS the answer. The church is not a body of ritual on Sunday; it is the body of Christ in this world.

### Being Receptive to Christ

Philip is a student of the Scriptures. When he finds Jesus, he proclaims to Nathanael that he has found the Messiah whom Moses had prophesied. In Nathanael’s reaction we can see what an honest man does when confronted with the Christ.

### Objection

Some people get discouraged when the one they are trying to bring to Christ raises objections. This should not be.

The world’s greatest salesman is a short, fat, cigar smoking man named Montague Hipple II. He’s a man who walked into my office, explained how he was going to sell me three million dollars worth of software – and have me enjoy the experience. (He was right, too.) Monty once told me this: “Selling does not begin until the customer raises an objection.” If they’re not complaining, they’re not seriously contemplating purchasing your product. So it is a good sign when Nathanael objects. Philip’s answer suits the objection: “come and see.” Examine the evidence God has placed before you. If you’re an honest man, the reaction will be soon enough.

### “Can any good thing...”

Nathanael is evidently quite familiar with the prophecies concerning the Christ. He knows that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem. Nazareth is to the North, and considered a hick town. Rather than reject Philip on this basis, Nathanael challenges him with it. Philip simply says, “come and see.” So the honest man goes to take a look. “It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts.” (Sherlock Holmes).

This also shows you the character of Philip. Nathanael goes to find out. He does so largely out of respect for Philip’s character. He has no reason to go and a good one to stay, but for the fact that Philip is not the kind of man to deceive you. We, as Christians, need to be keenly aware of this. If we are unable to speak to those around us about Christ, perhaps it’s because we know they wouldn’t trust us.

### Christ convinces

It is important to note that Christ is the one who does the convincing. The key to salvation is not in us; it is Christ. Therefore, whatever else we may do, we need to bring people to Christ and let him convince them.

How? We are his body on earth. Do we behave as he would behave? Do we feed the hungry? Heal the sick? Teach the truth? Or are we nothing more than a Sunday morning tea-sipping society?

### “You are the Christ”

It is a joy to deal with the Nathanaels of the world. Once convinced, they act. Here he comes to the core of the faith: who Jesus is. He is the one with the authority. If we will lift him up, he will draw all to himself.

Nathanael acknowledges him as King of Israel and Son of God. It is an amazing leap – but it comes because he has studied the Scriptures.

### Reward

It strikes people as curious that Christ would reward them for what they believe. We need to remember that in that time no one would have used the word “believe” without meaning “follow through.” Two things need be said:

- ✚ First, Christ is not talking just to Nathanael here. The “you” in the Greek is a plural. He is telling this to all his disciples. The day will come!
- ✚ Likewise, he does not begin to tell Nathanael everything about the faith all at once. An honest man can tolerate “I don’t know – yet.”

### Name Change

In this passage also is the name change of Simon. There is a goodly amount of controversy over this passage; the Roman Catholic church uses this as overwhelming evidence that they are the only church (all the rest are heathens or heretics). But the testimony of the ancient church – before the time of the popes – is universal on this point: Peter is not the rock. Peter’s confession is the rock on which the church is built.

Jesus is doing something that God did in the Old Testament. He changes a person's name to signify a change in purpose and direction. Abram becomes Abraham, so that God might turn him into a great nation through whom all nations will be blessed. So it is here that Simon becomes Peter – the rock. It signifies a change to a life in The Rock.

Often too – John the Baptist is one example – God will give a child a name before it is born. It signifies that he has a purpose for that child. We don't think of names in that manner; perhaps we should. Perhaps then we would know the purpose for our lives.

### Our new names

Do you not know that when you accepted Christ you were given a series of “new names?”

- ✚ We are called “Christians” – little Christs. We are to be, in our own human way, a model of the real thing.
- ✚ We are called the friends of God. We are those who can ask a favor of the Almighty; those who can talk with him without fear.
- ✚ We are called the sons of God. We are in his family by adoption, given the rights that children have. The world should see a family resemblance. More than that, we should look forward to the coming of Christ, when all his family will be reunited.
- ✚ Finally, we are called his body. We are the eyes, ears, arms and hands of Christ on this earth. We should do his work; we should be the visible sign of the invisible God.

### New Name to Come

This idea that changing the name changes the purpose of a life is extended in the Scripture well beyond what is shown here. Revelation reveals to us that our names will be changed again.

- ✚ We will receive the “white stone” (representing purity and permanence) with a new name on it.<sup>23</sup> This is promised to those who overcome the world.
- ✚ We will be given Jesus' new name<sup>24</sup>, This also is a sign of overcoming, but it also unites us with Jesus forever.
- ✚ Finally – and most mysteriously – we will be given a new name known but to Jesus when he returns.<sup>25</sup>

The past is our foundation in Christ; the present is our witness to Christ; the future is our joining in Christ. So we should say to one and all: “Come and see.”

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<sup>23</sup> Revelation 2:17

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 3:12

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 19:12

## Water and Wine - John 2:1-12

Perhaps because it is so early in Jesus' ministry that the other Gospel writers do not include this first miracle. John was there from the beginning, and he remembers it thusly:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." **"Dear woman, why do you involve me?"** Jesus replied. **"My time has not yet come."** His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, **"Fill the jars with water";** so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, **"Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."** They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone 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." This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. [\(Joh 2:1-12 NIV\)](#)

### Witness

It is fairly well known among Christians that God uses his miracles for his purposes, and not to satisfy the whims (or pleas) of his disciples. One such purpose is to be a witness – either to the Christ, or one of his apostles. This event is such a witness. We can see this in the way in which Jesus performs this miracle:

- ✚ First, note that he instructs the *servants* to fill the jars. Why? Perhaps it is so that the disciples would not think they had somehow contributed to the miracle. But it is equally likely that this was done so that the servants would be witnesses to the miracle. They could honestly say that they were performing their assigned task, and this is what they saw. (Besides, Jesus does not take a servant from his place, but uses him where he is).
- ✚ Next, note that Jesus did not fill the jars himself, miraculously. He could do this – He who spoke and the worlds began – but he did not. The time of the old creation is past; that of the new creation has yet to arrive. The miracle is “ordinary.” It is a matter of divine style; water becomes wine by natural means, and Christ is the author of nature. Besides, it’s more convincing to the servants; 30 gallons of water weighs about 240 pounds.
- ✚ The “master of the banquet” (some translations have “ruler of the feast”) is (according to Chrysostom) what we today would call a caterer. As such he has one most necessary attribute: he’s sober. The guests evidently are not. For a miracle like this, you would want at least one sober witness. If the servants were likewise sober, then it appears that most of those who could testify to this were indeed cold sober. Which makes the caterer’s judgment about the quality of the wine all the more important. Again, it is divine style: Jesus does all things well.
- ✚ The caterer, having no idea where the wine came from, comes to the obvious conclusion that the bridegroom (who paid for the wedding in those days) has done something stupid. Then as now, the older the wine, the better the taste – and the more expensive the bottle. So the caterer thinks he is letting the young man know that this is dumb – get the guests plastered and then bring out the cheap stuff. In so doing, he gives the bridegroom the chance to be a witness too.

You can see that the style has been calculated to produce the evidence in such way as to make the fact of the miracle beyond dispute. You can imagine the buzz of gossip in the village the next day.

But it was not merely to start the words flowing from the mouth that Jesus did this. His purposes are clear:

- ✦ First, that it will be a sign to one and all. Not just to those of that time, but to all who come afterward.
- ✦ In so doing, he reveals his glory. It is now clear that there is some special connection between God the Creator and this man Jesus.
- ✦ Though the whole of the doctrine could not be made clear to them as yet, it is sufficient for the disciples. It takes but one bullet to prove the gun is loaded. They put their trust in him – which is precisely what he intended.

His sign; his purpose – then, now and forever.

### Why did Jesus...?

#### Perform this miracle at all?

There are several reasons for this. The question makes a bit of sense, for Jesus clearly reacts as if it is too early.

- ✦ It is possible that his host was overwhelmed by Jesus and disciples as extra guests. As travelers, hospitality would ordain that they be invited. There is perhaps some aspect of bringing your own bottle to this. At the least, it is polite not to overburden your host – and Jesus was unfailingly polite, but never stuffy.
- ✦ It is also just possible that he did this to give fits to the WCTU types. There has always been a tendency to portray Jesus as a stuffed shirt who wept twice but never laughed. (How we put Jesus into our picture frames!)
- ✦ Most likely of all, however, is that Jesus responds to Mary's trust. It's a lesson for us; things change when we trust him.

#### Use the ceremonial pots?

Those things are heavy when filled with water! And there were certainly a bunch of empty wine jugs around. Why didn't he re-use some of those? Doesn't he know he should be recycling?

- ✦ If for no other reason, it is to show by divine evidence that the Son of Man is superior to the Law. These pots are used for ritual cleansing, never for wine.
- ✦ But "new wine in new skins;" Jesus is Lord both of the Sabbath and the feast. In this way he shows his disciples that he is indeed something new.

#### Say "no" to Mary, then do ask she asked?

The answer to this is found in Mary herself:

- ✦ First, Jesus exemplifies here the command to "Honor your father and mother." It is his rule; he is pleased to set an example.
- ✦ Next, for her humility in the way she asks. She puts the servants at his disposal (which, by the way, indicates that this might have been the wedding of one of Jesus' brothers) and waits for results. She never tells him what to do.
- ✦ His response is in humility also – not time yet – but she overcomes his humility with her obedience. By placing all she has in his hands, her obedience moves him to grant her request.

### Let others do the labor?

The Son of Man is the servant king; here, the servants do the work. Why? Other than his desire that they be witnesses, we can see these:

- ✦ In this miracle Jesus works the way he works in nature. Nature's creator and sustainer is not a part of nature, and this is portrayed here.
- ✦ He also wants to awaken our sense of awe in nature – and so the process is done as it would be in nature itself. The heavens declare the glory of the Lord.

### Our Water to His Wine

Wine is used throughout the Bible as a metaphor for other things. This episode features two things: wine and a wedding.

- ✦ Melchizedek brings out bread and wine to Abraham. Bread and wine are prophetic symbols of the body and blood of our Lord.
- ✦ Indeed, in the New Testament, we use wine as the symbol of the blood of our Lord, shed for our salvation.
- ✦ But the wedding has a part to play too. By that wine he built his church – who is the bride of Christ. So it is fitting that he reveal himself for the first time in two great symbols: wine, which symbolizes his blood, and wedding, which shows us the Bride of Christ.

### Miracles and the church today

You will kindly note the lack of fanfare in this miracle. Those of the “jump and shout” persuasion might do well to remember these things:

- ✦ Miracles are done *in his time*. They are not the playthings of the screaming, “bind the demons” preacher, but rather the power of the Word become Flesh.
- ✦ Miracles are done in his way. There is a certain sense of style to miracles, as shown here. Those who want pigs to fly miraculously might take note of this.
- ✦ Miracles are often done in honor of our humble prayers. Our humble obedience greatly pleases him, and he is therefore pleased to hear our prayers.

### Mary's Three Keys to Discipleship

It is unfortunate that (particularly since the Reformation) the Roman Catholic church has continually elevated Mary. I am told that the Pope now wishes to declare (infallibly, of course) that Mary is co-redemptrix with Christ. One result of this is the fact that the Protestant (and especially evangelical) churches have minimized what Mary has done. I present for your consideration three keys to discipleship which Mary exemplifies:

- ✦ *Obedience*. Whatever else Mary knows, she has found that obedience brings forth a great response from God. Her statement, *ecce ancilla*, “Behold the handmaiden of the Lord” is one of the most sublime statements of obedience. She shows it here too.
- ✦ *God Reliance*. So many of us are anxious to tell God how to arrange things to obtain the results we pray for. Mary shows the perfect balance in this: she relies on God's wisdom to determine what is to be done – but is also willing to do her part at his command.

✦ *Trust.* One aspect of trust shines out here: she trusts that God *will work*. So many of us are confident that God will do nothing. She expects him to act. More than that, she expects that he will act to do what is good for those who love him.

These three things were true when Jesus walked the earth. They are still true today. God has not changed. Have we?

## A Deed Full of High Authority - John 2:12-25

There is a curious sense of timing to this action. It is just before Passover. The devout Jew would, for seven days before Passover, have no yeast in his house. Indeed, he was required to make a thorough search of the house to make sure of this. The symbolic meaning is clear: before the angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ) will pass over you in deliverance from death, you must clean the house. We shall see that this symbolism underlies the actions described by John.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, **"Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"** His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, **"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."** The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

(Joh 2:12-25 NIV)

### Why?

At first glance the actions of Jesus seem puzzling, especially to the modern eye. We no longer have the temple described here, and we transpose the actions in our minds to a modern church building. It seems incongruous. Let's take it step by step.

### Why the anger?

The modern mind seeks an explanation. Jesus is ordinarily a mild-mannered sort; when you are God in the flesh, you don't need to go about airing your wrath. Kindness in miracles is sufficient. So why, then, is Jesus so angry?

- ✚ Some writers see it this way. The money-changers and sellers were, in fact, extorting the people who came to worship. You couldn't pay your temple tax in Roman or Greek coin; it had to be a special Hebrew coin. Your sacrifices had to be unblemished; the priests who inspected them were in cahoots with those who sold acceptable sacrifices. As some see it, the extortion was the problem. No doubt they were extorting; but that really doesn't seem to be the reason.
- ✚ Perhaps it's not the extortion; it's the buying and selling at all in God's temple. This is a little less comfortable answer for modern Christians, who are used to buying everything from bake sale goods to Alaskan cruises in the church. We prefer to think that the Tupperware lady who delivers her orders on Sunday at church is just doing someone a favor. It seems so innocent. But is this a sign of the decline in the church? I leave that one to you.
- ✚ There is one thing certain: his anger concerned the Temple. We must remember that this is the one spot on earth in which God said his Name would dwell. It is holy in a way that no church building can be.

But there is a parallel here. The Temple no longer exists. But we know where God puts his name: it is in us. We are told that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and – surprise – we bear the Name of Christ, for we are Christians. Note, please, that the Jews do not. If He took a whip to drive out the wicked from his Temple of stone, how much more will he drive out wickedness from the temples of the Holy Spirit?

#### Why didn't he explain the prophecy?

The answer is plainly given: they weren't ready to understand the answer yet. It is only after the Holy Spirit comes that they remember these words and understand.

The Jews, on the other hand, were unwilling. There is a difference between the two. God will often bring to mind and repentance something which did not seem a problem a month ago. You were not ready; so he waited patiently until you were. But if you are unwilling, then things become cryptic and you do not understand what he is doing. "A broken and contrite heart you will not despise."

#### Why did He not simply cite righteousness?

After all, to clean up an extortionist's racket does not require a miraculous sign of authority. It is clear from the text that all accepted his authority to do this; so why didn't he make everyone happy with some spectacular miracle?

- ✚ First, so that the Jews would have no opportunity to justify themselves. Jesus was simply not interested in their excuses, and that's what he would have received.
- ✚ More than that, He is the Christ, the Son of God. That's the key point – necessary for salvation – and he wanted the focus to be on Him, not them. In essence, he puts himself on trial so that all will ask, "Who is this Man?"

#### The Nature of Moral Authority

I've told the story before, but it bears the repetition. In the 1930s a riot erupted in a west Texas oil town. The riot soon turned into looting, and the sheriff and mayor appealed to the governor for help. The governor wired back that help would arrive by special train the next morning.

The next morning the train arrived. The sheriff was amazed to see that the governor sent only one man: Henry M. T. "Lone Wolf" Gonzualles. The sheriff blurted out, "You mean they only sent one man?" "There's only one riot, ain't there?"

Over the headquarters of the Texas Rangers to this day is the motto: "One riot, one man." There is a moral authority in this world. We seldom use it; indeed, "when what is vile is honored among men, how the wicked strut!" But here we see such authority displayed.

#### Unity with the Father

The first essential in moral authority is unity with God. When your purposes are his purposes, his authority goes with you. Note, this is not "when God comes around to my point of view." You're the one who must agree with Him.

In this instance, Jesus uses that moral authority to begin his teaching. The one who cleanses the Temple will soon welcome sinners and drunkards, tax collectors and political zealots. The one who claims this authority will soon heal on the Sabbath. It is important for one and all to know that he is not opposed to the Law. He is superior to it.

This zeal, this passion for the Name of God and the House of God, is characteristic of Christ. It is also characteristic of the true Christian. It is well written, "He who would save his life shall lose it; he who loses his life for my sake shall save it." This total commitment is the mark of the true Christian.

### The reaction of the Jews

Confronted with their own sins by one with moral authority, the Jews do something unusual. The normal method is to dismiss Jesus as being a lunatic, or one who is demon possessed. At the very least they can spread some nasty comments around.

But they don't. Confronted with true authority, they try to push the question back on him. Just whose authority is this? Jesus does not give them the satisfaction of a rabbinical answer. His fingers are not in the cookie jar. So it is we see the reaction to moral authority: legal wrangling.

### He knows what is in a man

The Scripture makes it plain that God can read your thoughts. He knows what you've been up to. It is also clear that to be a man is to be a sinner. Knowing this, Christ does not completely reveal himself to anyone at this time. He knows how fickle they can be.

We're like that too, and perhaps we can understand this from our own point of view. With whom do you trust your inmost thoughts? Do you hand them out to casual acquaintances, or are they reserved for friends of several years standing? So it is with Christ. We have the mind of Christ as we have the Spirit, and only those who are his good friends and family can know it.

### Importance to sinners today

At first we see a paradox in this passage. How is it that the gentle Jesus of Nazareth becomes this firebrand who cleanses the Temple?

- ✚ When you come to God, do you think he will leave you in your sins? Will he not cleanse you?
- ✚ And this process of cleansing, will it be more effective or less effective as you grow in Christ?
- ✚ Now, if your bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and he cleanses you (the temple) would he not also cleanse the physical temple as well?

### Seek and save the lost

What really bothers us about this passage is simply this: we spend much time and effort telling the world that Jesus saves; we proclaim that "softly and tenderly Jesus is calling." So what's with this fury? Joni Morse, a missionary to Thailand, tells a story which might help us here. One of the things he does to win the trust of the various tribes in Thailand is to offer to put in a system of plastic pipes with which to bring in clean water. At one particular village, the elders were offered this. There was great debate. Joni was puzzled; the women of the village walked several miles each way to get clean water; what possible objection could there be? Finally the elders announced their decision. Yes, they would accept the piping system – but only if Joni and his colleagues would first help them level and build a soccer field!

Paul told us that he became all things to all men so that by all means he might win some. Joni did the same thing here. He helped build the soccer field, then put in the plumbing. Jesus, likewise, is doing the same thing. For those who thought they had no sin, he is pointing out the hypocrisy of their ways – with a level of anger reminiscent of an Old Testament prophet.

You see the point:

- ✚ To those who know they are sinners, Jesus offers the light yoke, repentance for sins, and "go and sin no more."
- ✚ To those who don't he must first open their eyes. That's one reason he brings catastrophe on some. We shall see how he uses paradox on one such person, Nicodemus, in the next lesson.

For those who bear his name, he cleanses us. That's why he emphasizes repentance so much. Indeed, it is necessary. In cleansing us he is preparing a fit temple for the Holy Spirit. If you are his child, he will do this. You will bear his Name, be in his Family – and rejoice at his Return.

## God Makes the Necessary Easy - John 3:1-21

This passage contains the most beloved verse of the Bible. It is a passage frequently commented upon, and in one lesson there is not space enough to contain all that might be said. My readers will therefore pardon me if I have not accepted the most obvious course of study, for such is readily available elsewhere. You are encouraged to read all you can by those who love the Lord.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."** "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."** "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. **"You are Israel's teacher,"** said Jesus, **"and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."** After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized.  
(Joh 3:1-22 NIV)

### Nicodemus

We know very little of Nicodemus in the Bible. History abounds with legend concerning him, but we shall stick to what has been revealed.

### Comes by night

What can we learn from this fact?

- ✚ He is a cautious man, not anxious for confrontation like the more querulous members of the Pharisees. He is a man of peace and sense.
- ✚ He is one who likes to work discreetly. Behind the scenes is just fine with him. So he is not likely to be the one to get his name on the front of the building.
- ✚ He's not afraid to work the night shift – to put in a little overtime, if you will. He goes the extra mile to do things right.

### Challenges the council

In John 7:50-53, we see that Nicodemus calls for Jesus to receive a fair hearing by the council of the Pharisees, in accordance with the Old Testament Law. What can we learn from this?

- ✚ He has a sense of fairness, of justice. In simple terms, he is anxious to do what is right.
- ✚ He has courage – among the familiar. When he's on his own debating ground he is courageous enough; but perhaps not overly bold.
- ✚ He is a man who is reliant upon the Law – the best thing he knew from God. He trusts the commands of God, and obeys them. But he is not one gifted with supernatural wisdom to know when the Law stops.

### Embalms Jesus' body

What do we learn from this?

- ✚ First, that he is a charitable man – one who is willing (at risk) to do a favor for a man who (as far as he knows) can never repay him. In his culture, this would be thought of as a high degree of charity.
- ✚ Just as clearly, this is a man who expects his rewards to come from God. I suspect that long practice at this had taught him that God rewards those who seek him.
- ✚ He is willing to take some risk – even when there seems no point. Deep down inside, this man has courage which comes out in extraordinary times.

This is a man who walks the high, hard road to God, and willingly. He has come to this new teacher to ask for directions on the last few steps of that road. This man sounds like so many of us who have been born and raised in the church. Indeed, I suspect that in our day he would be nominated to become an elder. It is the best he knows; the teacher honors that – but not in the way he expects. He asked for a few steps; he got a revolution.

### The Three Responses

Nicodemus was looking for the last few hard, high steps on the road. He felt he was almost there, and now comes a rabbi with power from God. His life has been committed to God; he must go and find those steps. But he does not know that this rabbi has come for a purpose: to change completely the relationship between God and man. Nicodemus knows the road is hard. He is willing to walk the hard, high road. God is about to teach him a lesson: what God calls necessary, he makes easy.

Easy?

How can anyone conclude that? Listen carefully.

Jesus, when he meets those who are truly seeking God, replies to them with one of three answers. We shall examine all three and see how God has made it easy for each of them to come into the kingdom.

### Repent

The most common response Jesus gives is the simple command, “repent.” How is this easy?

- ✚ First, the directions are not at all complicated. You know what you've been doing wrong; stop doing it and begin to do what you know is right. No need for the theology textbook on this one.

- ✚ Next, Jesus condemns the sin – but came to give life to the sinner. So it is to “the vilest offender who truly believes” – God loves him. It’s the sin that separates; it is that separation Christ will bridge. That’s why he came.
- ✚ He offers the one thing the sinner considers impossible: forgiveness. Is it not the case that many sinners continue in the same, dreary sin because they see no way out? But here God offers forgiveness, a clean slate.

You see the point? God could have sent the sinner on a crusade, a search for the Holy Grail to prove his worthiness. Instead, he makes it easy: repent.

#### You lack one thing

There is another person we must consider, the one shown best by the rich young ruler. In his life there is no great sin. Indeed, he has kept the commandments all his life. But Jesus looks upon the heart of the man and tells him there is one thing he has not yet done. He has not rid himself of the roadblock on the road with God. Is his way easy, too?

- ✚ Consider this: all his training tells him of the evils of the love of money. God’s command simply builds upon what he already knows is right.
- ✚ It also gives him a clear decision point. There is no subtlety to it; no nuance of theology; not even the rote memorization of a complicated prayer. It’s a “do it” decision.
- ✚ If he does “do it”, it lifts a burden from his shoulders. If money is your chain, he will break it – if you will let him.

#### Be born again

It is the curious fact that Jesus never told anyone but Nicodemus to be born again. To the man who was a straight arrow he gives a radical turn of direction. This is the man without a problem to solve – and that is a huge problem. It requires a radical solution. How can this be easy?

- ✚ First, there is the pure joy of abandonment. No longer must he look over his shoulder to see if some regulation has been let slip. He can now move in the Spirit.
- ✚ He is free. Understand that to “be free” in God’s kingdom means to be free to do what you are designed to do. An eagle is free when it is flying. Swimming at the bottom of the lake, the eagle is not free – it’s in trouble. Nicodemus is free now to do what he is designed to do: love God and enjoy him forever.

It is a curious thing: the shackles of the Law, which keep Nicodemus from sin, also keep him from flying. But now the shackles are broken, and the eagle may now fly. As Augustine said, “Love God – and do as you please.”

#### The Necessary, Easy

God made entry into the kingdom of heaven to be easy. Why? Because he wills that all would be saved.

#### Too easy

For some of us, it seems too easy. We were born into the church, raised by loving, Christian parents. You can imagine that Nicodemus had parents who loved him and raised him in the highest traditions of the Jewish Law. Many who will read this are like this man.

Indeed, we often have a secret envy of those who came to Christ after a life of spectacular wickedness. After all, we say, looking at St. Paul we can see that great sinners make great saints. In a curious way, we never had the opportunity to be a spectacular sinner – therefore we don't know how to be a spectacular saint.

#### How do I know I'm saved, then?

Have you ever been through this drill? Since you were never a spectacular sinner, how can you know that you are indeed saved? What possible evidence could you produce which would convince anyone of this – especially noting that “anyone” includes “me.” Try these on for size:

- ✚ Does your life exhibit faith in Christ? The just are saved by faith.
- ✚ Do you have power over sin – can you look back and see how you've grown in the faith, becoming more like your Lord?
- ✚ Do you have the peace that surpasses understanding, or do you worry about everything?
- ✚ When you're at the funeral of a Christian, do you share in the hope of the Resurrection?
- ✚ Is your life marked by obedience to what God commands?
- ✚ Does love flow out of your life, bringing the love of God to others?

By their fruits you will know them. Look at the fruits in your life; let self examination keep you from this worry.

#### The wind of the Spirit

The wind blows where it will, and so it is with the Spirit. If you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, you will begin to notice that this Spirit within you affects your life every day.

- ✚ Like wind, the Spirit can't be hindered. If he encounters an obstacle, he simply flows around and over it.
- ✚ Like wind, the Spirit brings good or disaster, as God chooses.
- ✚ Like wind, the Spirit comes in power.

#### The Verdict

Perhaps these words have caused you to examine yourself, and you have found yourself wanting. There is a severe word of warning in this passage: the Light has arrived.

“Never lose your ignorance – it's irreplaceable.” (Attributed to Erich Maria Remarque's father). Many cherish their ignorance of God on the theory that God would not condemn them for what they didn't know. But he tells us here: the Light has come. The Light has come to save; there is no chance for those who choose ignorance – because to choose ignorance is to choose to live in darkness. Darkness is where the evil hide, for they fear the Light.

He came two thousand years ago to light the world; his light yet shines in his church. There is no chance to choose ignorance, and no time to waste. He is coming again; he tells us “soon.” He came so that all might be saved; he will come again to judge the living and the dead. The time is short; the consequences grave. Look for the light while there is still time.

## My Joy is Fulfilled - John 3:22-36

The passage we have before us is seldom commented upon in modern times. Perhaps this is because we no longer think of pride – or, in the words of the King James Version, vainglory – as being a sin. Our time listens to those who proclaim themselves to be the greatest. So it becomes difficult to understand the prophet, John the Baptist, as he speaks of becoming less so that Christ may become greater. But we shall see that there is great wisdom in his words.

After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.) An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan—the one you testified about—well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less. "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

(Joh 3:22-36 NIV)

### John's Troubled Disciples

John's disciples are all too human. They are sheep, following a shepherd – and they know that theirs must be the best shepherd. Deep inside all of us rest the same motives they had.

### The desire for exclusiveness

In a recent trial<sup>26</sup> a woman was convicted of shoplifting. One of the items she took was a purse, priced at \$850 (if memory serves). My first reaction to the price was one of incredulity. How could a purse – excellent versions of which can be purchased for much less – be so costly? The answer lies in our desire for exclusiveness. The inexpensive, functional purse carries with it no air of exclusiveness. With such possessions we feel we are "in" and the others are "out." We desire this so much that our purveyors know that they can charge a high price for it.

We can see that desire in John's disciples. Please note that they were not complaining about a slack in business because of this Jesus; they had their hands full baptizing the repentant who came to John. It's not that Jesus stole their customers; Jesus destroyed their exclusiveness. If you think this doesn't apply today, ask someone about the book of Revelation. There are so many who are delighted to have the exclusive, "right" interpretation. Ah, to be the one "in the know!"

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<sup>26</sup> The actress, Winona Ryder

You can see this quite clearly in their request. The argument is about ceremonial washing – the complaint is about Jesus baptizing. Remember that “Rabbi” is old Hebrew for “guy with all the answers.”<sup>27</sup> They’re just determined to keep it that way.

#### The desire for vindication

One of the reasons Jesus taught us to settle our difficulties quickly<sup>28</sup>, on the way to court, was so that we might be delivered from the desire to be vindicated. The disciples have not run to John for answers; they want argument ammunition. They want to set this person straight by proclaiming John’s supremacy – and, of course, this would rub off on them.

You can see it in their request. They call John “rabbi” but Jesus is “that man.” The implication is clear: we’re with somebody, you’re with nobody – which makes us right.

#### The desire for vainglory

“Vainglory” is an old word; it means, as it sounds like, a type of glory which in the end is completely useless. It means the honors of this world. It is such an old word that we must begin with a clarification. If you do a good job, and someone says to you, “Hey – great job!” you should feel a certain sense of satisfaction. We, as human beings, need that. Call that “positive feedback.” It turns sour, however, when we leap from “great job” to “great person.” Because you praise me, I begin to think that I really am somebody both important and wonderful. When that leads to, “I’m better than anyone else” it finds trouble.

See how John’s disciples have fallen into this. Their argument might be put this way:

- ✚ “You recommended this fellow – and now look! He’s stealing your business!”
- ✚ “Besides, we were here first.”
- ✚ “And our guy is a real prophet!”

#### Contrary

What we must learn is that all these human reactions, while very common, are contrary to the kingdom of God.

- ✚ The kingdom of God is not exclusive; it is inclusive, for he summons “all who will.”
- ✚ The kingdom of God seeks no vindication; indeed, Christ himself did not avoid the Cross. He did not deserve it; but he did not even attempt his own vindication.
- ✚ The kingdom of God seeks no vainglory. The kingdom of God is ruled by servants. If you wish to be the master of all, you must be the servant of all.

#### John’s gentle reply

John does not reply as his disciples might have wished. Indeed, his reply does not contain the answer they would like – and it certainly is not in the spirit they would like. His reply blunts their anger with its gentleness. Why these gentle words from so fiery a prophet?

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, it actually means “teacher.” But didn’t you feel that way about your second grade teacher?

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:25-26

- ✚ First, he wishes to ensure harmony in the kingdom of God. His disciples are envious; they must be restored gently.
- ✚ Next, he wishes to ease the transition. Soon he will begin to “decrease” – even to the point of dying in prison. He wants to make their change to Jesus as painless as possible.
- ✚ Finally, his soft reply has a reason: soft words require the hearer to listen. Have you ever tried this with small children? When you whisper they get quiet – so that they can hear what you say.

#### A man can only receive

Here we are reminded of the principle of gifts: the Holy Spirit gives us gifts for use in the kingdom of God. We do not choose them. We can only choose to use or lose them.

John, in a sense, is a matchmaker. He is assisting the groom (Jesus) with his bride (the church). It’s not his wedding, so to speak. But do you not see that this applies to us as well? Every one we bring to Christ is a repetition of this. We are not the important one; Jesus, the Christ, is. So we introduce others to the one who is really important. We are matchmakers between Christ and his bride.

#### Testimony

John returns to his testimony about Jesus. It is the central point of his ministry.

- ✚ He does it in words. He proclaims the truth, gently but without hesitation.
- ✚ He does it in action. If his disciples run to this Jesus (and some already have) he does not care; rather, he applauds.

This would seem to some to be very discouraging. After all, he’s poured a lot of himself into these disciples. How can this be a good thing?

Simply this: John is a craftsman. He has been given a task to perform, and he has performed it well. He has a craftsman’s satisfaction with the work; he has a runner’s satisfaction with reaching the goal. We would do well to imitate this.

#### The Supremacy of Christ

It should be noted that verses 31-36 are not necessarily “red letter” verses for John. They may be the comment of the Apostle.

#### Condescension

The early church was very impressed with what is called the “condescension” of Christ. The word has passed out of favor; today it means a snooty attitude by the rich and famous as they patronize the poor and anonymous. What it really means, in this context, is that Christ gave up the splendors of heaven to be human for us – so that we might become like him. We see this exemplified in this passage:

- ✚ He is said to be “above all.” It is a sweeping statement by John the Baptist. There were many authorities in his day. But it has stood the test of time. There are no more Caesars; but Christ remains “above all.” His authority is still supreme.
- ✚ We see here that he has the Holy Spirit “without limit.” “Without measure,” says the King James. This simply tells us that the Holy Spirit is in Christ to the full extent – so that Father, Son and Spirit are one.
- ✚ John speaks of him as the bridegroom. In this time (alas, not in ours) this would imply his authority over the bride. In terms we might better understand, he is “Prince Charming” to our Cinderella.

### The Nature of Christ

To understand this, we need only look at the message and the messenger. The messenger, Jesus, is from heaven. That alone teaches us that his message is going to be different. It will reveal things to us that we could not find on our own.

But notice the messenger's method. He testifies to what he has seen and heard. He is one with the Father, and therefore his words are the Father's own.

He speaks the words of God – whether we accept such or not. In glory and power Christ is without equal. But we also see here his obedience, indeed submission, to the Father. That obedience is for our sake. Would that we would imitate it.

### Connections

“All well and good,” you say. “But what does it mean to me?” The lesson comes by example.

- ✚ First, we must reject vainglory, the honors of this world. How can we do that? By setting our honor in comparison with His, not with others. What does my standing matter compared to his? We should compare ourselves to him – and imitate him in all things. Keep your eye on the prize.
- ✚ Next, we must be “friends of the bridegroom.” In our attempts at personal evangelism, we must remember that we are not showing off our piety; we are not displaying the wisdom of our teachers; we are not touting the “relevance” of our worship services. No doubt we should be pious; our teachers should be wise; our worship services relevant. But the point is Jesus Christ – not us.
- ✚ When we do this, we will be fulfilling the joy set before us. How do we do this? The matter is one for the Holy Spirit. Do we know what gifts the Spirit has given us? Do we use those gifts to perform the work set before us? The answers are important. Soon – perhaps very soon – you will be asking, “Is his return a joy – or a terror?”



## The Woman at the Well - John 4:1-42

The story in this lesson takes some understanding – you have to know the players. Let's look at the Scripture first, and then take a tour of the area.

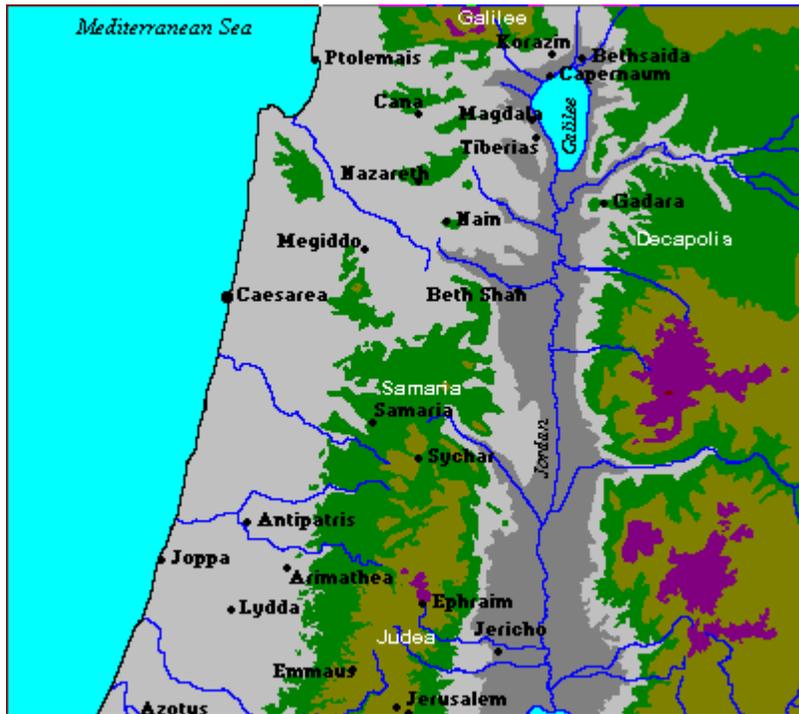
The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, **"Will you give me a drink?"** (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, **"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."** "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, **"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her, **"Go, call your husband and come back."** "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, **"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."** "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus declared, **"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."** The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Then Jesus declared, **"I who speak to you am he."** Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, **"I have food to eat that you know nothing about."** Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" **"My food,"** said Jesus, **"is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."** Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

(Joh 4:1-42 NIV)

(The first section of this lesson, the background, is taken from an older study in the Life of Christ series. Plagiarism is its own reward.)

## Background

*Geography:* where is this place?



As is evident from the map, if you want to go from Judea to Galilee, you need to go through Samaria. The devout Jew would not, of course, to avoid the possibility of being made ceremonially unclean.

The place where Jesus meets the woman is at Sychar. If you look closely, you can see that Sychar sits at the meeting of two mountains. To be specific, they are Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Mt. Gerizim was the place where Joshua had the Israelites pronounce, in chorus, the Lord's blessings (Ebal got the cursing chorus)<sup>29[1]</sup>. Hence, it was known as the "mount of blessing," and the Samaritans chose it therefore to house the temple. The name "Sychar" actually means "falsehood." The area is also known as Shechem (Hebrew for "shoulders", from the mountains). The city of Samaria, from which the region took its name, is just to the northwest, up the valley.

*Jacob's Well.* The well is still there today, and it is relatively certain to be the same well. Americans do not have the same sense of "historical familiarity" that the residents of Palestine do. Even in this time Jacob's well is about two thousand years old, yet the name remains unchanged. There is no direct reference to the well in the Old Testament, but the giving of the land is well documented. The city of Sychar itself later blended into the city of Shechem, and these two archeological sites are near the

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modern village of Aschar (which is surely Sychar from an Arabic tongue). This is a suburb of a small city named Balatah. The well is extremely deep for the region -- remember this is an open well, not a drill pump well -- as the water table varies from 75 to 105 feet in the area.

*Jews and Samaritans.* As is clear from the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along very well. Indeed, a devout Jew would go around Samaria to get to Galilee. The incident in the passage which relates that Jews and Samaritans would not share utensils comes from this interpretation: the Samaritans evidently held that a woman during her menstrual period was unclean -- but anything she touched was not. The Jews held that anything she touched was unclean. Since you could never tell if a woman during her period might have touched a pot since its last ceremonial cleansing, you could become ceremonially unclean just by touching a water bucket! Better safe than sorry -- walk around the place.

The Samaritans were also a mixed race. The king of Assyria exported some of his subjects to the area as part of his conquest. These were taught the law. In the time of Jesus (and to this day) the Samaritans considered themselves the only true believers (the right wing fundamentalists) because they accepted only the five books of the Law as binding (and there are some significant textual variations on those). The considerations of race and religion made the Jew and the Samaritan like oil and water.

*Living Water: the concept.* The Samaritan use of the first five books only may have had some influence on the woman's understanding of Jesus. The phrase "living water" could also be translated (under other circumstances) as "running water." It is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, as is shown in the Old Testament. But we need to remember: the Samaritans did not accept the rest of the Old Testament! The phrase does not occur in the Pentateuch.

### The Actions of Jesus

#### Why did he go to Galilee?

If you will notice in the beginning of the passage, Jesus is being pursued by the Pharisees. It is still very early in his ministry; therefore, it is not yet time to present himself as sacrifice for atonement. On other occasions he walks right through a riot crazed mob. So why, in this instance, does he flee? As God, he has the power to triumph over them.

- ✚ First, so that you might know that he is human. In our day and age people have difficulty believing him to be God. In most other times people had difficulty believing him to be human. It is human to avoid trouble if you can.
- ✚ Next, so that he might set an example for us. He tells us to flee when persecuted.<sup>30</sup> Here he shows us an example.
- ✚ It is also an illustration of "spiritual judo." When the Jews drove him out, they opened the door to the Gentiles. When they drove out the church, they spread the Gospel.

### The humanity of Jesus

It is useful to note that Jesus is tired from his journey. Sometimes we think that, being the Son of God, his ministry was "no sweat." It is exactly the opposite. He is both: completely man, completely God. If he walks a long way, he gets tired. Indeed, his humanity is necessary for our salvation. As

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew 10:23

Augustine said, “He created us by his strength; he saved us by his weakness.” Indeed, the weakness of God is greater than the strength of men.

This humanity is an advantage. Notice how gently he treats this woman. He speaks to her by means of a common metaphor – something that teachers know is easy to understand, and even easier to remember. By teaching her gradually, he uses his weakness to draw her to himself.

What we usually do not appreciate in this: the enormous condescension of Jesus in speaking to a woman – and a Samaritan woman, at that. Remember that Paul instructed women of his time to keep silent in the church – they could ask their husbands at home if they had any questions.<sup>31</sup> Jesus goes so far as to condescend to her needs – he shows her the way, not tells her.

### The divinity of Christ

Even in this scene we can see also the divinity of Christ. See how lightly he treats the question of food – and this for a man who was thirsty a few minutes earlier.

One sure sign of his divinity is the way in which he answers her question. He speaks to her as the true God – who knows what he desires in terms of true worship. There are lessons in here:

- ✚ First, the Father *seeks* such worshipers. It is not just that he accepts them, or considers this the minimum to set foot in the church building – no, he actively seeks those who will worship him in spirit and in truth.
- ✚ As we see from this woman, such worshipers – though they may be great sinners – have a common characteristic: they lift Jesus up. So it is that more are drawn to Jesus. Do we seek our own whiteness, or do we lift him up?
- ✚ So it is that the sinners received him gladly – over and over again we read how those who were the outcasts of the righteous society find in Jesus a source of joy and hope.

Jesus, God in the Flesh, ignores food and water so that he might do his Father’s will. Indeed, such work is meat and drink to him.

### The Questions of the Woman

The woman is both ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. Her sinfulness has made her an outcast – but like many other outcasts, she is not afraid to speak to the righteous. She has nothing to lose, after all.

### Her character

We see three things which define her:

- ✚ She is a materialist – like most people of today. She doesn’t “get it” when Christ speaks of living water. She’s concerned about how hot and tired she gets lugging the stuff back from the well.
- ✚ She is – you can’t help but see this from five husbands – a woman dominated by her passions. When her passion becomes Christ, she tells all, “come and see.”
- ✚ She is neither easy to convince, nor is she quarrelsome for the sake of argument.

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<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:35

### Her inquiry

The core of this passage is the interchange between Jesus and the woman. Here we can see three things:

- ✚ The Samaritans accept only the first five books of the Bible. But this is no barrier to Christ. You need not wait until you understand perfectly to come to Him. Indeed, it is notable that the Samaritans, with less light than the Jews, seem to be more hospitable to the Light.
- ✚ The kindness of her reply - she does not ridicule, just questions – is evidence of the openness she has. She is looking for hope – and has been often disappointed. But see how she phrases things: the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans, not the other way around.
- ✚ This kindness is returned. Her query is gentle; the Master's rebuke is kind. At one and the same time he shows her that he is a prophet (at least) and brings up her chief sin.

### Saved to serve and seek others

There is a great clue to her character here: she left the water pot. There is a change of heart and a change of purpose here. She "takes up the cross" in a sense. The task given her, implicitly, is to share this Jesus with others. Despite her reputation, she testifies.

Does she hand out a great theological explanation? No. She testifies to what Jesus has done for her. Perhaps the reason some of us are so poor at evangelism is that Jesus has never been given the room to do anything for us.

Indeed, if you think not, consider the contrast between Nicodemus and this woman. The teacher of the Law comes by night, becomes a secret disciple and tells no one. The sinner tells everyone she can.

Even more telling is this: this sinner asks about doctrine. She cares for the things of God; she wants to know the truth. By comparison, some of us should blush with shame.

### The Puzzlement of the Disciples

It is well that we remember that this incident occurs early in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus takes them by surprise with his actions.

- ✚ First, that he's talking to a Samaritan. They would regard this as something contemptible.
- ✚ Next, he's talking to a woman. Remember, in this time women were expected to be silent, barefoot and pregnant – preferably in the kitchen.
- ✚ Worst of all, they soon find out that he has been talking to a notorious sinner.

Despite all this, they do not challenge him on it. Even this early, they know better. They have found an early discomfort with the divine dilemma. God is righteous; how can he associate with sinners? God is love, why would he not?

They make the same mistake she does: they see only the material when he is talking about the spiritual. They have yet to perceive the true extent of his love. So he speaks to them in metaphors and parables. Later, they will remember these things (that's why we use such instructional techniques).

### Fields white

“The fields are white unto harvest,” the old King James put it. In this metaphor we can see several things:

- ✚ The first is the phrase, “even now.” So many of us are waiting for the time when the fields will be white; Jesus says they already are. The world is hungering for spiritual nourishment, which comes from only one source.
- ✚ Next, he makes it clear that no one of us can “do the whole job.” It’s been my privilege to baptize several people. I was there for that moment; others have taught them since; still others brought them along the narrow way when I found them. It is the gift of God, lest anyone should boast.
- ✚ For such reasons, some of us will see little in the way of results. Others will reap bountifully. Neither should despair; neither should puff himself up. God gives the increase.
- ✚ But for exactly that reason, all of us (sower and reaper) should rejoice when a sinner comes home. Remember John the Baptist? He had to decrease as Jesus increased – and he counted it joy fulfilled.

### Challenge

If there is one thing which strikes me about this story, here it is: the worst of sinners, as accounted in her time, is gently led home – to testify to others so that they might be saved also. If one so far down in sin can do this, what excuse could we possibly present to our Lord for our inertia?

## Two Miracles - John 4:43 – 5:15

We examine two miracles in this lesson, as predecessor to Christ's explanation of who he is. Evidence precedes explanation.

### From Fear to Faith

After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there. Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. **"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,"** Jesus told him, **"you will never believe."** The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus replied, **"You may go. Your son will live."** The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, **"Your son will live."** So he and all his household believed. This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee. (Joh 4:43-54 NIV)

### The subtle comparison

By separating the verses as we have done, we miss a subtle comparison between the Galileans (whom we encounter here) and the Samaritans (whom we encountered in the last lesson). The comparison does not favor the Galileans; but perhaps they will show up more favorable compared to the Pharisees. Why does this bit of Scripture tell us of such comparison?

- ✚ The Samaritans, you will recall, saw no miracle. They saw a prophet; they heard the word and they believed. This is faith.
- ✚ Jesus spends little time in Galilee, especially in Cana. He spent several days in Samaria. Why? Because the Samaritans received him gladly. He still seeks the warm and open heart.
- ✚ He spends time only once in Samaria; it seems that this is sufficient. The Galileans are slow learners.
- ✚ Contrasting with the Samaritans, the Galileans will not believe without miraculous signs.

### Coming to Christ

Those who are new to the faith often have preconceived notions of what it takes to become a Christian. There are things they think they must learn, actions they must take – all things to become “good enough” to become a Christian. This is a misconception – but a laudable one. It means they know that they're not good enough to earn it. But then, no one else is either.

Consider our nobleman here:

- ✚ He has no real idea of who Jesus is. He comprehends no theology on the subject; he just knows this man might be able to help.
- ✚ His coming is an act of desperation. He did not wait until Jesus passed by, for that might have been too late.

- ✦ But it is also an act in humility. He is rebuked; but he persists. He knows no merit of his own to advance as rationale – so he begs.

#### Take him at his word

The most extraordinary part of this narrative is in verse 50. The man took Jesus at his word, and departed. He did not (praise God!) tell Christ what to do. Jesus rather told him.

- ✦ He took *action* when Jesus told him to. He didn't "think about it," or "know that this would be a good thing." There is nothing hypothetical about his response.
- ✦ Note that trust (faith) has an element of doubt here – he asks the servants for the time at which the fever broke. He's still not sure until he hears. After all, it could be coincidence, right?
- ✦ He knows the difference between coincidence and providence.

#### Divine style

Fevers break naturally. It's possible that this is just a coincidence. But this man knows better; he has eyes with which to see. Many of us spend time building up our doubts; this man saw, and believed. If you keep your eyes open, you'll find the many providences of God.

#### The Man at the Pool

As a side note, most of the modern translations omit verse 4 of chapter 5. It is not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. It is, however, necessary to understand what's going on in this passage, which is probably why some editor stuck it in there.

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed [*—and they waited for the moving of the waters.*] [*From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.*] One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, **"Do you want to get well?"** "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, **"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."** At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, **"Pick up your mat and walk."** So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, **"See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."**  
(Joh 5:1-14 NIV)

There is a point at the beginning of the passage which is easy to miss. Jesus went to Jerusalem for a feast day (probably Pentecost). Why is it that we see Jesus in Jerusalem on the feast days of the Jews? First, of course, the Jews were commanded to come to Jerusalem for Passover. More than that, however, is this: God seeks those who are seeking him; he's looking for the devout. Where better to find a devout Jew than in Jerusalem during a feast?

### Question and answer time

So often in the Scripture Jesus answers a question with the answer to the question you *should* have asked. Here he asks the right question – and gets an answer to a different one.

“Do you want to get well?” Jesus asks. Now, at first glance, this would appear to be a dumb question. The man’s been here for 38 years, he’s an invalid and this place is where he can get healed. But the question has its virtue: simplicity. It’s very basic and completely to the point. Besides, it’s a yes/no question, which gives the student a 50-50 chance of getting it right.

This man flunks. He takes a true-false question and treats it like an essay question. He explains. In this, he is typical of so many of us:

- ✚ How often we hear the question of God – and explain to him why He can’t do it.
- ✚ Worse, we often explain to him why *we* can’t do it.

All the while, the Almighty is not asking us for an engineering probability analysis – he asks if we want his healing.

### Why this man?

What was it about this man that attracted Jesus? Why, among all who were there, did Jesus select this man?

- ✚ First, the man had perseverance. 38 years of perseverance. That’s a lot. How many people do you know who have been married for 38 years?
- ✚ You’ll notice, too, that this man is a thankful man. Jesus finds him the second time at the Temple – where he would have come to present offerings of thanksgiving.
- ✚ Most of all, he is an obedient man. Jesus tells him to do something, and he doesn’t argue, he just does it.

It’s a useful set of tests. Perhaps the reason we don’t get what we ask for is that we do not persevere; or that when we receive, we are not thankful. Likewise, we often ask and refuse to obey. We could learn something from this man.

### Stirring the pool

We must not think that this business of stirring the pool and healing someone is simply a case of wishful thinking, or psychosomatic cure. This man couldn’t move before this day. To fake that for 38 years is a bit much. This pool was a sign to the Jews – one which would allow them to see the true Messiah when He came. This pool is a picture of baptism!

- ✚ It cleansed disease, as baptism cleanses sin. Indeed, sin is the disease of the soul that leads to death.
- ✚ The pool was an Old Testament harbinger of things to come. Then, you could receive healing only when the water was stirred; now, it is freely available.
- ✚ Like grace, the method seems so simple. Just get into the pool – first. It doesn’t depend on how good you are. Rather, we have God’s terms and God’s time.

We can understand the man staying by the pool. How many of us can say that we are just as ready to grasp the opportunities he gives us today?

## Lessons for Today

Let's break this down for simplicity.

### Lessons for those seeking God

- ✚ First, God welcomes seekers! Even if they're not very knowledgeable.
- ✚ Should such a seeker expect miracles? Usually not – but you should expect answers. Sometimes we are rushing around so fast that we can't hear the answers delivered.
- ✚ Always remember: you are dealing with the power of Christ. He who made all things, seeker, is seeking you.

### Seekers – God wants them

Just what kind of seekers is God looking for?

- ✚ We know (from our last lesson) that God is seeking those who will worship him “in spirit and in truth.” Outward displays of piety don't impress him; he's looking for the “real you.”
- ✚ Those who seek him must believe that he exists – and that he will reward those who seek him.<sup>32</sup>
- ✚ He is looking for those, like these men, who are willing to take action upon his word. It's called “faith.”
- ✚ He is not looking for the proud, but the humble. That's why life is so often humbling.

### Expectations for Christians

What does he expect of those who are mature Christians? Here we can see a number of things:

- ✚ The paramount necessity of obedience is stressed here. These men did as they were told. For us, that may just be “stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you.”
- ✚ Effort is demanded. It is not in proportion to grace, but action is required to show our commitment to his word.
- ✚ Look for the evidences of the faith. The nobleman asked the time at which his child was healed – and believed.
- ✚ It is easy to ask forgiveness (and we should). It is hard to accept grace. But accept it we must; none of us are worthy of heaven.

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<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 11:6

## Who Am I? - John 5:16-47

We now see, early in Christ's ministry, his proclamation of who He really is: the Son of God. We might expect this to be a difficult concept to the Jews, as they had drilled into them the idea that God is One. Indeed, God is One. But, as we know, God is love. How can love exist, if there is only one person? The imponderables pile up, the philosophical difficulties grow.

Interestingly, Christ never attempts to explain matters by philosophy. He simply marshals the evidence, and asks those who love God to come to the obvious conclusions.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, **"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."** For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer: **"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is valid. "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. "I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God? "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"**

(Joh 5:16-47 NIV)

### His Equality With God

This is the part that is hard to understand; so Jesus gives it to us in several forms. Thus, if we cannot understand one way, perhaps we can grasp another.

### The Son can do nothing of himself

Please note the verb. He did not say, “could, but won’t.” There is no possibility that Christ can do anything “of himself.” This shows us the unity of Father and Son; they are one. This “oneness” with the Father is (as Chrysostom put it) “invariable and exact equality.”

Consider this in a simpler light. Can God contradict himself? Can he (as the little children ask) make a rock so big he can’t lift it? The answer is, “the question does not make sense.” God cannot contradict himself, for He is One. And for exactly the same reason, the Son cannot contradict the Father – for they are One.

### The Son only does what He sees the Father doing

Again, we see another aspect of the unity. If the Son has the power to do something, but the Father restrains Himself, so does the Son. It is a complete unity of will, or purpose. How can this be done? Even the closest of human beings cannot have the such unity of will. Why is this impossible for human beings? Because, being mortal, each of us has a different spirit. But God the Father and God the Son have the same Spirit. (Consider the implications of having the Holy Spirit within you).

### Whatever the Father does, the Son does

Not only, “only does” but “whatever” – the equality is that exact. We know that Christ is the author and sustainer of the universe, created by God. So as Christ walked with us on earth, he also sustained the universe “at the same time” (if such a phrase can be applied to God). Hence we see the calming of the sea, the walking on water – all these things show Jesus as Lord of Creation; just like the Father.

### Why?

The reason for this unity comes from, I think, two things:

- ✚ God is one. It is impossible for him to be divided, and that “impossible” is one of those “impossible impossibles.”
- ✚ God is love. Love requires more than one person; hence the three persons of the Trinity. Perfect love requires perfect unity, and God is indeed perfect love.

### The tests

Some will tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God. For those, I will offer these practical tests:

- ✚ Did the Jews persecute him? If so, why? Is it not the case that the Jewish religious leaders, those who should have known God when he arrived, persecuted this man Jesus because he claimed to be God?
- ✚ Did he violate the Sabbath? Did he do so rather casually? Can any created being set aside God’s law? Only God is superior to the Law. This man, by his actions, says that his own personal presence is sufficient to ignore the Sabbath, commanded by God. Why is this God? God works on the Sabbath every week (does the sun still rise on Saturday?)
- ✚ Did he call God his Father? To the Jews of that time, this could only have had one meaning.

### The Evidence

Jesus, knowing their hearts but also mindful of other hearers to come, now lays before them the evidence.

### John the Baptist

Jesus needs no testimony from any of us as to his Godhead. But he's perfectly willing to use such testimony if it will bring people to know him as Lord and Savior. In this instance, the testimony is that of John the Baptist. The Pharisees quite rightly respected John, and the people held him to be a prophet. If God supplies you a prophet, should you not listen to him?

Note one other thing here: there is a principle of judgment involved. If you go out in the desert to hear John the Baptist, and you praise and acknowledge him as prophet, then whatever he teaches you can be used to judge you. You "know better." In this instance, they honored John – and he testified to Jesus being the Christ.

### The works of Christ

You sometimes hear the criticism that Jesus didn't do enough miraculous work. After all, he barely made a dent in the number of sick people of the time. Speaking of which, why doesn't he empower some righteous people today to do such healing?

Remember this: the works of Christ (and his Church) are to bring glory to God. They do this by testifying to the coming of the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. We can see this in three particular ways:

- ✚ First, there are the miracles recorded for us. These people knew the miraculous when they saw it – and they saw it. The argument then is simple: where did such power come from, if not the creator of the universe?
- ✚ Next, there are the words of Christ himself. Read all that he said, and you will find two characteristics: first, his words are filled with wisdom and often shrewdness. He is eminently sane and trustworthy. He at the same time, over and over, tells you that he is indeed God in the flesh. Only one hypothesis can reconcile those two characteristics.
- ✚ Finally, there is the Resurrection itself. Who else has power to die and then rise again?

### The Scriptures (Old Testament)

Finally, Christ points them to that with which they should be very familiar: the Old Testament. To even survey all the prophecies therein would take far too much time for this lesson, but we can take a surveyor's view:

Christ first cites Moses. In the first five books of the Old Testament (the works of Moses) we see various prophecies.

- ✚ In Genesis, we see the mysterious prophecy that a "man born of woman" will defeat Satan. This is not clear until the Cross.
- ✚ Throughout Genesis, we see the promise given to Abraham, then to Isaac and then to Jacob (Israel) that through these the whole world would be blessed.
- ✚ Finally, the promised one would come from the tribe of Judah.  
This is just the beginning of prophecy.

- ✚ There are many poetic references to Christ in the Psalms – see most especially Psalm 22.

- ✚ There are entire sections of the major prophets which deal with Christ – for example, Isaiah 53.
- ✚ Sprinkled throughout the minor prophets are various other prophecies of Christ – right down to the name of the village in which he would be born.

### The Judgment

All this is nice, perhaps, but what's it got to do with us today? Very simply this: we will all face the Judgment some day. When that happens, it will be too late to prepare.

### “Life in Himself”

The essence of God is existence; he is “I Am.” Jesus claims the same name. What does this mean? It means that God does not owe his existence to anyone else or anything else (as all things in our universe do). He exists; He is eternal; and if we exist (being contingent) then he must exist.

That the philosophers know. What is revealed here is that God is willing to pass on that existence – eternal life – to those whom he chooses. More than that, Jesus is the one with the power to give that life to all he chooses.

How do we get that eternal life? Believe on the One who sent Jesus, trusting Him.

### Authority to Judge

If there is a Judgment, there must be a Judge. Is there a judgment to come?

- ✚ Do you believe that God is powerful? That He is righteous?
- ✚ Surely you see that there is evil yet to be judged.

The only way to reconcile both these statements is this: God has not yet closed his books on the evil. Over and again in the Old Testament (and New) he tells us that he wants all to repent. But the day will come when justice will be delivered; the books will be closed.

So there will be a Judgment. There must be a Judge, and Jesus tells us here that he will be that Judge. Why?

- ✚ He is God – therefore he is perfectly righteous. His judgments will be true and correct.
  - ✚ He is Man – therefore he understands *and has lived through* our weaknesses. Whatever mitigating factors we may be able to produce, he will understand, personally.
- The Son of God is also Son of Man, and therefore the Judge.

### All will rise

Very well; but aren't most of those evil people dead? How's he going to get to Adolf Hitler, for example? The answer is radical and simple: God will raise them from the dead. He who has power over life and death will bring them out from their graves to face the judgment.

Now, there is a goodly amount of debate over who will rise when. Hal Lindsey tells us, for example, that there are six resurrections (including that of Christ). But whoever's version you think best, there are two things all versions agree upon:

- ✚ All will rise – no exceptions.
- ✚ All will be judged. Those who have done good, to be rewarded. Those who have done evil, to be punished.

### **Accused by the authority you know**

Often we hear the argument about the pygmy in Africa – the one who has never heard of Jesus Christ – and asked, “on what basis will he be judged?” The answer is given here, in a fashion. Christ will be the judge – but who will prosecute? The answer for these Jews is Moses.

Why? Because Moses is the authority they knew. The Scripture makes the basis for judgment quite clear:

✚ If you knew and recognized an authority – like Moses – then you will be held to the standards you accepted from Moses.

✚ If you condemned someone else for something, that then becomes a standard by which you will be judged.

In short, you will be judged by what you know – and what you used to judge others.

OK, I know the prosecutor; I know the judge – who’s the defense attorney? For the Christian, it is Jesus himself.

### **Lunatic, Liar or Lord**

There it is. The shrewd, wise words of Jesus come from the same mouth that proclaims himself to be God. Either he is a lunatic (and if so, how such wisdom), a liar (if so, for what purpose? To be crucified?) or he is Lord. There are no other options. As Sherlock Holmes said, whenever you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains – no matter how improbable – must be the truth.

## Old Creation, New Creation - John 6:1-21

### Background

One of the difficulties in studying John's Gospel alone is that he leaves out a great deal of the action – on the assumption that you would already have read Matthew, Mark and Luke. Matthew, for example, tells us that these events happened immediately after the beheading of John the Baptist. (This may explain why the crowd wanted to proclaim him “the Prophet”). The passage is also significant in what it does not say. Many miracles are omitted, so that we might understand things of true worth.

There are two things shown here just before the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand which are often skipped.

✚ You will note that Jesus does not go up to Jerusalem for the Passover. This is contrary to the law, for he is well able to do so. But as we have seen, his mere presence (it seems) overrides the law. The bridegroom is with us; the party is on.

✚ Note that Jesus sets an example for us by going up into the mountains – for “solitude is meet for the study of wisdom,” as old Chrysostom said. We need to heed this example.

Indeed, much of Christ's teaching is exemplary, in the old sense of that word. It means that it is an example to us. Prior to feeding the five thousand, he has had the disciples apart, to teach them. Now he goes from lecture to lab, showing them what is good. We need to be ready to draw example from this. For if Jesus had compassion on the poor and fed them, what should we be willing to do?

### Feeding the Five Thousand – Lecture Section

Let's begin with the Scripture:

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, **"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"** He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, **"Have the people sit down."** There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, **"Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."** So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. (Joh 6:1-15 NIV)

### Teaching paradigm

It is fruitful to consider Jesus' method of teaching here:

- ✦ He will first have the disciples acknowledge the obvious difficulty: The caterer is lost. We have a lot of hungry people on our hands.
- ✦ Interestingly, he will next allow them to dig around in their own minds to try to find a solution. Perhaps this is to convince them that there is no way they could find a solution.
- ✦ He will then show them the solution: the power of God.
- ✦ Finally, he will extract from this example all the available lessons.

#### Philip: the realist

The Scripture says that Jesus asks him a question to test him. Parallel accounts indicate that the disciples were already worried about this, but Jesus selects the realist of the group to outline the problem for them. This is not because Jesus does not know what Philip will say; he does. But like God testing Abraham with the sacrifice of Isaac, he is going to demonstrate the point clearly (physics teachers will remember the concept of “demonstration experiment.”) He already knows the steps in the lesson. He’s just making it perfectly clear to the disciples.

So then, why did he pick Philip?

- ✦ Philip has a firm grasp on practical reality. His attitude is from Missouri: “come and see.” A man for the facts, if you will.
- ✦ He also has a firm grasp on the market price of bread. His quick multiplication makes it clear to the disciples that the task is beyond them.
- ✦ These are Philip’s failures, not his successes – as we shall see. How often we are proud of the fact that we can clearly see that the church cannot do something!

#### Andrew – the maybe thinker

Andrew, on the other hand, is somewhat more optimistic. He approaches the problem from what might be considered a more enlightened point of view.

- ✦ Where Philip focused on what the disciples didn’t have, Andrew looks at what they do have. He remembers the stories of the Old Testament, and is willing to nudge his faith just a tiny bit.
- ✦ But he also sees that, while their resources are not zero, they aren’t exactly huge, either.
- ✦ In this, he forgets the power of the creating God.

#### Feeding the Five Thousand – Lab Section

Note that Jesus knows what he’s going to do before this all begins – but he waits until Philip and Andrew have both admitted that it can’t be done. Let’s look at what Christ does here:

#### He has the disciples seat the people

Why is this?

- ✦ First, there is the matter of obedience. They do not know what their Master is going to do – but they need to learn to obey him in such a circumstance.
- ✦ Indeed, he is showing us that one major purpose of teaching the Scriptures is exactly that: to yield obedience.
- ✦ He also obliges the disciples to make a commitment. By having the disciples make the crowd be seated, he obliges them to make a decision. Can Jesus really do anything for this hungry bunch? If yes, have them be seated. If no, argue some more. Jesus is not interested in our lip service, but our actions.

### He prays over the food.

He says grace, as we would put it. He didn't do that for most of his other miracles; why this one?

- ✚ First, I think, to set an example for us – that we should receive all things from our Father with thanksgiving.
- ✚ Perhaps more to the immediate point, he wants it clear to the crowd that what he is doing is *in his Father's will*.

### “Let nothing be wasted”

In this little sentence we see two things, I think:

- ✚ First, we see that God's provision is exact. He produces that which is sufficient for the crowd – and exactly twelve baskets left over. God's providence for God's tasks; he does not do slop work.
- ✚ It also brings home to us the sin of gluttony. How often we forget that most of the world hasn't enough to eat, while we live in a land where fat is a problem, not a solution.

### King by Force

Isn't it interesting? All the miracles of healing never generated such a response – but when you feed the crowd, they're ready to proclaim you king. Bread and circuses, the method by which tyrants keep the crowd with them. But Christ does not accept the testimony of men; only that of his Father (before the atonement). His work is God's work, therefore he will seek only the Father's praise. There's a great lesson in that.

How, then, can we turn ourselves in such a point that we seek only the Father's praise? As Jesus did – by going to the mountain alone. The time spent alone with God in prayer, meditation and study will help wean you from the praise of man and form the habit of listening only to God.

### Walking on the Water

After this very public example, Jesus now gives one to the disciples alone.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, "**It is I; don't be afraid.**" Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone.

(Joh 6:16-22 NIV)

### Preparation

We often look at these stories in isolation; in this instance we need to look to some of the preparation these men have had.

- ✚ First, according to Matthew, the calming of the storm came *before* this miracle. These men have seen the power of Christ over the natural world.

✚ The parallel accounts make it clear that Jesus *sent* them on ahead. The disciples do not understand, but they are obedient – the first step in maturing faith.

It is not sufficient. Mark tells us that “their hearts were hardened” so that they did not understand. But do you not see that Jesus was dealing with that? By his preparation he has made them able to grow into the next phase of maturity with him. Often what confuses us today becomes the stepping stone to clarity tomorrow.

#### Miracle of the new creation

The calming of the storm, the feeding of the five thousand, these are miracles of the old creation. Storms become calm in our world; bread multiplies (think of your sourdough starter). But the really important miracles are the miracles of the new creation – things like the Transfiguration, the Resurrection and the appearances afterwards. These have no parallel in our daily experience. But they show us, in a small way, how much greater the new creation will be.

“It is I, don’t be afraid.”

The two phrases are linked. The parallel accounts (which include Peter’s walking on the water) berate the disciples for their puny faith. Why is it that their little faith made them greatly fearful? Because they did not love Jesus enough; for perfect love, we know, casts out fear. And just who is Perfect Love?

Our attitude should be that of the three Hebrew children:

**Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual**

**(Dan 3:16-19 NIV)**

Is our obedience equal to theirs? Is our love for Christ strong enough to cast out our fears of rejection and harm?

Exemplary: meaning, to set an example. Here we see the examples of Christ for us:

- ✚ Feeding the poor
- ✚ Trusting in God’s power
- ✚ Seeking God’s blessing in all things
- ✚ Being good stewards of what he has provided
- ✚ Standing firmly, because of our love and obedience.

A fair set of tests for any one day.

## Bread of Life - John 6:22-71

There is something strangely modern about the crowd in this passage. It seems that human nature has not changed; we are still looking for a full belly first, and then (if we have time and inclination) we might think of things spiritual.

### Looking for Miracles

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" Jesus answered, **"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."** Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

(Joh 6:22-28 NIV)

### The World's Attitude

Perhaps the Romans were right. It may just be that all we really want are bread and circuses. Having had the bread, the crowd now looks for the show. In short terms, the crowd is laying out its terms for belief: "do this, and we will believe." Look at our attitude problem:

- ✚ First, we decide on what is true and what is not. We do not discover truth; we decide upon it. We make ourselves the supreme arbiters of truth. If someone claims to be The Truth, we will tell him just what he has to do to prove it. Do you see the presumptuousness of this?
- ✚ In particular, being of a "show me" mind, we will prescribe the hoops through which you must jump, Mr. Truth. So it is that the truth is something which is under our control. Why must this be so? Because we want to use the truth (the power of God) for our own purposes. We're interested in a partial God with a keen prophetic eye on the stock market.
- ✚ Of course, to be fair about it, we shall reply in kind. You be the nice, partial, unassuming but very helpful god; we shall give you partial devotion in return. Bread for today, circuses tonight (on our new wide screen TV) but no reminder that we might be sinners.

### Miracles and Magic

"Magic and Science are twins," said C. S. Lewis. It's true. Both of them are ways to manipulate the universe around us for our own benefit. Recite the right incantation at the right time and the crops will grow. Apply the right fertilizer and insecticide and the crops will grow. The logic is the same: "if" you do this, "then" thus and such result will occur.

In this view, God is a "force," as portrayed in Star Wars. By invoking this force in just the right way, it will assist us in obtaining our heart's desire. But what if God is not a force, but a person? What if he is a person, a being with personality?

### The Crowd

The crowd here is looking for the God who can be manipulated, the God who will do as he is told. As we are told here, the crowd follows Jesus not because they have seen a miracle but because their bellies were filled. We are seeing the sin of gluttony having its way.

We can see this in the sign (miracle) that they ask for. It might seem rather stupid to ask for something to eat (manna) again today. After all, they've already seen that trick once. But that was yesterday; besides, we haven't seen it fall like the manna we read about in the Scriptures. If you're really the Holy One, surely you could arrange the trick for us?

### The Tyranny of the Belly

Jesus sees through them, however. He knows why they are there. They have come for seconds. Their bellies were full yesterday, but now they are hungry again. That's the motive.

Have you ever heard of a "rice Christian?" The phrase refers to Christians (particularly in China) who are in the faith because some charitable church in America thought it best to send rice to their starving brethren. Of course, as soon as the rice arrived, the number of Christians in town greatly increased.

You might think we could not be like that. It is not so. Among our numbers are those who continue to go to church simply because things are good – they are going well. At some time in their lives they made the connection between the bounty God has given them and the church. Therefore – like amateur magicians – they continue to go the church, thanking God for their blessings. At least they are grateful, if not faithful.

### Bread of Heaven

Jesus now explains it to them – in words they don't understand.

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, **"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."** So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Jesus said to them, **"I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."** "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." Then Jesus declared, **"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."** At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, **"I am the bread that came down from heaven."** (Joh 6:28-41 NIV)

### **The Metaphor: Food**

It appears that God understands that we like to eat. From the earliest times of the Jewish nation he prescribed dietary laws. In this way he placed their attention on what they ate – so that they might apply what prevailed in the physical realm to the spiritual realm. As a result, it is a frequent metaphor. Here we see it bringing the idea that eating the right food results in life, just as in the Old Testament eating the wrong food brought uncleanness and therefore death.

“You are what you eat,” as the old saying goes. In a spiritual sense, that’s very true. That which you take into your heart, mind and spirit determines what you are. This is the peril of pornography, for example. By taking this in you determine what your view of marriage will be.

Also, we know there is a right food for infants, and right food for adults. Christ here tells us the truth: He is the right food for adults in the kingdom of God. Take him into your heart, mind and spirit, and you will grow strong in the kingdom of God.

### **What Shall We Do?**

Christ now makes one of those amazing statements which eliminate all doubt as to who he really claims to be. They ask (rather logically), “what should we do?” Give us directions; how about a plan of action here? His plan is very simple: believe in the one whom God has sent.

At first this appears silly to us. We do not connect “believe” with “action”. But they were not such fools. In their time, believing meant doing as well. So we must understand their astonishment. It is not the astonishment of those who have been told to “do nothing” by the God who is always commanding their obedience. It is the astonishment of those whose lives have been run by rule and regulation now hearing that the only rule – is a person standing in front of them. God in the flesh now calls for their total and complete obedience.

What, then, about good deeds? Surely God wants us to do such? Of course he does. They are the natural effect of believing. To believe is the work (and it is work) which causes good deeds.

### **Bread of Life**

Christ now puts the metaphor before them: He is the bread of life. But this metaphor he now expands to assure them that it completely encompasses all of their salvation. This is no ordinary bread!

#### **Its sufficiency.**

Is there anything we need to do? Any great adventure we must complete? No; we need only to come to Him. That is sufficient. How do we come to Him? In our time we cannot go geographically – but we can go in belief. If we trust Him completely, his grace is sufficient for us.

#### **Its sureness.**

See now the sureness of God. All that the Father gives, Jesus will keep – he will never drive them away. So if you come to Jesus, you know that only one person can drive you away from him – and that is you, yourself. No one else can pry you loose.

- ✦ What an impact this has on the sinner! Are your crimes too horrible to mention? No matter; the Father draws you on, the Son will keep you forever.
- ✦ Why is this so? It is because this is God's will – and has been so from the beginning. The lamb is slain from the foundation of the world. What the Father wills, the Son does.

### His Sonship

All this is done because of the relationship of God the Father and Jesus, the Holy One. His purpose in being born was to do his Father's will – a will that drove him to Calvary. By that same will, he will lose none of those who come. (What a blessed assurance!) It is God's will that anyone who looks to the Son (Jesus) and believes will be saved.

Saved? Yes, the shorthand for the benefits:

- ✦ That you – the real you, not the husk of your body, will be eternal.
- ✦ That you – the real you, clothed in an immortal body, will be raised up from the grave on the last day by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
No wonder we call it "amazing grace."

### Words of Life

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, **"I am the bread that came down from heaven."** They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, **"I came down from heaven'?"** **"Stop grumbling among yourselves,"** Jesus answered. **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.'** **Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."** Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, **"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever."** He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, **"Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe."** For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, **"This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."** From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. **"You do not want to leave too, do you?"** Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Then Jesus replied, **"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"**

(Joh 6:41-70 NIV)

### The Problem of Predestination

It appears to be a contradiction. The Father “draws” us to himself – but we are to “eat.” How is it then that we say that we obtain grace or reject it of our own free will? Surely, if God does not draw us, we cannot come.

The matter is simpler than it appears. It is also the case that God the Father wills that all be saved. There are two possibilities here:

- ✦ Some hold that all who are to be saved have been predestined to have such – no matter what they say or do. It is all by the “drawing” of the Father.
- ✦ The ancient scholars looked at it differently – with more humility. Coming to the Father is so far beyond us that unless He draws us to Himself, not one of us have the strength to make it. As Chrysostom put it, “the words do not take away our free will, but show we need assistance.”

We see here the source of the sacrifice: God’s will. He wills that not one of us perish; all who want to come to Jesus will be drawn towards him. By his divine power we grow closer to God.

### The Metaphor Becomes Reality in Communion

One fact is apparent here: God chose his words for his Scripture so that the messages would be clear in any language. The metaphor of food – the body and blood of Christ – is shown to us on three levels.

- ✦ On the level of physical reality, Jesus became our sacrificial lamb, the perfect, unblemished sacrifice for the sins of all people. His body, His blood are our salvation, and can be understood to be so in this quite literal sense. If he is not sacrificed according to the Law, then there is no hope of our salvation.
- ✦ On the level of worship and symbolism, we see this in communion. Our Lord was quite explicit: “this is my body” and “this is my blood.” You are what you eat, and by taking in his body and blood you grow in Christian maturity. Is it just a symbol? Is it the essence of Christ? Men may argue, but one thing is clear: no other meal ever had so much influence over who you really are.
- ✦ Deep within our own persons, there is a third level – the level of the spirit. We know that the spirit gives life; the Spirit gives us the only life which is eternal. How is this? This is the Holy Spirit, the same who raised Jesus from the dead – as we take him in, we take in life itself.

### The Great Divide

“This is a hard teaching.” Students sometimes complain to the teacher that the problems were too hard – it’s the teacher’s fault they are failing. We need to look at the teaching here, for it forces a division in the ranks – some leaving, some staying.

### A Hard Teaching.

Why is his teaching hard? Because it requires our total, radical commitment to Jesus Christ. This is not something which we achieve by our own good deeds, though those good deeds will flow out of it. (One must not confuse cause with effect). But do you not see that the very hardness of the teaching, the very absoluteness of the statement, forces a division? No one is left sitting on the fence; there is no fence to ride.

### **The Inevitability of the Divide.**

Christ does nothing here to convince those who are leaving. Indeed, he makes his teaching even more difficult to accept by telling them that the time will come when those who believe will see him ascend into heaven. Not exactly the kind of news you want to deliver when you're trying to hold on to a following!

There it is. Some people, despite any and all evidence, will not believe. I did not say "can not;" I said "will not." The commitment is too great. Painfully, they turn back. If they turn back, God will not draw them to himself. There is no reverse gear in God's transmission.

### **To Whom Shall We Go?**

Christ, it seems, will take only volunteers. God will enable them to come to the kingdom of heaven, but they must be volunteers. Worse yet, even then there will be hypocrites and traitors in our midst. So how is it then that the remaining disciples decide to stay with Jesus?

Simple. For those who are victorious over the world, there is no "option B." Only Jesus has the words of life; only He knows the way to the Father because He is the way to the Father. No matter what it costs, no matter how hard the trail, He is the way, the truth and the life – the only way. God give us strength to walk in that way; may He draw us on to life eternal.

## Christ and the Crowd - John 7

There is a recurring thought in western civilization. It is that our generation, alone of all generations, has finally figured out what to make of this man Jesus – and that we can safely bury him as a footnote in the history books. The thought is much older than we imagine. In this lesson we will examine the crowd as they try to decide, “Just who is this man?”

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him. Therefore Jesus told them, **"The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come."** Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. Now at the Feast the Jews were watching for him and asking, "Where is that man?" Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people." But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the Jews. Not until halfway through the Feast did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having studied?" Jesus answered, **"My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"** "You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" Jesus said to them, **"I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment."** At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, **"Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me."** At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, "When the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?" The Pharisees heard the crowd whispering such things about him. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. Jesus said, **"I am with you for only a short time, and then I go to the one who sent me. You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come."** The Jews said to one another, "Where does this man intend to go that we cannot find him? Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks? What did he mean when he said, **'You will look for me, but you will not find me,' and 'Where I am, you cannot come'?**" On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, **"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."** By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since

Jesus had not yet been glorified. On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet." Others said, "He is the Christ." Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him. Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?" "No one ever spoke the way this man does," the guards declared. "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law—there is a curse on them." Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, "Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?" They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." [Then each went to his own home.

(Joh 7:1-53 NIV)

#### Preliminary: the Feast of the Tabernacles

It is generally assumed (despite Christmas) that whenever Christians have a holy day (holiday, as we now call them) that long faces and a dreary piety are requirements. God, after all, wants us to suffer as much as possible. The ancient Jew would have known better. This feast, the feast of the Tabernacles, is a joyous occasion. It is a memorial to the wandering in the desert by Moses and the Jews. You might think forty years of wandering would be something to be mourned over; but God chose instead to make this celebration come in at harvest time – when food would be plentiful (and wine, too!) It was one big party, a joyous assembly.

The Jews by this time had made two minor additions to the feast, one of which will show up in this Scripture. The first was the tradition of lighting lamps during the festival – both to remember the pillar of fire and (I suspect) so the partying could go on through the night. The second was the custom of drawing water from the pool of Siloam (which was used for healing) and pouring it on the altar. This was done on the “great day” of the feast, the eighth and last. See verse 37 above, and see how a master teacher weaves the day’s events into his teaching.

#### The World’s View of Christ

##### The Brotherly View

It’s not that his brothers don’t like him. It’s just that he’s going about this business the wrong way. Of course, they don’t believe there’s anything going on here except that older brother wants to become a spectacular success in the world of religion. Perhaps he should work his way up to a nice pulpit, then see if he can get his own radio show. Then he could start on the big time: television! Hundreds of volunteer workers praying for the donors calling in. This could be the start of something big.

The problem, of course, is that the brothers don’t believe. So here’s what the unbelieving world says to the church – take good notes, now.

- ✚ First, go to the big city – Jerusalem! Galilee is hicks in the sticks. Go for the big time.
- ✚ If you don’t think so, remember – you have disciples there too. They *need* you. In person, no doubt.
- ✚ More miracles! Everybody loves miracles!
- ✚ And do them in public! No more quiet stuff.

### The View from the Crowd

The crowd – not having the inside track to Jesus, and therefore not being in a position to offer great advice – now gets a chance to react to this man Jesus. The reactions haven't changed much over the years. See if these sound familiar:

- ✦ “He’s a good man.” He says some really cool things, and he seems to practice what he preaches. Of course, some of the things he says are a little too “spiritual” for us, but he’s basically a good guy.
- ✦ “He deceives the people.” Another televangelist, that’s what this guy is! A religious fraud, in it for the money. Nobody could be that good – and mean it.
- ✦ “Where did he get such learning?” In our time, this comes down to things like, “How did he know I had that problem?” After all, no one has had my problems before; I’m unique.
- ✦ “Isn’t this the man they’re trying to kill?” The crowd is quick to pick up the fact that the authorities – in all ages – are very uncomfortable about this man Jesus. He claims an allegiance which comes ahead of all others – and that just can’t be good for law and order, can it?

Isn’t it amazing – the same things can be heard today – and for the same reason. They missed the point entirely.

### What’s the Problem Here?

#### Worldly success – the brothers

The brothers, as we have seen, counsel doing things in the world’s way. It’s because of their unbelief. Christ shows us three replies to such an argument:

- ✦ First, there is his humility in reply. He has the power to “make it happen,” but refuses to use it. In this he shows us that we need not answer to the world for our methods, only our Lord. If the world thinks less of us for it, so be it.
- ✦ There is also the matter of God’s timing – a subject which is almost completely ignored today. God is quite content to do things in his time – we, on the other hand, need it today.
- ✦ The day of glory for Christ has not yet come. We need to remember this, that at the time of the end we shall see many things brought right.

### The Crowd

The crowd, too, has its flaws – these are easier to see.

- ✦ The first is ignorance – and a willful ignorance, generally. People do not wish to take the time and trouble to find out the truth. So they ask each other – people equally ignorant – to determine the truth. The opinion of the mob fluctuates around their appetites.
- ✦ More than that, Jesus speaks to us on matters of the spirit – and the crowd listens to matters of the stomach. They don’t want to hear things spiritual – and so they won’t.
- ✦ It should be noted, in fairness, that much of what Jesus says here is prophetic, and cannot be fully understood until after the Resurrection. That’s still true today – anyone reading the Scripture on a regular basis is constantly enlightened, even though reading it many times.

### Does the church today “do it His way?”

So often today the church thinks like the brothers – and caters to the crowd. Attendance figures are everything (at least, after offering numbers). The sad truth is that many churches today are nothing more than social clubs with good attendance. They do not call for commitment from the pews; that’s the minister’s job.

The debate is often over “modern vs. traditional.” It’s not about technology; it’s about leadership.

### Christ’s Proclamation to the Crowd

Our Lord is not silent on this issue. He explains it quite clearly here. He makes three points which should be heeded today.

### The world hates Jesus

It’s simple, really. The world hates him because he points out the evil in the world. Christians – real Christians – do the same. They can’t help it, because they’re going around being righteous. If you think not, consider these modern reactions:

- ✚ Abortion. How the pro-abortion people *hate* those “weirdo right wing fundamentalists!” Christians are sub-human; they are demons. They need to be locked up and straightened out by psychiatry (read: drugs). Not since abolition have such passions been stirred in America.
- ✚ VRWC – the Vast Right Wing Conspiracy. Hillary Clinton made it perfectly clear: her dear husband was being persecuted by this gigantic conspiracy. And why? Because he was acting like a liberated man! So of course it couldn’t be that those people actually believe that adultery is wrong; it must be a political conspiracy. Can you hear the hatred in Hillary?

The Psalmist had it right:

**The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.**

(Psa 12:8 NIV)

We’ve been stepping on their strut. If they hated Jesus then, will not this generation hate his children?

### My teaching is not my own

Note that Jesus does make the effort to get his teaching down to their level. A full explanation of the Trinity at this point would probably be fruitless. He makes it simple for them:

- ✚ God sent me.
- ✚ God is my Father
- ✚ I will return to God when I’m done.

Because the teaching comes from the Father, it can be brought down to their level without losing any of its truthfulness.

### The Power of Christ

There is also a lesson by example in here for us. Jesus slips quietly into Jerusalem, as if he feared the Jews. But later he walks right through a group wanting to stone him. It is not weakness, but timing – God’s timing. Power is best used in restraint; there is so much less to clean up.

### Christ Proposes the Tests

OK, suppose you want to know – in a very practical way – just how to know whether or not this Jesus is who he says he is. He gives you some very pragmatic tests:

- ✚ Live a life of obedience to God’s commands. How does this work? If you do this, you will become quite good at distinguishing between the latest and greatest psychobabble and what God truly

wants. Even if you don't have guidance of the Scriptures, that's OK; do what God wants, and you'll become astute at knowing what's godly and what's not. Then take a look at the life of this Jesus of Nazareth – and see if you don't recognize a lot of what you already know.

✚ Don't judge by appearances, nor by the whim of the crowd. Investigate. Find out. Don't just take some "expert's" word on the subject; dig into it. Josh McDowell, the leading writer on apologetics today, started out with an attempt to prove that Christianity is false. So did Lew Wallace, the man who wrote *Ben-Hur*.

✚ The best test is that of results. Is it true that when Christ was lifted up (speaking of the Crucifixion) that he would draw all to himself? Is that not the central point of Christianity? If that is not sufficient, then look at his disciples. Those you know to be his real disciples; does the living water of God flow out from them? Are they caring, giving people (despite their temperaments) or not?

God does not make it easy to know him. It is hard. So he has made it essential to salvation – and then given you a lot of help along the way.

## Christ and the Sinner - John 8:1-11

The story is one often told, for it shows the compassion of Christ. Most newer Bibles have an annotation that this story is not found in the oldest and best manuscripts. This is true. Ancient writers explain the discrepancy: the story would, in the early days of the church, be twisted into a justification of Christians committing adultery. This, at a time when the moral reputation of the church was the prime evangelistic tool. Most scholars consider it authentic, though there is some debate as to where in the Gospel of John it really belongs.

### Preparation

**But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.**

**(Joh 8:1-2 NIV)**

There are some quick points which should not be missed in these two verses:

- ✚ Consider the prayer life of Christ. He spent the night on the Mount of Olives. There, we are told, he often went to pray. How much the prayer in the darkness strengthens us for the combat of the day!
- ✚ Note too that Jesus arrives at dawn. He does not show up after a latté at Starbucks, but he's on the job on time.
- ✚ He sits down to teach the crowd. It is the mark of the teacher in these times that he sits. He is not a rabble rouser; rather, it is in deep instruction that he enlightens the crowd.

We might also learn some background of what is about to happen. Specifically, we might learn why adultery – which in our day is thought to be a good thing, or at worst a “victimless crime” – was taken with such seriousness.

- ✚ In the Old Testament God often equates idolatry with adultery. This is the forerunner of things to come. It is interesting to note that the three capital crimes of the ancient Jews were murder, adultery and idolatry.
- ✚ It is in the New Testament that we see the explanation. Marriage is not just a human relationship; it is the picture of Christ's love for the church. If the bride (the church) commits adultery, does this not break the husband's heart?
- ✚ We must always remember that the Law is a schoolmaster to us.<sup>33</sup> We are taught the rules in the Law, and the principles in Christ. We are now full grown, or should be – and therefore all the more in danger when we disobey.

### The trap

The Pharisees now bring out a set-piece trap. It is often noted that they bring the woman taken in adultery – but not the man. As it would seem to be a little difficult to do that, it is generally conceded that the object was to present to him a sinner whose appearance would summon up mercy rather than wrath. They succeeded – but not quite the way they wanted.

**The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" They**

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<sup>33</sup> Galatians 5:21-25

were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

(Joh 8:3-6 NIV)

Begin with this: the trap was deliberately set in public. The intent is to discredit Jesus with the crowd. This should work; after all, this is the same Jesus who has extended adultery to include looking at another woman with intent. It's also a mark of desperation. The Pharisees (in preceding passages) have assaulted Jesus on his truthfulness; they have assaulted him on the matter of his humility – and now they wish to assault his righteousness.<sup>34</sup> They have produced someone most likely to appeal to his mercy and gentle nature – at the expense of his righteousness.

As the Pharisees see it, Jesus has three options, all of which are deadly:

- ✚ He can condemn the woman to death. In so doing, he upholds the Law of Moses, but loses the support of the crowd of sinners who receive him so gladly. This would also get him in trouble with the Romans – who forbade capital punishment to the Jews.
- ✚ He can plead for her life – and thus destroy his reputation for righteousness.
- ✚ Or, in the most subtle of traps, he can cleverly rationalize the two options. For example, he might say that Roman rule is God's punishment on Israel's unfaithfulness, and this woman's release shows the evil of the Romans. This would be the start of co-opting him into "the system" – where he would be just another brilliant rabbi.

Observe one thing: that last option would have made everybody happy. Everybody, that is, except God. But Jesus has come to do his Father's will. What might that be? To seek and save the lost! Even, perhaps, the Pharisees.

They call him "teacher," and you can almost hear the sarcasm. But it is a point to be seen: those who set such traps usually have their own heads caught in them.

#### Time to Think

It is a measure of Christ's devotion to his Father's will that he gives the Pharisees time to repent of this.

**They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.**

(Joh 8:6-9 NIV)

Look at verse seven: they kept on questioning him. Was this done in a tone of triumph? Did they just not notice that he was writing? We cannot say. What we can say is this: only after continued questioning, unanswered by Jesus, does he finally rise with his reply. They asked for it.

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<sup>34</sup> See Psalm 45:4, the basis for St. Augustine's commentary on this passage.

There is one thing which is greatly comforting. The Jesus who bends down portrays God stooping to deal with our sin. The Christ who stands up portrays God who stops the mouth of our accuser.

#### What did he write?

It's been a mystery for two thousand years. What was Jesus writing in the ground?

- ✚ Some ancient manuscripts hint that he might have been writing out the sins of those who were standing there. Perhaps; but I think not. That's a long list.
- ✚ We might also consider this. There are two times in Scripture when God is portrayed as writing with his finger. Do you remember the other?<sup>35</sup>

They go away, one by one, starting with the oldest. That, at least, is polite. In our day the younger ones would push to the front. There is a wisdom with age, and wisdom knows wisdom when it meets such. But note one thing: it wasn't just the Pharisees that went away – the crowd did also. All the sinners were convicted that day.

#### Dealing with the Sinner

Jesus straightened up and asked her, **"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"** "No one, sir," she said. **"Then neither do I condemn you,"** Jesus declared. **"Go now and leave your life of sin."**]  
(Joh 8:10-11 NIV)

I wonder: did the woman expect to be stoned by Jesus? It's perfectly plausible that she did. This, after all, is a righteous man from God; who better to cast the first stone? She has not escaped entirely without punishment, for she has been exposed to shame in front of the town. It is very likely she thinks she deserves it.

This explains her silence; she knows she's guilty. She does not bring up the subject of "what about the man?" She doesn't attempt to justify herself. She just stands there, hopeless.

But the hope of the world stands before her. In Him she will see the mercy of God.

- ✚ "Woman, where are they?" How's she supposed to know? Christ is simply pointing out the obvious. It's just the sinner – and the sinner's friend.
- ✚ Christ now portrays for us both the mercy and righteousness of God. "Neither do I condemn you" – no charges filed, no prosecution, we're dropping the case (despite the evidence). "Leave your life of sin" – labels it for what it is, and gives the cure: repentance.<sup>36</sup>

Christ condemns the sin, but not the sinner. In Him is the resolution of the divine dilemma – How can the righteous God have anything to do with sinners; how can the loving God not have everything to do with them. Only Christ can do this, for only he is both fully God and fully Man. Only Christ can do this, for only He can be the perfect atonement for our sins.

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<sup>35</sup> If you've forgotten, see Exodus 31:18

<sup>36</sup> See Ezekiel 33:10-20 for the Old Testament version of this.

## Lessons for Us

Though often used as a starting point for the depth and breadth of the forgiveness of God through Christ Jesus, this passage yields us some other lessons as well.

### Our right to judge

It is a fact – judging by the content of sermons preached these days – that the church is quite fond of condemning those outside the church. It serves as an excellent substitute for passing judgment on those inside the church. After all, a scathing denunciation of abortion clinics need hardly trouble the woman who has had an abortion. “They” – always good to have around to take the blame.

We have it backwards. We should be judging ourselves and lifting each other from the pits of sin:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

(1Co 5:9-13 NIV)

How often we ignore this! But our Lord has made clear his view of this:

**"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.**

(Mat 7:1-5 NIV)

The issue is relatively simple to state. We must judge ourselves, to see wherein we need to repent. We must judge others in the church, so that by sound church discipline we snatch them from a life of sin – always being careful of the snares which entrap them. We must judge no one outside the church.

The time will come when we too will be judged by God. On that Day, it will be blessed to hear, “Has no one condemned you?” Who is our accuser, but Satan? Who can defend us against him, except Christ?

But then – to take the practical example – are we not to condemn adultery? Certainly! The issue is, how? I submit that we condemn adultery by living the life of purity and chastity. As John puts it,

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

(1Jn 1:5-7 NIV)

Walk in the light. In the presence of light, darkness flees. In the presence of Christ, Satan, the accuser, flees. We are the light of the world<sup>37</sup>; by our presence we condemn the darkness of this world – if we but walk in that Light.

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<sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:14

## The Light of the World - John 8:12-59

In this meeting between Christ, the Pharisees and the crowd, Christ lays out for us the great division between those who follow him and those who oppose him.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid." Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me." Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also." He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come. Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come." This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?" But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." "Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied. "I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world." They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does." "We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?" "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the

prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

(Joh 8:12-59 NIV)

### The claims of Christ

#### Light: the analogy

It is a fairly common metaphor even in our day: "I saw the light." Hank Williams, a pained soul and one of the greats of country music, put the phrase into the English language. It came from the Scripture, as so much in country music does.

Light; its nature has fascinated mankind for millennia. Let us focus our attention on three aspects of light, by analogy.

- ✚ Light is used for measurement. We say that we "hold something up to the light" when we want to know more about it. By such we mean that we are determining the true nature of a thing.
- ✚ Light is used for direction. We say that an event "lit up the path" or "lit up the landscape" to mean that we obtained insight into which way we should go.
- ✚ Light is used for understanding, particularly in time of trouble. We might say that someone "is my light" during troubled times.

#### Christ as light

In this passage Christ identifies himself as the light of the world. We can understand him in the same three senses:

- ✚ Because he is righteous, he is qualified to judge us. He did not come to judge us, but by making this clear he also shows us that he could – and some day will. His precepts, therefore, should be our standard of measurement.
- ✚ He knows the direction in which we should go, for he came from God and returned to him. All who seek eternal life must go to him.
- ✚ Indeed, he sets us free, if we are his disciples. He is the light we look to in this troubled world.

#### Jesus, the Son of God

In this passage he explicitly tells us that he is indeed the son of God. He claims God as his Father – which, biologically, is perfectly true. It's also perfectly true in any other sense. We see these aspects to Sonship here:

- ✚ He tells us that God explicitly sent him to us. He is "from above" (that is, from heaven) as we are not.
- ✚ We see also the perfect obedience of the Son. This is seen in two ways, both examples to us. First, Jesus does what pleases God. (Obedience is the key to understanding God). Next, what God tells Jesus, Jesus tells the world. Do we hide the light under a bushel basket?

- ✦ God is “with” Jesus – as seen in the many miracles he did.
- ✦ Finally – particularly because of the Crucifixion – God glorifies Jesus, the obedient Christ. The family resemblance is worth noting.

### I AM

In the very last section of this Scripture you see one thing clearly: Jesus of Nazareth claims to be God. Not just “a god” but the God Jehovah, the I AM of the Old Testament, the only God that ever was, is or will be. His enemies understand this clearly enough: they try to stone him. It is the Old Testament punishment for blasphemy. In any other mouth such a phrase is blasphemy (not to mention ridiculous). Only one man has ever made it stick.

### His Opponents

It is useful to note that Jesus never inspired anyone to be a fence-sitter. When people meet the living Christ, they choose up sides quickly. In this passage Jesus lays out for us the characteristics of – indeed, the charges against – those who oppose him. See if you recognize anyone here.

### Judgment by human standards

There is divine judgment and human judgment. Human judgment is seen here; it is the judgment which is most convenient to self.

- ✦ It shows no mercy on others, but is very lenient to self.
- ✦ It is very legalistic. It is unfortunate for others, but we must follow the law. One man’s loophole is another man’s escape.
- ✦ In human judgment, appearances are everything. We fear to appear too lax on criminals, so our prisons bulge. But we are merciful to the beautiful.
- ✦ Most important: the righteousness of our judgment is our own. We decide what is right and wrong. It is based upon us – and therefore crumbles when we are gone.

### Do not know the Father

If you ever listen to the opponents of Christ, it will not take long to hear, “I don’t believe a loving God could ever...” Listen carefully; it is an admission that they do not know God. That’s why they are the opponents of Jesus and his church; they know only the imaginary God. God’s attributes, visible and invisible, can be known – but only by those willing to seek them out. Those who seek them out will soon see that Jesus is the human representation of them.

### Where I go, you cannot come

It is an interesting way of stating it. Jesus tells them quite simply that where he is going (heaven) they can’t come – but they will look for him.

- ✦ That they will look for him? Certainly they will. There is an innate desire in man to have fellowship with God. We are born with it.
- ✦ But unless we follow Jesus, that innate desire will go unquenched. Seek as you might in this world, it cannot be done. How many do you know who constantly are looking for a new guru to lead them, this time one for life?

### Your Father is not...

You see, all of this hinges on just which family you belong to. Are you of this world, or of God? Just who is your Father? (Kindly note: these people did believe in heredity! And they understood that you might be mistaken about the father, but not the mother).

- ✚ You could be, in this time, a “child of Abraham.” The phrase means more than biological descendant; it means one who follows Abraham’s ways. Consider this: suppose you know and love someone who is very righteous. When the perfect righteousness comes along, you recognize it – because of your experience. So if you are such a child, Christ comes and you see your heart’s desire.
- ✚ You could be, then and now, a child of God. Perhaps you have some imperfect revelation of God. When the real thing comes along, you know it. Following him is quite natural.
- ✚ But you could also be a child of Satan.

How would you know? Jesus gives us three characteristics which Satan passes on to his children:

- ✚ Satan is the accuser. Have you ever noticed that those who deny Christ are the first to accuse? The way you defend abortion is to demonize those opposed to it.
- ✚ Satan is the father of liars – and the father of lies. May we take again the abortion movement? It was sold on the idea that there were 55,000 deaths each year from illegal abortions! How many were there? In the year preceding Roe v. Wade, there were 13. Not 13,000. 13.
- ✚ Finally, they are murderers. Enough said.

You can see this in Jesus’ time too. They didn’t believe the truth when it was in front of them, but accused him of horrible things (demon possession). They could not do this in truth, but that posed no barrier to them. If you don’t like the message, kill the Messenger.

### Promises to the disciples

We began with the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the very God in the flesh. We have examined the characteristics of his opponents; we now examine the promises he made here to his disciples.

### Knowing the difference

First, how do you know you are his disciple? Anyone can go through the ritual of baptism. What’s the real indicator?

To understand the answer, you must first understand the slavery of sin. Sin holds us in a tight grip. Like the alcoholic, we cannot give up the sin that dominates us. We keep going back to it.

That gives us the test of Christ. If we continue to obey his teachings, the slavery of sin is broken in us. The true test of the disciple is obedience. Do we do what he commands?

Some might quibble; suppose this, or that. Remember that judgment is done “in the light.” Take the sin in your life to the Lord of Light; let him pass judgment on it and remove it from you.

### The light of life

If we have light, then surely our three metaphorical ways of using it will still apply:

- ✚ We will be able to measure accurately in all things spiritual. We will know if it fits or not.

- ✚ We will be given direction
- ✚ We will know how to escape the wrong and seek the right.

Indeed, beyond this, Jesus tells us that we will never see death. Life after this mortal body is guaranteed by the one who knows how.

**Know the truth.... Truth will set you free**

Verse 32 is inscribed on the Liberty Bell. What does Christ mean when he says we shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free?

- ✚ Freedom, in God's terms, is the ability to do what we are designed to do. A dancer with a broken leg is not free. Each of us understands that freedom in a different way, but all of us were designed to be in fellowship with God forever. That is freedom; being what we were designed to be.
- ✚ What, then, is truth? Pontius Pilate asked the question rather flippantly; we should be a bit more serious. Truth is one of the attributes of God. If you know truth, you know (at least in some measure) God.
- ✚ How then are we set free? Well, how are prisoners set free? They pay the penalty of their crimes, and then some agency of the governor authorizes their release. We have a much better freedom. The penalty for sin is death – but Jesus has paid that penalty. Upon this, the authority (that is, God) pronounces our debt paid – and us free.

Walk in the light. Measure yourself always by God's standards; seek his will and his Word to direct your paths. Do not lean on your own understanding, but the wisdom and power of God.

## Blind Man from Missouri - John 9

(Note: a more conventional treatment of this passage can be found in our Life of Christ study. As I promised the class I would not rerun lessons – the Word of God is ever new – this lesson takes a somewhat different approach.)

We see this morning the virtues of a man with an overwhelming handicap. He's blind.

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" **"Neither this man nor his parents sinned,"** said Jesus, **"but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."** Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. **"Go,"** he told him, **"wash in the Pool of Siloam"** (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." Jesus said, **"You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."** Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. Jesus said, **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** Some Pharisees who

were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. (Joh 9:1-41 NIV)

We will approach this passage from an unconventional direction: we will follow the story from the point of view of the blind beggar.

### Born Blind

What's it like to be born blind? We have in our midst those who were born with grave afflictions, like cerebral palsy. In our time the wealth of our society makes life more tolerable for such people, but I submit that we have not really taken away the pain of such things.

- ✦ A man born blind in this society must become a beggar. Imagine that; all your life is spent knowing that you continue to eat by the charity of others. The disabled in our day all seem to want a job; something by which they can hold up their heads. This man had no such opportunity. He lived by the art of making others feel generous.
- ✦ Especially in youth, this man would have been a laughingstock – the kid who couldn't play soccer. Children can be extremely cruel. Being "different" is often the worst of crimes. Worse, there was no hope of ever fitting in with the others.
- ✦ In his day – and, perhaps to your surprise, in ours – the question of "who sinned?" is raised by the good and the pious. Either somehow the blind man is the sinner, or the parents he loves were such sinners that God punished them with a blind child. The "tsk-tsk" of the saintly can be cruel indeed.

### Suffering for sin

Why do we put this burden on others? Because we know, ourselves, what sinners we are. We can look at them and see ourselves – only "they" were singled out by God for such punishment. In the time of this man there was a theory extant which held that the soul was eternal (it isn't; you have a beginning) and that therefore prenatal sin was possible. (Similar theories drive the reincarnation religions.)

In our modern time we call the selection random, and explain it scientifically. This, I think, misses the point. It may be interesting to know why I am afflicted with this or that, but the real question is not, "Why?" The real question is, "Why me?" Job knew why his children were not coming home. He didn't know why he was singled out.

And – to be fair to God about it – it would have made no difference if he had known. The dinner table would be just as empty with an explanation.

### Outside the box

The world has put this man, and his parents, into a little box marked "Sinner – and paying for it." Jesus takes them out of this box. He explains to his disciples that this man was born blind – so that the glory of God might be revealed.

Does that seem unfair? A man is blind for over thirty years, all so that someone else might see the glory of God?

How little we esteem the glory of God in our day! In past times it was thought a noble thing to build a cathedral to the glory of God. The architect of Notre Dame de Paris is anonymous – for his work

was for the glory of God. We would ask why he didn't put up a brass plate with the name of the architect and his firm. But our ancestors knew better than that. Here we see the prime purpose: that God's glory would be "made manifest" – made clear and plain – to one and all.

The blind man becomes the monument to the greatness of God; in his economy, God uses the weak and powerless to proclaim his power.

#### The blind man revealed

Character is revealed in action. In action we shall see what this man was made of.

#### His faith

It might seem to you that this man would not be noted for great faith. I submit that his behavior shows us the opposite.

- ✚ Did you notice what he didn't do? He didn't ask any questions; he didn't question his motive or methods – but he obeyed.
- ✚ How – you might ask – did he come by such simple obedience? One question answered with another: how did he know Jesus' voice? After all, he never saw Jesus until he hunted him up. Jesus told him to go to Siloam. He knew Jesus' voice because he had been listening to him teach in the Temple. He was a student at the Master's feet.
- ✚ His virtue is simple obedience to divine command. By the use of clay Jesus reminds him of the creation of Adam; by washing, he puts in mind baptism for repentance. These are pictures which penetrate the blindness and bring this blind man his sight.

#### Attack on the blind beggar

As the phrase in our time goes, "No good deed goes unpunished." We can see that the touch of the Master has changed this man; we see it in his response to those who insist that Jesus cannot do such things.

- ✚ Their first attack is upon the miracle itself – it can't be the blind beggar, but someone who looks like him. There must be a trick here. In this, however, the transparent honesty of the man shines out. When he identifies himself, those around know the voice.
- ✚ There is always the possibility that the blind beggar is a fake. Perhaps his parents taught him how to act blind and beg. But they are called in also, and their reputation for honesty is such that all believe them when they tell the Pharisees the truth.
- ✚ The charge of trickery having fallen, the Pharisees now challenge the righteousness of Jesus. Our blind man is a simple soul; whether or not the man is a sinner, how should he know? But one thing he knows, and one thing he testifies to: he was blind, now he sees. This objection was rather tough.
- ✚ Indeed, it was too tough for the Pharisees. Rather than let this miracle influence them any more, they throw the man out.

#### Defense: the character of a man of faith

Perhaps the most dramatic aspect of this miracle is not the sight in the man's eyes, but the transformation of the man into a bold speaker. He has spent his life being subservient, begging with sightless eyes. Now his eyes are opened, and he quickly grows bold.

We also see here the growth in faith. His perception of Jesus changes as he knows more:

- ✚ First he is “a man.” It’s an important point, and a good start.
- ✚ Then he is “a prophet.” This he is also, and shows us that the beggar puts him in the highest category of God’s servants. But there is more.
- ✚ Finally, he is “Lord.” As he draws closer to Jesus, the truth becomes plain.
 

It is characteristic of one who truly knows Jesus Christ that they divide those around them. Christ did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

#### Lessons from the blind man

We can learn from this man.

#### Walk in the light you have

You don’t know all about Jesus Christ? Join the group. Here’s what you can do with what you know:

- ✚ Be obedient. This man did not challenge Jesus, but did as was commanded.
- ✚ Be the witness of what you have seen and experienced. The man did not understand the theology of this – but he knew one thing. He was blind, but now he wasn’t. Testify to what Christ has done in your life.
- ✚ Do not fear to admit your ignorance. Correct it if you can, but in the meanwhile understand that God will reveal himself to you progressively, lest you be overwhelmed.

#### Don’t be afraid

The facts, after all, are the facts.

- ✚ This man did not back down or compromise, despite all threats. Even when his family passed the buck to him (what must they have thought of him?) he was bold. Quite a change for a beggar!
- ✚ Realize that you, like this man, are sent for a task. Siloam means “sent” in Hebrew; when God touches you it gives you a responsibility.
- ✚ The paradox is still there; he who would save his life will lose it; he who would lose it will save it.

#### Remember the Judgment

This man did not take his new-found sight and use it to judge others. Perhaps years of begging had taught him about the log in his sightless eye. The cure for spiritual blindness is to bring it to God and have it removed.

## The Good Shepherd - John 10

The passage of Scripture is justly famed for its metaphor of Christ, the good shepherd. As such, it serves as guidance for those who would know Christ – and warning to those who would be his shepherds.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are gods'? If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'? Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp. Then Jesus went back across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. Here he stayed and many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true." And in that place many believed in Jesus.

(Joh 10:1-42 NIV)

## Christ and the Father

It is a matter of frustration to many Christians that we have no full explanation of the Trinity given in the Scriptures. We are rather presented with various statements about it, and a variety of facts concerning it. From these, we are left to pick our way through a theological minefield. We shall do our best.

### The perfect unity

“I and the Father are one.” It is the statement of unity which flies in the face of observation. God is spirit; Jesus is man. Yet over and again we are told that they are one. The assertion is made so strongly that we must assume that this is a fact to be presented to us.

“I am in the Father and the Father is in me “. This seems even more unlikely. But we know that Christ is speaking in a metaphor, and he is not speaking of physical containment. Rather, he is speaking of the union of his spirit with the spirit of God. The two are one. Indeed, they are so much one, that the fathers will is also Christ’s will – and vice versa.

The distinction is made as the Father sets apart the Son. To “set apart “means to make wholly. Christ is indeed the Holy One of God. We see now that Christ is distinct from the father. Indeed the agents held that he was equal with God as touching his godhood, and inferior to God as touching his manhood. It was the best explanation they could devise. It is best shown in this: Jesus, the Son of Man, is obedient to the Father.

### The evidence

Of course, God does not expect us to believe this simply because one man states that it is so. We need evidence. Evidence God provides – but not proof. If he provided proof, there would be no room for faith. So, then, what evidence do we have?

- ✚ First, there are the miracles. These are frequently cited as being done in the Father’s name. By claiming God’s authority verbally, then verifying it with a miracle, Christ convinces most of those who see him. They reason, quite correctly, that God Omnipotent would not allow a fraud to perform miracles in his name.
- ✚ There is also the fact of divine style. “I do what my Father does.” Recognize that what I do is what God does; healing the sick, calling the sinner to repentance, loving the poor.
- ✚ Indeed, the evidence is sufficiently strong that Jesus – contrary to what many believe – frequently challenges his hearers to examine that evidence. He does not want Christians who have faith in having faith – rather, he challenges them to seek out the evidence. Why? So that they might bring others to Christ. (Interestingly, the challenge should also be applied to those who preach and teach in Christ’s name. Their lives should show evidence of God as well.)

### The Father Gives

It is a curious phrasing. The father gives the sheep to the Son. At first, it might appear that God has divinely ordained those to be saved and those to be condemned. Is your spiritual destiny predetermined? I answer no. Rather, this is a statement of the power of God. Those placed in the hands of Jesus, no force on earth can rip away. God is omnipotent. By his power he keeps those who are faithful to his son.

The father loves the son. Christ here gives us the reason. It is because he lays down his life for the sheep. This is obedience in the highest degree. Is it not interesting, then, that he tells us that he is in the father as he is in us. This is divine style again. Should we therefore not have the same obedience to him?

### Christ and the shepherds

Our Lord warns us here about those who claim to be shepherds of his flock – but are false. If we are to understand his meaning, we must see the dual use of the metaphor of the sheep gate – the “door” in the old King James Version. In one sense he says that he enters through the door; in another, that he IS the door. How can this be?

It is simple: the door is the picture of the Word of God. See how this passage applies to the door being Scripture:

- ✚ Scripture bars the way to Satan and heresy.
- ✚ By Scripture, the honest man comes to Christ.
- ✚ For those who want the “other way quote “, they must add to, delete from, or replace the Scriptures.
- ✚ Now you know the test: does the shepherd honor the Scriptures?

### Three types of leaders

Christ tells us about three kinds of leaders:

- ✚ There is the thief. He comes only to steal or to destroy. If to steal, then his motive is money. If to destroy, his motive is hatred. Therefore, look for greed or anger; these mark the thief.
- ✚ There is the hired hand. His test is simple. What does he do when persecution starts? Does he stand by the faith, or does he lick the boots of his oppressors?
- ✚ The true shepherd, or watchman, is also told by his motives. He does not seek your wallet, nor your destruction, nor does he fear persecution. The greatest test is that he will lay down his life for Christ’s sheep.

### The true pastor/shepherd/watchman

What are the signs of the true pastor?

- ✚ He comes in the character of legitimate authority. He comes openly. His motives are easy to see. His actions are honest and above board.
- ✚ He serves the one flock. He believes in and upholds the unity of the faith, and the unity of God’s flock, the church.
- ✚ He is the watchman. He opens the gate for the shepherd; thus, his sole purpose is to bring you to faith in Christ. More than that, he is also watching for the return of Christ.

### Christ and His sheep

We now must turn to the most important part of this relationship – that of Christ and his sheep.

### How do I know Jesus is the real thing?

- ✚ First, examine the evidence. Read his words. Look at the records of the miracles. Read the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament. See if you can find any other explanation. As Sherlock

Holmes once put it, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”

- ✚ Next, examine his disciples. Do they act as though they know God?
- ✚ Finally, listen to his voice. Seek the truth; examine his words. If you find truth in them, then follow that truth.

### Christ is the only way

So many wishful thinkers ardently wish that this were not so. Over and again we hear, “It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you’re sincere.” Or we hear, “God would not condemn someone just because...” But is that what God says?

- ✚ “I am the way, the truth, the life – no man comes to the Father except by me.” He is the door, the sheep gate – the only entrance into the mercy of God.
- ✚ He is unique in this too: of all religions, where else do you find one who “lays down his life?” He gives you the ultimate sacrifice, that of a sinless human being. Note, please, that with his own authority he rose from the dead. Not only is his sacrifice unique, his authority is unique. Indeed, all true authority comes from him.
- ✚ “You do not believe because you are not my sheep.” The Good Shepherd has done all that is necessary for your salvation. If you do not enter into it, it is by your own choosing.

### The personal relationship

Christianity is not a “system” nor is it a “belief structure.” It is a personal relationship with Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Let us indeed see how personal this relationship is:

- ✚ He calls you by name. Is this not the sign of a personal relationship ?
- ✚ You hear his voice. Just like the man born blind, it is his voice that you seek. The true sheep of Jesus listened only to his voice. They listen, and obey. They listen to Christ, and none other. Listening, they obey.
- ✚ The results of this relationship is awesome. We are told we will be gods. We will reign with him. As the Psalm says, opposed to whom the word of God has come will be God’s. When he returns, how glorious we all will be.
- ✚ In the meanwhile we shall find pasture with him. Christ, and Christ alone, feeds us with the bread of life.

## The Unexpected Jesus - John 11:1-32

The story is often preached. Here we shall examine its beginnings – the man called Lazarus.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, **"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."** Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days. Then he said to his disciples, **"Let us go back to Judea."** "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?" Jesus answered, **"Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."** After he had said this, he went on to tell them, **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."** His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, **"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."** Then Thomas (called Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home. "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus said to her, **"Your brother will rise again."** Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"** "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[\(Joh 11:1-33 NIV\)](#)

### Jesus, doing the unexpected

In this passage we need to have an understanding of time and place. The time is simple: Jesus has just fled Jerusalem as the Jews tried to stone him. He has fled to the region on the other side of the Jordan, which would be about a two day walk. Bethany is a village within two miles of Jerusalem. With this in mind, then, let us examine the facts.

“Just the facts, ma’am”

Let us set out the obvious for the benefit of Sgt. Joe Friday:

- ✚ Jesus loves Mary, Martha and Lazarus. From the context, it appears that Martha is the older sister to Mary, and that Lazarus is probably a kid brother. Losing a younger child like this is always painful.

- ✦ Mary has anointed his feet, an act of great worship.
- ✦ In a previous incident, Mary is praised for hearing Christ, while Martha is gently rebuked for putting the dishes ahead of Jesus.
- ✦ Martha here makes the great confession. It is not clear in this translation, but in the NASB the verb is translated “I have believed...” – which shows that this faith is hers before this incident.

#### How we see it.

Most of us, I think, would reason things this way:

- ✦ These people are personal friends of Jesus, and thus of God the Father.
- ✦ God, who is love, would want to help his friends in their hour of tragedy.
- ✦ God, who is all powerful, could save Lazarus from dying – even doing it remotely.
- ✦ If you wait too long for Lazarus, he’s going to die. Four days ago, to be precise.
- ✦ So then, Jesus will come quickly to their aid – unless he’s afraid.
- ✦ But this cannot be – look how easily he’s handled those who want to stone him.  
So, therefore, our expectation would have been that Jesus, upon hearing the news, would go quickly to Bethany.

#### What he did

So note what he did:

- ✦ He delayed. For no apparent reason, he waits two more days.
- ✦ He sends a message to Mary and Martha that sounds very much like, “Don’t worry – he’ll recover.”
- ✦ He then lets Lazarus die.
- ✦ Then, when things look absolutely most hopeless, he goes.  
That last is important. If the fear of the Jews was a factor when Lazarus was alive, he certainly wouldn’t go just to attend the funeral. And he evidently missed that too.

#### The Disciples

It is a great comfort to know that the disciples, in daily contact with Jesus, had their problems with this too.

- ✦ First, they simply didn’t get what he meant by Lazarus sleeping. It’s clear to us, but we have hindsight. So perhaps I’m not meant to understand everything that God is doing.
- ✦ Next, they have a quite reasonable fear of the Jews doing the mob work for the Pharisees. Those people are dangerous – lethal, to be specific – and the disciples are reasonable men. They have no great wish to die.
- ✦ For this reason, they give God some good advice – look, if the man is sleeping, that means he’s getting better. (We still think so today). So, if he’s getting better, there’s no reason to see him (and stick our necks out in the process).
- ✦ And, like so many of us, they haven’t a clue as to what God will do.

#### Jesus prepares the disciples.

It is unusual for Jesus to tell his disciples of their destination. Chrysostom, in his commentary, states that this is the first time he tells them a destination. I cannot find a contrary example, but it is worth noting that Jesus is certainly not in the habit of pointing out tomorrow’s geography. He is much more concerned that he is your companion. “Follow me” needs no map.

He also deals with their fear of danger. His antidote here is the call of duty. Duty is the strong right arm of courage. Courage, as you should know by now, is the overcoming of fear. Duty helps by providing your motive. Jesus' off hand statement that there are twelve hours of daylight sounds very much like the old sergeant's call of, "Come on, you \*\*\*\*\* - do you want to live forever?"

There is a great lesson in this. So often we complain that we don't know where God is leading us. This is usually true. So what are we to do about it? The answer is given here: do the duty you know to be yours, and let God lead. Otherwise you will stumble around in a darkness of your own making.

The reason we often do not see the goal is that we like to think of ourselves as being the ones who do great things – when God sees us as the ones who need to be taught great things. Lazarus is going to be quite an education for the disciples.

### **Doubting Thomas**

There has long been some doubt about Thomas here. Yes, this is doubting Thomas. Is his reaction here bravado? Courage? We don't really know. We do know one thing: Thomas knew what he was supposed to do. In particular, stick close by his Lord! It shows us the great depth of personal love and loyalty that the man had. He is one capable of the depths of doubt and the heights of worship, and we see his despairing nature overcome by his love for his Lord. Better cold than lukewarm.

### **Mary and Martha**

Somehow I have the feeling that Mary was the pretty kid sister, and Martha the plain older one. The cute girls get away with so much more; the plain ones know they must buckle down and do the work. The first incident produced rebuke for Martha, but now we see what the working Christian produces. We can only imagine Martha being one whose works of charity were well known. She has lived the life of service. It is natural, therefore, that she would be the one to take action – she goes to see Jesus as he is coming in. Mary waits at home.

Their actions receive appropriate reward. Mary must rest upon her faith; Martha receives the comfort of Christ. Mary reproaches Jesus with "if you had been here" – while also knowing that "even now, God will grant." This is a life of faith, but of faith without great experience. Martha's hard work now rises with her faith to the heights of the Great Confession.

### **Messengers to Jesus**

We can see much of that life in the messengers sent to Jesus. As she is the older sister, we must presume that she instructed the messengers. See what this brings to us:

- ✚ The sisters appeal to Jesus – but they do not presume to instruct him. How often in our prayers do we bring God our problems, and then present him with our own ideal solution!
- ✚ How, then, do the sisters feel when they receive the returned message – only to have their brother Lazarus die before their eyes? Especially when it is clear that Jesus delayed in coming?

We often have this difficulty with God. He won't take our advice and he won't do the obvious right thing. But see verses five and six: He loves them – and still he delays. Perhaps the matter is simply this: we do not understand God's timing, and therefore are tempted to doubt his love. But when we don't understand his timing, we should use the faith we have to stay loyal to him.

In a sense we can see this faith in action here. When Lazarus is ill, what would be more natural than to have one of the sisters (probably Mary) run to Jesus while the other (guess who?) cared for Lazarus. Like the centurion, a man of authority, they knew that the messenger would be quite sufficient. How comforting the return message must have been – until Lazarus died.

### Meeting Jesus

It is therefore a mark of great faith that Martha does not reproach her Lord. Nor does she tell him what to do. Why not? Perhaps she understands that he knows better than she does – what to do.

She does express her pain – but she does so in her faith. She knows that her brother will rise again on the last day – but that's not much comfort for the loss she has suffered. Perhaps she has not thought it through completely.

She knows who Jesus is. Or at least she has the basic idea. She makes three cogent points:

- ✚ He is the Christ – the Holy One of Israel.
- ✚ He is the one who was prophesied.
- ✚ He is the Son of God – God in the flesh.

She has not yet seen the rest of the matter. He explains it in simple language:

- ✚ He is the Resurrection. She knows her brother will rise on the last day – and now she knows who will make it happen. This is the one with power over death. He will show that power in raising Lazarus; he will show it again on that first Easter morning.
- ✚ He is the life – the word used here means biological life. From this alone we would proclaim the bodily resurrection.

Martha finds, as do we, that understanding the answer to the great question is not a discovery but an expedition of discovery.

### The Matter for Us

God often does what we do not expect. He expects us to do what the world does not expect – so that the world will see Him in us. A couple of examples spring to mind:

- ✚ What is our attitude at funerals – our attitude towards death? The world fears it, the world hushes it up, the world wraps it in comfortable funeral ritual. A funeral is an ideal time to proclaim the Resurrection.
- ✚ What is our attitude when God does not do what we think he should – or even when he delays doing it? Do we endure with courage? Do we do the duty at hand, even though we don't see how God will redeem that?

Sometimes, faith is shown in being a follower of the man who said, "Follow me." It's easy to follow when the path is clear. The world can see that. What they can't see is why we would do it when the path is not clear. It is then we can proclaim that the Word is a lamp for our feet, a light for our path.

## Lazarus, Come Forth - John 11:33-57

We must remember that we are very close to the week of our Lord's Passion. He is teaching some final lessons to his disciples; this one concerns death – and therefore concerns us all.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. **"Where have you laid him?"** he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. **"Take away the stone,"** he said. "But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then Jesus said, **"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"** So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, **"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."** When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, **"Lazarus, come out!"** The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, **"Take off the grave clothes and let him go."** Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, "You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish." He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life. Therefore Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple area they asked one another, "What do you think? Isn't he coming to the Feast at all?" But the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that if anyone found out where Jesus was, he should report it so that they might arrest him.

[\(Joh 11:33-57 NIV\)](#)

### The Humanity of Christ

The favorite verse of children in Vacation Bible School – famed for having children memorize Bible verses – is verse 35. It is the shortest verse in the Bible, and therefore the easiest to memorize. It also shows us the humanity of Jesus, the Christ.

### Jesus wept

Why did he weep? It seems somehow undignified for God in the flesh to weep. But we must remember that he is fully human:

- ✚ He wept because he is human. The natural, human reaction to losing a friend to death is to weep. He is like us.

- ✦ He wept because his friends wept. He shared in their sorrows as well as their joys. Indeed, the definition of a true friend might just be someone who has wept with you. Jesus is the true friend of sinners.
- ✦ He wept because his enemy – the enemy of anyone who is human – is death, and death had claimed another victim. He mourned his enemy’s triumph.

#### Care for the witnesses

Jesus is fully human; he knows how suspicious we are. It is easy to say, “Have faith, believe.” It is hard to believe. So Jesus moves so that the witnesses to this event might be convincing.

- ✦ The God who called Lazarus back to life could surely remove those grave clothes. But he didn’t. He had the witnesses do that, so that their testimony might be all the more certain.
- ✦ The Christ of power might have commanded the stone to be removed. But he didn’t. He had witnesses do that, so that they might know how difficult it would be.
- ✦ He could have moved the stone physically by himself. But his way gave the witnesses the assurance that Jesus himself was at a distance as all was done.
- ✦ Indeed, even as he asks for the location of the grave, he makes it clear that he could not have been involved in a fraud.

This may sound overly cautious. But do you remember the man born blind? They debated over his true identity. Lazarus seems easier to identify.

#### The humanity of our High Priest

It is a matter of great worth that our intermediary with God – our High Priest – is human just as we are. We see here his power over death; we also see that he knows how we fear it. Indeed, our High Priest knows what it is like to die – and to live again.

#### “Lazarus, come forth”

It is perhaps the most impressive of commands – because it shows that Jesus of Nazareth has power over death itself. All others perform their works in the name of God. Jesus performs his in his oneness with God. He is fully human – and also fully God. Thus he stands in the gap between us and our maker, pleading for us – and with us.

#### The Wrong Reaction

Some of us fit our theories to the facts, others fit the facts to the theories. We see here also some of the wrong reactions to Jesus.

#### Testing God

We love to do this. You can see it here in the Monday morning quarterbacks – the ones who say, “You know, this guy could probably have kept old Lazarus from dying – if he got up and moved soon enough.” Isn’t that just like us? No set of miracles is ever sufficient; we need to give God just one more test to see if he is real.

Do you not see that to be a “realist” of this type is to deny God? You say you believe him; but do you act upon it, or do you test him? Is it really fitting that you should decide what God must do to prove himself to you?

How do we do this? We do this when we calculate without God. The Pharisees give us a good example here. “If we let this fellow keep on, the whole place will go into revolt. Then the Romans will crush and destroy us. Therefore, he must die.” This comes from the people who supposedly worship God! It is arrogant for us to say that we know how things will turn out – and ignore God in our plans and calculations.

### Miracles

The usual excuse goes like this: “If I only saw one miracle, my faith would be so strong that I...” Look at the people who saw miracles, and see what human beings really do:

- ✚ For some, it doesn't matter how many miracles Jesus performs. He does not fuel the dominant emotion in their lives – bitter hate – and therefore they cannot believe. If he would only lead them in revolt, they would be such ardent followers. Leading them beside still waters provides no opportunity for hatred.
- ✚ Others of us are simply too taken with the cares of this world. We call the meeting; we berate ourselves with our small accomplishments and decide to buckle down and get realistic with ourselves. In so doing we throw away the precious grace of God and rely on the things of this world.

### Ceremonial Cleansing

In verse 55 you see a reference to ceremonial cleansing. This is a great need for human beings; we long to be free of sin and know ourselves to be righteous. We can deny this need, or satisfy it. We cannot ignore it.

### Christ Leading Us

It is a great thing to note that our Lord used much of his life as an example to us. He is one who leads, not one who directs.

### Concern

If there is a thread running through this story, it is this: Christ's concern is for our salvation. His prayers explicitly tell us that he and the Father are one – that he comes in the power of the Father. It is the characteristic of true power that it is clothed in humility. The strong father need not impress his infant son. So it is with us. In his words, Christ condescends to our level, for we cannot rise to his. In his actions, we see the power of God.

Often you hear Christ speak of the glory of God. His own glory is not his concern, but the glory of God the Father. Yet he is equal to the Father; therefore his glory must be equal. Who is concerned with proclaiming the glory of Christ? Must this not be his church? He lets go the glory of God, becoming a servant in human form, so that we might be saved – and proclaim his glory.

### Exemplary life

We see that in his prayer. He gives glory to God – but it is for our benefit he does so. By praying in this way, he makes it clear that he and the Father are one.

In that oneness we see that the glory of Christ is like that of God. This is why men construct great cathedrals for his name's sake. Taken correctly, it is not a monument to human pride, but a visible sign of the glory of God – as displayed by those who love him.

### Reactions in us

All this is well and good – but what should we do about it? We can at least learn by example:

- ✚ First, we should believe. We long for our own righteousness, our ceremonial cleansing. It is found only in Christ. Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness.
- ✚ As we believe, we should act. He commands that the stone be taken away. In faith we should believe that he knows what he's doing; in faith therefore we should act as if we do believe it. Even if it means rolling away the stone.
- ✚ We should love one another. Jesus shared the sorrow of Mary and Martha; we should do likewise with each other. We may not be able to work the miracles, but the world should see that we love one another – so that they might believe, too.
- ✚ We should expect, as happened here, that the powers of this world will rise up against the church. Those who calculate without God cannot tolerate his interference – or his people.
- ✚ He has called Lazarus out of the grave. One day he will call us all out of the grave. Until then, let us watch for his return, and be faithful until he does.

## Perfume - John 12:1-9

It is the nature of John's Gospel that it fills in some of the gaps and things left unsaid in the synoptic Gospels. Matthew and Mark also describe this incident; but John's account is much more personal – it names names.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it. **"Leave her alone,"** Jesus replied. **"It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."** Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.

(Joh 12:1-9 NIV)

It should be noted that some see some discrepancies in the various accounts. We must, of course, allow for the fact that exact quotation is not common in ancient writing – no tape recorders. But it is instructive to examine some of the differences between the Gospels:

- ✚ Matthew and Mark make it that "the disciples" object to this. John is specific; it was Judas. Being Jesus' best friend, he may have felt the betrayal more keenly.
- ✚ Nor do they identify Mary. It is possible that this is because Mary was still alive when Matthew and Mark wrote, and either humility or danger to Mary from such writing prevented it. It's also possible that Matthew and Mark, writing to Jewish audiences in a Jewish culture, felt it more proper to leave out the name of a mere woman. John, writing in a Greek culture, may have felt otherwise.
- ✚ The next event in John's Gospel is the Triumphal Entry. In Matthew and Mark, the next episode is Judas going to the priests to betray Jesus. Thus it is that many see such envy in Judas.
- ✚ Matthew places the meal in the house of one "Simon the Leper." Such a man (undoubtedly healed by Jesus, or he could not attend his own banquet) would be a gracious host. It is likely that this is somewhat similar to a church pot luck supper; all the women would take a hand in serving.
- ✚ Matthew records for us (Mark too) Jesus saying which honors Mary to this day: "Let her alone. She has done a beautiful thing to me." As we shall see, this might be the theme of the passage.

### The Character of Judas

Of all the people in the New Testament, none is such an enigma as the man named Judas Iscariot. How a man could spend three years in the company of the Holy One and then betray him seems well beyond our minds. We can catch but a glimpse of "why" in this passage; but there are lessons nonetheless.

### His treatment

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Judas is this: that Christ, the omniscient, treated him like the other disciples. There is no record that Christ treated him the worse for what he was going to do. Despite the fact that Jesus must have known, he treats Judas like all the others, as far as we know.

There is wisdom in this. It tells us that the church ought to treat sinners as we do Christians – for all Christians are sinners too. Our Lord’s forbearance to Judas should be an example to us all.

### Mary and Judas

Indeed, it is an interesting comparison, Mary and Judas. Dare we speculate a little and see if we can peer into Judas’ heart?

- ✦ Judas brings up what he considers a better use for the money. Jesus does not rebuke his hypocrisy (they are, after all, in public) but rather commends Mary. Can you see what envy that would have provoked in Judas? That a mere woman could be so highly praised, especially after his pious suggestion of giving to the poor – it is a bitter thing to take. Bitterness is the breeding ground of envy.
- ✦ It’s clear that the love of money is in Judas’ heart. But see how indifferent to this is Mary! It seems that she had plenty of it (the perfume is quite expensive) but that it did not rule over her. Nor did it tempt her. Judas is a man owned by money.
- ✦ But most of all there is this: Mary is not afraid to give Jesus everything she has or is. Judas has only measured devotion.

### The treatment of sinners

Our Lord gives us an example here. In the case of the worst of sinners, the one who betrayed the innocent Lamb of God, we see how Jesus treats him – or rather, does not treat him:

- ✦ He does not audit the books. He does not go looking into Judas’ affairs, for he knows that all of his disciples are sinners. That being said, the specific sins need no particular explanation. Similarly, does the church do well to investigate new members to make sure their sins are only of the acceptable sort?
- ✦ He does not rebuke him in public. He could denounce Judas to the other disciples, but he rather would wait. It is an early form of church discipline – which starts with the one on one contact in private.
- ✦ He does not condemn him for what he is about to do. Rather, even to the last minute in the garden, he treats him as a friend in the hope of conquering his pride and securing his repentance.

### Mary

If there is one essential difference between the two, it is this: Mary’s worship of God knows no limits. She has discovered the joy of abandonment. Judas is trying to be proportionate; no proportions can satisfy infinity.

### Sacrificial Worship

So that you might understand her actions better, you must know something about the culture of the time. In our time women regularly parade themselves in clothes that a hundred years ago would have shamed a prostitute. The idea of a “male only” gathering is now restricted to bachelor parties and such. Then, it was unthinkable that a mere woman would participate in the important things of life – such as this dinner given in honor of Jesus. Cooking and cleaning should suffice for them.

So we can see that it would surprise the guests that Mary would actually participate publicly. More than that, she would shock the guests by letting her hair down in front of a man who was not her husband. It would be viewed as a gesture of complete abandonment.

Martha, her sister, is being reasonable about things. She's serving the meal. But from her last rebuke she has learned that she should not hinder Mary when Jesus is around. There is something in Mary that Martha just can't reach.

Look again at the Scripture. Do you see the phrase, "pure nard?" The word for pure in that phrase is *pistici*. It is the word from which Greek gets its word for faith. Mary has that extraordinary purity of faith which yields a soul devoted to Jesus Christ. The Father seeks such worshipers, for they worship him in spirit and in truth.

### Devotional Giving

There are three tests of true devotional giving – such as Mary shows here.

- ✚ From the world's viewpoint, the sacrifice is a waste, a prodigal sacrifice. We can recall the thousands of tons of gold that David acquired so that his son Solomon could line the walls of the temple with it.
- ✚ From the giver's point of view, it must be extremely costly. We recall the widow's two small coins in the offering. Not very valuable from the monetary point of view, but all she had. She could have offered one of them – but she gave them both. She trusted God for everything else.
- ✚ Indeed, devotional giving always carries with it the possibility that the giver could have given less – and the world would still have approved. Devotional giving is the opposite of conventional giving. Devotional giving says, "If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't help."

### Lessons for the Church

This passage is often used as a fine example of devotion to Christ – but we seldom hear just what the speaker would have us do. Here are a few lessons which we might take home:

#### How should the church treat sinners?

We need to remember that we are all sinners – Christians are the ones who have turned around and are following the Lord, but we're sinners still. We should therefore take lesson from Jesus and treat the lost thus:

- ✚ We should not concern ourselves with finding out what their sins should be. We know they are sinners, and therefore lost. We should not judge them, but introduce them to the Savior. As Paul said, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?"<sup>38</sup>
- ✚ We rebuke to repair – to bring the sinner back to God, not to proclaim our own righteousness. So it is that we rebuke in private, lest the temptation to pride overwhelm the tender mercy of the Lord.
- ✚ Indeed, we are ambassadors of reconciliation, not condemnation. Our attitude should always start with the fact that we too are sinners.

#### First things first

One of the surest ways to kill a church is to put the works in this world about the worship. We pay very little attention to the importance of worship, but important it is. John remembers in this instance how the aroma of the perfume filled the room. It is a picture of what we should be doing. The worship life of a saint comes **before** the life of service. The first commandment is to love the Lord your

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Only then is the command to love your neighbor as yourself given. First things first.

How do we do this?

- ✚ In prayer – the sweet time of bringing our entire life to the Lord.
- ✚ In praise – in the joy of music, the adoration of the tongue, we set ourselves in proper relationship to God.
- ✚ In devotion – spending time thinking about the greatness of God; reading the thoughts of those who know him better; time spent getting to know the greatness of the Lord.
- ✚ In reverence for his name – so that you keep it holy.

#### Sacrificial living

Once you have established sacrificial worship, you will then find yourself inevitably practicing sacrificial living.

- ✚ The poor are always with us; therefore, the question of how we treated them is also always with us. May it please God to find us with a ready answer; one that says, “I cared for them as I would care for you.”
- ✚ This is not a matter of giving from your excess; rather, giving from what is important to you. “I will not offer a sacrifice that costs me nothing.”<sup>39</sup>
- ✚ When you complain of the loss and pain, remember to look to the Cross – remembering what your Lord gave for you. There is the standard of your giving; there your Lord gave his all that you might be released from bondage. Consider the example – then go and do likewise.

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<sup>39</sup> 1 Chronicles 21:24; said by King David

## Triumphal Entry - John 12:12-26

Depending upon the wealth, location and bravery of the congregation, one of the delights of a Christian upbringing is the chance to participate in the recreation of the Triumphal Entry. To be six years old, with a palm branch larger than you are (rather restricted to warmer climates) and a chance to pet the donkey before the service, is a grand thing. Indeed, there is a sense in which we understand this better as children – for children know that this is for the praise of Christ, while the adults might wonder, “Why?” Let us examine the Scriptures.

### Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" Jesus found a young donkey and sat upon it, as it is written, "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him. Now the crowd that was with him when he called Lazarus from the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to spread the word. Many people, because they had heard that he had given this miraculous sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!" Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast.

[\(Joh 12:12-20 NIV\)](#)

One reason why this passage makes great pageantry and little sense to us is that we are not familiar with the symbols that these people would have recognized.



Here's one you recognize, I'm sure. Whether you wouldn't set foot in one, or think it the only place to go (when you have the grandchildren with you), you certainly recognize this symbol. In our time and place, it is well known. There are symbols in their time that they would have recognized with equal ease. We don't, because as a society we ignore the Scriptures (especially the Old Testament). They were steeped in the Scriptures, and they would have recognized these items:

- ✚ The use of the East Gate – the one nearest the Temple – is the gate which (in Ezekiel's prophecy) belongs to “the Prince” and is to be kept shut because the glory of God comes through that gate.
- ✚ He rode on the foal of a donkey. The donkey is the symbol of a king, coming in peace. A conqueror would have ridden a horse.
- ✚ The foal in question had never been used for any agricultural purpose – which was required of a sin offering.
- ✚ As he entered, the “Hosanna” we hear is actually known as the Conqueror's Psalm – the one sung for Judas Maccabbeus when he entered the city and liberated it.

Do you see what these things would have meant to the ordinary citizen of the time? The Messiah has been promised for over a thousand years. Here comes a man whose entrance is very much like that which they would have expected – just as much as you would expect to see Ronald McDonald® at that restaurant.

## Presentation

From the symbols and songs, we can see that Jesus is presenting himself to the people as being the Messiah, for he claims to be these things:

- ✦ He claims to be a **king**. That's what the donkey was for; formal presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as King of the Jews.
- ✦ Because he accepts the crowd's "Hosanna," he is claiming to be **savior**. "Hosanna" means "save now."
- ✦ He comes to them in the character of a **prophet** – particularly in the sense that he has a message to deliver. Nothing is more characteristic of the Old Testament prophet than conflict with the ruler of the day. Jesus certainly has shown this with the Pharisees.
- ✦ By his comments about the stones crying out, he claims to be the **Creator**. No one but God the Creator could make such a claim.
- ✦ He comes primarily to be their **sacrifice for sin**. It is Passover, the time at which the Jews remember the Exodus and how God passed over those houses who had the blood sacrifice on their doorposts.

That's who he claimed to be, in symbolism clearly understood by the people of the day. Indeed, we can see from their reaction that most understood his claim quite well – even if they rejected it.

## Reaction

Three groups of people see this, and react in different ways:

- ✦ The crowd sees him as the conquering King – which fits their preconceived notion of what the Messiah will do. They ignore the passages in the Old Testament which deal with his sacrifice. This is "wishful interpretation."
- ✦ The disciples see the same symbolism – but knowing Jesus, they can't believe him as conqueror. Sometimes these boys were a little slow in the uptake. They know of his greatness – but they don't see the objective of this. Therefore, they are confused.
- ✦ The Pharisees, enlightened by the Old Testament, see most clearly what he is claiming to be. Those who should know best, reject their Messiah.

The fascinating thing to be observed is that this rejection is essential for the spread of the Gospel to the world. Indeed, Jesus now recognizes that the time has come for the Gospel to go forth.

## The Greeks

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

[\(Joh 12:20-22 NIV\)](#)

### The Greeks seek Jesus

The specific Greek word used here tells us that these particular Greeks were what were called "God-fearers." They did not accept the Old Testament Law – but they worshiped the same God. The Jews accepted this, for the Law was given to none but the Jews. There were certain things that were prohibited to these Greeks; one of them was entrance to the Temple. A low wall surrounded the outer court of the Temple (the "Court of Women") which prohibited those not circumcised from entering. As they cannot go in, they ask the disciple with the Greek sounding name, Philip, to have Jesus meet with them.

Philip thinks he knows the answer. On a number of occasions, Jesus has told those who are not Jews that he has come only to the lost house of Israel. He thinks these men will be rejected, too. But he has compassion on them. So he gets his brother, Andrew, (strength in numbers) and goes to Jesus.

Why did these particular Greeks get this treatment? Perhaps Andrew saw in them what the Lord did:

- ✦ These Greeks came to worship – which necessarily precedes all actions of the faith. They were not the idly curious, or the philosophically inclined, nor were they the ones who (like people today) would look upon Jesus as a religious oddity.
- ✦ They also understood that true religion is not a case of “what” – but of “who.” Thus they do not approach the Lord themselves, but seek the help of those who are his friends.
- ✦ Ultimately, their contact with him is “friend to friend.”

The great curiosity in this passage is what Jesus did not do. He did not announce great things to the Greeks, nor did he ignore them. He announces great things to the world – because they have come. How is this?

- ✦ The Greeks, symbolically, represent all the thinkers beyond the Jewish culture. We frequently see in Paul’s writing that Christ is Lord of “both Jews and Greeks.” Combined with the Jews, they represent the whole world.
- ✦ In particular, Greek culture represented science and philosophy – whose basic tenet is the superiority of man; man the decider of all things.
- ✦ Unlike previous occasions, where Jesus has rejected those outside the House of Israel, Jesus takes this group to be the signal of the time. It is as if these particular Greeks are the alarm clock of history, announcing the great change from God’s relationship only with the Jews to his love for all mankind.
- ✦ This, by the way, explains the answer that appears not to be an answer. Jesus, as is his custom, answers the question they should have asked.

### Loving and Losing

Jesus replied, **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. "Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.**

**(Joh 12:23-27 NIV)**

### Speaking about God

The answer doesn’t seem to answer, does it? Jesus takes their “we would see Jesus” and makes it the herald of a new age. Then he explains it in a parable which must have seemed more mystery than explanation.

The key to understanding this: remember, Jesus is God. As such, we cannot describe the limitless One with our limited minds. The technique Jesus taught us for such situations is that of the parable, the metaphor, the simile. His ways are far above ours, and we must use these pictures to understand that which we can.

### Power of Paradox

So what does it mean, this grain of wheat? How is it that saving your life loses it, and losing it saves it?

Consider, for the moment, a true hypochondriac – a man totally consumed with worrying about his health. The more he visits the doctors, the more apparent it becomes that he has a mental problem. The very thing he worries about – his health – is sacrificed to his obsession about it.

Or consider the man who is thoroughly greedy. The more he gains, the more he wants. Like a man drinking salt water to quench his thirst, he can only long for “more.”

Both of these men are shaping their attention to the things of this world. Both – if they were to “die to this world” would be much better off. The greedy man might indeed have less money – but greater joy. The hypochondriac will have fewer pills – and better health.

To show us this principle – dying to the world so that we might live to Christ – our Lord does two things:

- ✚ He proclaims this truth to us by parables, so that we might understand it clearly, and then in plain language, so that we might not mistake his meaning.
- ✚ More than that, he becomes the example of his word. He will fall to the ground only to rise up in much greater power.

### The Paradox

If we honor ourselves, we get what we bargained for: ourselves. No death, no growth. If we honor him and serve him, we get the reward of God Almighty. We, therefore, should imitate him. He came to bear our sins on the Cross, to die so that we might live. We are rightly his servants; by his compassion his friends, and by the grace of God his brothers and sisters. We are not greater than he; rather we are less. He came in obedience to God the Father; the example could not be clearer. If we die with him, we will reign with him.

### The example

Would you like to see how this works? Take a look at our example.

- ✚ Christ died a shameful death, the execution due a criminal. In that death, God the Father brought glory to his name.
- ✚ If we will die to self, the Father will reward us in the same way.
- ✚ But only if we, like Jesus, are completely committed to him. The servant is not greater than the Master, and the Master was completely obedient and devoted to God the Father.

### Lessons to take home

It is not wise to leave you with such an abstract concept. Therefore, gentle reader, permit me a few questions:

- ✚ Do you proclaim him as King? In particular, do you proclaim him as King by the way in which you act and speak?

- ✚ Do you proclaim him as Savior? Most of us do – as long as it doesn't involve obedience, or imitation of his ways. Do you proclaim him as Savior in all ways?
- ✚ Do you know him as Prophet? Or do you go through life expecting him to be as surprised as you are by events? Should you not rather count on him who holds the future to work all things together for good?
- ✚ Do you honor him as Creator? Do his wonders awe you? Does the sweep of nature serve as a picture of his power?
- ✚ Do you honor him as our Sacrifice? What are your thoughts during the Lord's Supper, for instance? There is more. Let us learn from our Greeks:

- ✚ Do you approach Jesus in an attitude of worship, or an attitude of one who "is entitled?"
- ✚ When the opportunity arises, are you like Philip, taking your friend with your friends to your great Friend?
- ✚ Do you seek his face? Or do you want and worship the impersonal God who can be bribed with prayer?

And finally, learn from your Master.

- ✚ If you are partially his, how can he be all yours?
- ✚ Is your relationship with him one of devotion, or mutual back-scratching?
- ✚ Most important, are you prepared to abandon your claim on yourself, giving it up to him? Whoever loses his life for Christ's sake shall find it. Where do you find your life?

I cannot forbear a personal point. My life is best when I abandon all care and give it to my Lord. When I make sacrifices for him, not investments, my love is at its height – and my life is most real, most joyous, most satisfying. The joy of abandoning yourself to him is seldom spoken of today. A pity, that. We have given up the gold of the kingdom for the brass of Churchianity. A very poor trade indeed, no matter how prudent it appears.

Seek the pearl of great price. Nothing else satisfies like Jesus.

## Light in Troubled Times - John 12:27-50

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. The crowd spoke up, "We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of Man'?" Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light." When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them." Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."  
(Joh 12:27-50 NIV)

### The Inner Christ

One of the reasons John's Gospel is so beloved of Christians is for the very intimate, personal view that John gives us of Jesus. His "heart is troubled." Why? He is, after all, the Son of God, God in the flesh.

True enough – but he is also Son of Man, completely human. Ordinary human beings fear death, and they fear dying – especially in a painful manner. He knows what is coming, and he is not indifferent to the pain and suffering. It is most certainly the case: for him to be the Mediator between us and God, he must know what suffering is; he must know what death is. He therefore must suffer and die like the rest of us. The bridge between man and God has two pillars, one on each side. The pillar of humanity includes suffering and death.

### The choice

He has, of course, a choice that we don't have. He can decide that he's had enough of this and "abort the mission." It is in his humanity that he must decide whether or not to use the options open to

God alone. But see his attitude! He shows us the attitude of one monk, whose prayer during sickness went something like this:

Oh Lord, if it brings glory to your name to heal me quickly, heal me quickly.

If it brings yet more glory to your name to heal me slowly, heal me slowly.

Should it bring even more glory to your name that I should die quickly, let me die quickly.

Should it bring even greater glory to your name that I should die slowly, let me die slowly.

You can see the parallel for us. Often in our prayers we will ask for the cup to pass from us. We are but human, a mist, a vapor. But if we will raise ourselves up to press for the glory of God, what greater things can be done! Courage is not the absence of fear; it is not the denial of fear; it is the overcoming of fear.

### The Voice

One thing is characteristic of the Good Shepherd – even as he approaches his death he is concerned for his sheep. The voice is not to strengthen him – that will come later, in the garden – but to benefit those around. Christ cares for his own.

It also is the voice of warning. Even for those who do not believe, there is the warning voice. The time is coming when the world will discover judgment – based upon what they have heard.

### On Judgment

Christ now brings to us to the concept of judgment. His death will bring judgment to the world. How?

- ✦ By his death he completes the Old Testament Law, ushering in the new covenant (New Testament). Upon its completion, its followers are liable to a final accounting.
- ✦ His death now prepares the way for the Day of Wrath – the Day of Judgment. For he must be sacrificed before the law can be completed; but once the law is complete, judgment can begin at any time.
- ✦ His death also opens the door of God's mercy. His death provides the means by which we can escape the wrath of God. God no longer offers the law, but now he offers grace. To escape his grace is to volunteer for hell. It is now true: God sends no one to hell – they're all volunteers.

### Satan is to be driven out

As Christ taught us in parables, the strong man must be bound if you are to rob his house. Satan is bound indeed at the Cross. Why?

- ✦ First, as prince of this world, he has killed an innocent man. All others that he has put to death were sinners, short of the glory of God. But this man is innocent, yet – knowing that – Satan (in the form of "the system") put him to death with due process. For this the judgment will come to him.
- ✦ But even now his power is limited. For the Cross brings in Pentecost – and the Holy Spirit. What is evil is to be driven out by what is holy.
- ✦ Indeed, as Christ saw at the return of the Seventy, Satan is fallen. No longer able to deceive us in the presence of Christ, his doom is sure. But not without some interesting events leading up to that.

### Draw all men

It is not sufficient that he be driven out; that would leave a spiritual vacuum. As our Lord taught, this is to invite worse treatment. So it is our Lord draws all men to himself by the Cross:

- ✦ First, the Cross is the sign of his mercy and love. You may attract men for a short while with greed; for a long while with pride – but mercy and love do not lose their attraction even in eternity.
- ✦ The Cross leads to Pentecost – and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's task is to convict the world of sin and judgment, thus pointing the way for all who will to receive salvation.
- ✦ The Cross is the inspiration of the church – and by the way we love each other do all men know that we are Christians. By our good works men are drawn to Christ.
- ✦ Finally, and most powerfully, by the Resurrection itself does Christ draw all men. He alone has conquered both sin and death; he alone has what all men need.

### Walk in the Light

Once again we are taught to walk in the light, for in a little while we won't have it. There is a parallel for us. Which of us is guaranteed tomorrow? We often see people die after long illness; but we also know that there are those who seemed in good health when God calls them home. The warning is for us, too.

What does it mean, to "walk in the light," as Jesus teaches here?

- ✦ First, and most obvious, it means that we are to *walk*. This is not a matter of observation, of going to church and listening alone, but of doing. It is a matter of works.
- ✦ But there is no thought of neglecting faith to do so, for we are taught to "put your trust in the light." It is a matter of faith. So that our works may not be empty, we need faith.
- ✦ Faith without works is indeed dead – but let your works be inspired and led by the God your faith reveals. Do not perform "random acts of kindness." Rather, let your kindness and love be purposeful. It is easy to be kind to the stranger who has never insulted you. Kindness to those who have is much more difficult.
- ✦ Indeed, we are to practice this so well that we become "sons of the light." If you practice something long enough, you tend to get rather good at it. You may indeed become so good you are identified with it – we call Babe Ruth a baseball player, Thomas Edison an inventor. The test of those who call themselves Christians is this: are they persecuted in this world as their Lord was? It's a sign that you no longer care what people think of you – only what God thinks of you.

The Scripture now tells us that Jesus hid himself from them. This is not because they were about to stone him – but because he knew what was in their hearts. It is a sad thing to know that something is going to happen like this – and know that hardness of heart prevents any cure. Isaiah's words were written in sadness.

You see, of course, that Isaiah did not "make" them hard of heart; he simply foresaw it. The mystery of prophecy is great – but the decisions are still ours.

### When a Man Believes in Me

There is a chain of belief stated here which is important to us. Let us examine its links:

- ✦ If you believe in Jesus, you believe in God. That seems simple enough – but it requires us to know that God is three – and yet one. But Jesus walked around the planet; people saw him – it makes it easier for us.

- ✦ If you see Jesus, you see God. Jesus is the “exact representation” of God. As God the Father cannot be seen (physically) we understand this to be the spiritual sense. But how does one see God? Only the pure in heart know that.
- ✦ In this we see a great mystery revealed. No one sees God; he is mysterious, beyond our comprehension. We are the clay; he is the potter; how can we understand him? Only if he sends messengers to us. Indeed, in Christ, the messenger is the message, for God has walked among us. Our minds cannot wrap around God the Father – but we can know God the Son, for he is also Son of Man.

### The Last Judgment

The coming of the Son of God carries with it a somber implication: judgment. The judge is light with the offender who is truly ignorant – but throws the book at those who are learned in the law. Here Christ lays out the principles of the Day of Judgment.

- ✦ Judgment is by the word you have. If you have heard the word of Christ, and rejected it, then you will be judged for that.
- ✦ Indeed, this is fair – because what Christ teaches is what God commands. They are one. Therefore, to reject Christ is to reject God, and rebel against him.  
God sends no one to hell – they’re all volunteers.

### Glory to God

We began this lesson with glory to God; it seems fitting that we should end it that way. How is it that Christ overcomes his fears? Is it not for the love he has for God the Father – and his desire to glorify God’s name? And are we not the imitators of Christ? Therefore, should we not conduct ourselves to glorify God’s name?

But how? What can I do which is so high and holy?

- ✦ First, there are the works of charity done in his name. Let the world see the difference in the actions of Christian and non-Christian. This is one reason we need to encourage each other to such good works.
- ✦ Next, there is personal purity – for only the pure in heart shall see God. Is your character a glory to God?
- ✦ Your mouth should follow your life; let there be praise flowing from it.
- ✦ There is also the matter of sacrifice; if the Old Testament teaches nothing else, it teaches that. Sacrifice – not just giving to Goodwill that which you were going to throw away, but denying yourself something so that others may be blessed.
- ✦ Finally, call on him in the time of trouble – so that the world might know (and you might confirm to yourself) that he is worthy of the glory you give Him.

## Washing the Feet - John 13:1-17

It is a stunning episode. It so clearly shows what Jesus taught about servant leadership that the best instruction on the subject is found simply in the passage itself. We shall add what little we can to your understanding, but first see the lesson presented by the Master:

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, **"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."** "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."** "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered, **"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you."** For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** he asked them. **"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."**  
(Joh 13:1-17 NIV)

### Timing

It is said that the secret to comedy is timing. Perhaps that's the secret to great drama as well; it just might have something to do with teaching, too.

### Background

To understand the teaching more completely, we need to know how to take a bath – in the first century. It was a rare home that had its own bath. Plumbing, as we know it, had yet to make itself felt in the average home. But you could take a bath; indeed, the bath houses were often the negotiation rooms of ancient Roman and Greek culture. A bath house was a public – very public – place. After cleaning your body by oiling it and scraping it (no soap, remember?) you then went into a large pool which was built over a fire pit. Slaves kept the fire going; water flowed through the bath to keep things clean. So it is that a person could bathe quite nicely.

But afterwards there was the walk home. Your feet, so recently cleaned, got dirty again. Here we run into another ancient custom: washing the feet. When you got home, the lowest servant in the house was detailed to wash your feet. This completed the bathing experience, so to speak.

To this custom we must now add the Passover – the feast which defines the nation of Israel. This is the memorial of the night in which the Angel of Death passed over the nation – and began their

voyage to the promised land. All has been prearranged this Passover night, right down to the meal and menu. So, on this most memorable night, Jesus begins matters by washing the feet of his disciples.

### Why now?

It is clear from Peter's reaction that this is the first time Jesus has done this. Why did he wait until this night?

- ✚ First, "the time had come." Jesus knows that the Crucifixion is near; following that will be the establishment of his Church. In that church these men will have high position and honor. He wants them to know what that means in the kingdom of God.
- ✚ Next, because of his great love for his disciples. He would not leave them without this most important lesson – the same disciples who bickered about who would be greatest in the kingdom.
- ✚ Also, there is the matter of Judas Iscariot. Jesus knows what he is going to do – but he will not let him do it without every chance to repent. Jesus washes Judas' feet as well.
- ✚ We might see it as a diminishing of God's glory; Jesus sees it as fitting to one who came from God and is now returning. Because of his great power, he can gently serve his disciples.
- ✚ Knowing that God has placed all things in his hands, Jesus turns those same hands to the example of service. With authority comes responsibility; with responsibility, service.

### He washes their feet

What does it all mean? Why does he do this? What's going on? It's pretty obvious that the disciples all assumed someone else would do this (though they didn't expect it would be Jesus). There is a symbolic side to this too.

It symbolizes, for the Christian, the repentance *after* baptism. It's the answer to the question, "What do I do if I sin after I'm baptized?" The answer is found here: your feet must be cleaned. Not in the literal sense, but in the sense of repentance.

You can do this for yourself – which is greatly encouraged ("examine yourself" – ever heard that in Communion meditations?) You can have someone else help you with it ("confess your sins one to another"). Either way, the lesson is clear: by such cleansing you show your repentance – and accept the Lord's forgiveness of your sins. "You are clean," says Jesus, and the meaning still stands today.

### Authority, Responsibility, Submission

#### The Servant King

This is the clearest portrayal of Christ, the Servant King. The son of man did not come to be served, but to serve. Here Christ passes on the concept to those who will be leaders in the church.

- ✚ He shows them the basis of authority – which is responsibility. In this world we obtain authority and delegate responsibility. In the kingdom of God, you are given responsibility (the Spirit appoints some to be teachers, for instance) and from that responsibility you derive your just authority.
- ✚ Such authority benefits those under authority. Our Lord has the authority to forgive sins; we are the beneficiaries.
- ✚ Most of all is the lesson on self importance. In our nation, which used to be a Christian nation, we still refer to our office holders (occasionally) as "public servants." There was a time when a President could proclaim that "a public office is a public trust" – and not be sneered at for saying it.

This idea, that the official is the servant, not the master, of the people comes directly from the Servant Kingdom of God.

### “You call me Lord”

We do, in fact, call Jesus “Lord.” I’ve heard it. I’ve heard it in song, less now than before. Indeed, some of the most stirring of Christian music proclaims his lordship. Even in our speech we sometimes refer to Jesus as Lord. But what does “lord” mean to us?

- ✚ For some of us it means that he is so powerful he can solve all my problems. We like that.
- ✚ For some, it means that we are set right with God. We like that.
- ✚ But does it mean that we are to be obedient to him? We don’t like that.

Think about it: when did you last hear the word “obey” or “obedience” used with respect to Jesus? Why? With his apostles, Jesus could humbly recall to them their own words, calling him “Lord.” Could he say the same for us?

### “Rightly so”

It seems that lordship is something important, for Jesus has drawn their attention to it on this night of nights. To what end? So that he may wash their feet – that is, provide for their cleansing upon their repentance.

Remember, God can have nothing to do with the wicked – except to destroy them. We must be clean if we are to appear before Almighty God. How can this be done? Only because Christ intercedes for us, on the basis of his sacrifice at Calvary.

But see how effective this is! We are taught that he is “faithful and just” to forgive us, if we repent. Note that the phrase is not “condescending and sneering.” His forgiveness is ours based upon his faithfulness and his justice. His justice, in that the price has already been paid. His faithfulness, in that he is obedient to his Father – just as we should be obedient to him.

### The Humility of Jesus

There is a curious fact shown in this passage. The writer, the Apostle John, stresses the divinity and glory of Christ. His words about him are those of praise for the God he is. But Jesus’ actions are those of humility. The episode itself establishes the humility of Jesus. Indeed, we can see the evidence of this:

- ✚ Evidently, until he got to Peter, he did this in silence. Silence, which befits the lowest of servants, those not counted worthy of being heard.
- ✚ Even when he must correct Peter, he does so gently.
- ✚ Finally, see how he says, “You call me Lord,…” It is as if he is reluctant to take on the title, until they understand what it means.

### He washed Judas’ feet

If there is any one thing which shows forth the humility of Jesus, it is this: He washed the feet of Judas. He understood quite clearly what Judas was about to do (“not all of you are clean”), but he did it for him just the same.

Why? Why didn't he run the man out of the room? Is it not because he was giving the man one last chance to repent? He treated him like the rest of the disciples so that he might remain one of the disciples.

It shows us a lesson or two:

- ✚ First, is there a sinner so vile that repentance cannot save? The unforgivable sin is to deny the work of the Spirit – the conviction of sin. All else can be forgiven.
- ✚ It also shows us that our service to others is not for their worthiness, however great we may think that is – but it is for love, for God is love.

#### **The Imitation of Christ**

One cannot leave this passage without thinking of the example set. Christ explicitly tells us he did this to set an example for us. What may we learn from that example?

- ✚ First, that our attitude should be that of a servant of God, for we are in the kingdom of the Servant King.
- ✚ We should accept all who come, for we are sinners like them. It seems to be the only qualification for being a Christian – and also the best of reasons to become one.
- ✚ Especially with regard to those close to us, we should always leave the door open to repentance.
- ✚ And, whenever we experience a moment of glory, remember that we are servants to God Most High – and act accordingly.

## Betrayal - John 13:18-38

We now continue in the upper room with the departure of Judas – and the warning of the disciples.

<sup>18</sup>“I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’<sup>o</sup>”

<sup>19</sup>“I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. <sup>20</sup>I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.”

<sup>21</sup>After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.”

<sup>22</sup>His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. <sup>23</sup>One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. <sup>24</sup>Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”

<sup>25</sup>Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. <sup>27</sup>As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

“What you are about to do, do quickly,” Jesus told him, <sup>28</sup>but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. <sup>29</sup>Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. <sup>30</sup>As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

<sup>31</sup>When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup>If God is glorified in him,<sup>o</sup> God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup>“My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

<sup>34</sup>“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?”

Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.”

<sup>37</sup>Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”

<sup>38</sup>Then Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!

## Judas

We begin with one of the enigmas of the New Testament: Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. Since the foundation of the church, his name has been a synonym for one who betrays. We are given little history about the man, but there are some things we do know.

### Christ knew

It is clear from this and other passages that Jesus knew exactly who his betrayer would be. It seems odd, therefore, that he would not have announced this fact – after all, Judas has already been to the priests to get the money – so why does Jesus not announce this fact?

- ✦ First, because the fact is long established – in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Jesus' purpose here is not to proclaim Judas guilty; his purpose is to link prophecy with fulfillment, so that his disciples might believe.
- ✦ Indeed, he tells the twelve – so that they will understand *after* the Resurrection. He wants no bold plan to rescue him; rather, he wants to do the Father's will.
- ✦ He speaks here of acceptance – he who accepts the Christian, accepts Christ, he who accepts Christ accepts God. Is this not a warning? If it is true of acceptance, is it not true of denial? And if denial, how much more betrayal? That last is important; for the disciples know how close denial is to betrayal. And they know what is in their own hearts.
- ✦ Perhaps, indeed, this is the last warning. But even for a sin so serious, for a betrayal of the innocent, Christ forces no one to accept him. Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling.

### Do so quickly

There is a curious phrase in here. Jesus knows what Judas will do, and tells him to do so quickly.....why?

- ✦ Perhaps it's like pulling a bandage off – sometimes it's best to rip it off quickly and get the sting over with. There must be sadness in Jesus' heart; why would he want it to linger? This is especially true in light of all that Jesus will tell them this night.
- ✦ In keeping with the prophecy, Jesus must be betrayed *this very night*. So Judas must not dawdle. Even in evil, all things belong to God.
- ✦ Jesus is merciful. Even for the traitor, he would not parade one man's sins before his fellows.

### Hospitality and treason

Christ identifies his betrayer – with hospitality. Nothing so struck the ancient writers about this as much as the fact that Judas shared bread from Jesus. It is a gesture of hospitality, of favor from the host to the guest. Jesus, in a common symbol of the time, welcomes Judas into his presence. By the rules of courtesy (which persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century in this culture) Judas is obligated to Jesus – as being his guest. At the very least he should refrain from ill chosen words – and certainly is not permitted to betray him. The gesture is a telling one.

Judas leaves. John, the great writer of the New Testament, paints the picture with four simple words: “and it was night.” How clearly does he portray the blackness of heart in Judas!

But look: Judas leaves – and then the glory of God is revealed. John the writer has shown us a triumph. In the presence of evil God's glory is not revealed; when the evil one departs, then Jesus can speak of glory.

### The Disciples

It's clear from this and other accounts that some, at least, of the disciples, knew that Judas was the betrayer. So why didn't they beat him to a pulp (in a decent Christian manner, of course)?

- ✦ It may be that he left so quickly they didn't have the chance.
- ✦ More than that, they're having trouble believing that any of them could do such a thing. They're in shock at the thought of it.
- ✦ But then, as they examine themselves, each one asks, "Is it I?" They have learned what is in the heart of man. A season of self-examination has arrived.

### Is it I?

The plain fact is this: all of us are sinners, and therefore capable of incredible wickedness and evil. That's a fact. That's not a question. The question is, "What are we going to do about it?"

Notice, please, one thing: despite (or perhaps because) of their feelings of loyalty, they have learned that Jesus is a better judge of human character than they are. He says one will betray; they take it as fact. They do what human beings usually do when at a loss: they stare at each other, They're looking for help, and not finding it.

There is no help, if not in Christ. Sinners we are, one and all. They knew it too; they knew what mankind is capable of. They had struggled against sin, and knew its power. Now, they see its fruit.

### Peter

Peter, having been rebuked in the matter of washing the feet, is hesitant to ask for another rebuke. So he takes the back door. You must picture that these men are lying down, angled up to the table. Peter asks; John rolls backwards until his head is at Jesus' chest. The question can now be whispered.

Jesus points out the man – so that they may know that all is in God's hands. But see one thing: betrayal is close by – within hand's reach.

### Prevention

We should be horrified at this betrayal. But we should also take steps to see to it that we do not fall into any such sin.

- ✦ The matter is first one of prayer: "Lead us not into temptation." Some of us are sure we cannot fall; such surety is pride.
- ✦ Second, we should seek no praise. Judas, after all, was a highly competent man – we know that from the fact that he was placed in charge of the money. Somebody thought he was capable.
- ✦ Last, we must remember not to meddle in things above us. So often we are concerned with when this or that prophecy will be fulfilled that we neglect the tasks at hand.

### New Commandment

New? How can the commandment to "love one another" be considered new? It is clearly stated in the Old Testament.

The newness is in this: "as I have loved you." There's the difference! No longer is love to be limited by our own capability; we are to love like Christ loved us? How can we do this? Only by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But what does this mean? Let's take it logically: just how does Christ love us? What are the characteristics of his love for us?

- ✦ He loves us *first* – even when we did not love him, he loved us. His love is not conditioned on our love. So we should love each other.
- ✦ He loves us *despite our sin*. Even though we are not perfect, and he is, he still loves us. Can we say the same of each other, even in the closest of human relationships?
- ✦ He loves us *sacrificially* – he is willing to give up life itself that we might live. Are we so sacrificial even in our own families?
- ✦ He loves us *continually* – God is good, all the time. His love for us does not depend upon his mood.
- ✦ He loves us *humbly* – not making a point of how great his love is, not setting himself up. Sometimes we are so proud to be so humble.

#### A sign to others

It is a curious – but very important – fact: the sign of the true church is found in how her sons and daughters love each other. This is the sign.

- ✦ The sign is not miracles. We often believe that one miracle would change our belief to certainty. Consider the ancient Israelites who saw the miracles wrought by Moses – and see too their rebellion. Miracles are not the sign of the true church.
- ✦ Nor are words: great preaching is not the sign of the true church. No matter how eloquent the preacher or the teacher, the spoken word does not signify the true church.
- ✦ But this love does: love that is so deep that it caused the one sinless man to die as our ransom. There is the true sign of the true church.

You and I are to love one another with the love so deep that it brought Jesus to the Cross. It sounds hard. But please remember: there is no glory without sacrifice.

#### Denial

It is unlikely that we will get the chance to betray our Lord; but we certainly will be given the chance to deny him. This must hurt him deeply; think how you feel when you overhear a “friend” laughing at you. Denial is done in words; Peter would deny him three times. Denial is also done in works. Remember how he will separate the sheep and the goats?

Words are bad enough; deeds are certainly fatal. It therefore is good for us to examine ourselves in this matter (commanded at communion) and see. The potential to deny our Lord is always there. We must build ourselves up in faith and grace so that we do not become those who praise him on Sunday and deny his very existence on Monday.

## The Way, The Truth, The Life - John 14:1-8

It is his last night before the Crucifixion. Jesus has much to say, and says it in a memorable way.

**"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."**  
(Joh 14:1-8 NIV)

### Trust

Chapters and verses in the Bible are a wonderful idea. They aid in memorization of the Scripture, provide ready reference points for scholars to debate, and in general help catalog and make useful the Bible. But the very act of dividing the Bible into chapters and verses also carries with it the risk of missing important connections. Such is the case here. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," says Jesus – but the circumstances are lost in the chapter heading.

The phrase is not a random one, nor the start of a new lesson from the Master. It is a reply – to the look on Peter's face when Jesus tells him that he will deny the Lord three times that very night. No doubt Peter was very upset by that prophecy – but he dares not deny it. The Lord has been right too many times.

Therefore, our Lord comforts Peter with the instruction. Now, if the leader is going to fall, what then of the lesser disciples? Were they not thinking through the possibility of their denial? If so, then, we can see the worry that Jesus is soothing. He tells them not to worry; he is preparing a place for all of them. They saw the night ahead as one which would make or break them; Jesus sees them all falling away – but ultimately turned back to him. Many rooms for many disciples; it is a comforting thought.

### Do not let your hearts be troubled

We sometimes think that our worries are inevitable and inescapable. But Jesus makes it clear: worrying is a choice. We let our hearts be troubled. We have a choice about it.

This is true, but most of us think we know the intelligent choice when it arrives. Consider, however, the ultimate in trouble: death. If you are a Christian, death holds no terrors, for you know that your Lord has conquered death. You are not afraid of death, for "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Now, if that is your great fear, should you not trust your Lord with the lesser fears as well? Will you remain serene in the face of death – and panic at losing your car keys? What is there to fear?<sup>40</sup> Is there anything which can separate us from God's love?

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<sup>40</sup> Most of us would answer, "public speaking." But are all of us called to that?

## Going away

In his comfort Christ tells them that he is going away. That's not very comforting. We can imagine how that felt to the disciples; they must have felt as if he were abandoning them. But he gives them good news:

- ✦ He's not going because his lease has expired. He's going for the purpose of welcoming them into new life. (More on this later)
- ✦ And, if he is preparing a home for them in the new creation, he tells them he will not fail them there either. He will come back to get them.

As we shall see, we benefit from both his coming and his going. He tells them that they know the way to these "many rooms." How often we know something – and forget that we know it. This is why preachers do so much more reminding than instructing. The worst of it is this: how often we forget our Lord, and attempt to tackle the world on our own. No wonder he calls us to assemble each week.

You will note in this passage, and those to follow, that the ones putting the questions are disciples from the outer group. It's as if Peter, James and John have nothing to say. It's not that they are bashful. But these men have seen the transfigured Christ, the Jesus in power. When he speaks of going away, they have a better understanding. So it is that the ones who ask the questions are men like ourselves, who have not seen – but believe.

## The Way

The phrase, "the way," is most commonly used in the physical sense.

- ✦ There are no freeway signs at this time. The way would be unmarked; you have to find it by inquiring – and trusting those who point you.
- ✦ You can't see the end of the way – it's just a path through the brush. It leads somewhere.
- ✦ There is danger on the way (remember the Good Samaritan on the Jericho road?)
- ✦ Usually, there is only one true way; the others all lead to a different destination. Picking the right one at the start of your journey is therefore most important.
- ✦ Most of all, it is a journey – an adventure. We still look at it this way today.

The parallel to Jesus being the way is quite accurate:

- ✦ You still need to trust those who point you on the way. The government puts up no signs directing you to God.
- ✦ As long as you are in this life, you will not see what the end will be. You must walk by faith; there is no other way.
- ✦ Danger you will have; false paths, false guides and the things of this world to consume you.
- ✦ There is only one right path. It's true – no one comes to the Father except by the Son.
- ✦ It is a journey, not a destination. The adventure is in the going and doing, not in the arriving. We are just poor, wayfaring strangers.

If this is so, then finding the way – the right way – is of utmost importance. How do we do that?  
By seeking the truth.

## The Truth

One of the most frequent phrases found in red letters in your Bible is this: “I tell you the truth.”<sup>41</sup> Telling the truth; caring for the truth and living it are a part of Christian character. As your mother told you, character counts.

### Truth – for those who do not love Jesus

I submit that you can tell a disciple of Jesus from the pagans of our world in a simple manner: the pagans handle the truth quite differently.

- ✦ They *suppress* the truth – and earn the wrath of God.<sup>42</sup> There is a reason that Christianity is the suppressed religion on our state’s college campuses these days.
- ✦ They *exchange* the truth – for a lie of their own choosing.<sup>43</sup> The Dalai Lama is welcome to speak in our colleges; Mother Theresa is not. God in return abandons them to their lusts – so that they will fall victim to their own depravity.
- ✦ They *reject* the truth – and so earn the wrath of God.<sup>44</sup>
- ✦ They *add to* the truth – regulation upon regulation.<sup>45</sup> By imposing such a burden they hope to create a substitute for what God has already completed.
- ✦ They *learn about* the truth – but never *do* it. Even inside the walls of a church building, there are those who have listened to a thousand sermons – and never really heard.
- ✦ Worst of all, they *claim to be without sin* – and deceive themselves. How often have you heard someone tell you that God will always take a man of good works into heaven? I’ve been pretty good; why would I need a Savior?

### Truth – for those who do love Jesus

How, then, can we see the children of light and the truth they proclaim? The Scripture gives us a few guidelines:

- ✦ Love *rejoices* in the truth.<sup>46</sup> When the truth is revealed, are we overjoyed – or looking for another excuse?
- ✦ The children of God say nothing *against* the truth – they only *speak for* it.<sup>47</sup> They praise truth, and always speak it; they also reverence it.
- ✦ The children of God *obey* the truth.<sup>48</sup> It is their rule and practice of life. This is a witness to others as well.
- ✦ The children of God *speak the truth in love*. Truth is not a bludgeon for the head but a balm for the soul.
- ✦ The children of God *bring back the wayward* by the truth.<sup>49</sup> Those who stray are retrieved not by having a good time, but the loving application of the truth.

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<sup>41</sup> The King James translated this as “verily, verily, I say unto you”

<sup>42</sup> Romans 1:18-20

<sup>43</sup> Romans 1:25-26

<sup>44</sup> Romans 2:8

<sup>45</sup> 1 Timothy 4:3

<sup>46</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:6

<sup>47</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:8

<sup>48</sup> Galatians 5:7

<sup>49</sup> James 5:19

- ✦ The children of God are *purified* by obeying the truth.<sup>50</sup> Obedience restores the relationship with the Father.
- ✦ Finally, the children of God are *firmly established* in the truth.<sup>51</sup> Truth becomes a habit; obedience becomes a habit; love becomes a habit – and wonderful are such habits.  
Jesus tells us he is the truth. God is his attributes, and we see God in the flesh here.

### The Life

Interestingly, the word used here is not the one for spiritual life, but physical life. In this we see a shadow of things to come at the Resurrection.

### Life – in this life

The Old Testament taught us that “life is in the blood.”<sup>52</sup> This is the reason that Christ, in establishing the Lord’s Supper, told us to drink and remember him - “this is my blood”. Hardened hearts are needed to reject this life.<sup>53</sup> The word means biological life – which is why the Scripture reveals to us that we reveal that life in our bodies:

**But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.**

**(2Co 4:7-12 NIV)**

### The Life to Come

All this points, of course, to the life to come. If there is no life after the grave, then we are fools indeed. But Jesus tells us that he is indeed the resurrection and the life.<sup>54</sup> The Resurrection is not only proof of God’s power in Christ, it is the first sampling of the resurrection to come when Christ returns to claim his own. The things we do in this life are of little importance if they relate to the body now – but of great importance as they relate to the body forever.<sup>55</sup>

What then should we do? It is a matter of knowing where to put your treasures. We are counseled to lay up treasure in heaven – knowing that when we die what we have here will be ours no longer.<sup>56</sup>

### The Life Approved

John gives us a vision of the life approved by God:

**The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,**

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<sup>50</sup> 1 Peter 1:22

<sup>51</sup> 2 Peter 1:12

<sup>52</sup> Leviticus 17:11

<sup>53</sup> Ephesians 4:18

<sup>54</sup> John 11:25

<sup>55</sup> 1 Timothy 4:8

<sup>56</sup> 1 Timothy 6:19

so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

(1Jn 1:2-4 NIV)

See how simple it really is:

- ✚ What you see and know, you testify.
- ✚ You do so in fellowship with all Christians as well as with God.
- ✚ In doing this, you make your joy complete.

#### Summary

We should walk away knowing who is the way, the truth, the life. But what can we do about this truth in our daily lives?

#### The Way

- ✚ Recognize that this is a journey, not a destination. Never be content to be what you are, but move further on.
- ✚ Trust in Christ. He who triumphed over death is your guide.
- ✚ Overcome the dangers along the way by trust and obedience.

#### The Truth

- ✚ Always uphold, and never deny, the truth. No matter how inconvenient this will be.
- ✚ The truth is not a bludgeon; handle it with love.
- ✚ When you know the truth, be obedient to it.

#### The life

- ✚ Reveal the life of Christ in your own body. Chastity, for example, speaks loudly in these times.
- ✚ Lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth.
- ✚ See your Lord in all you do; testify to his goodness to you; and rejoice.

## Introduction to the Trinity - John 14:8-31

No part of the Gospel is more puzzling to modern Christians than the Trinity. Evidently the Apostles felt the same. But in the passage below, note that the disciples asking the questions are not Peter, James or John. These three have seen the Transfiguration. They may not understand the Trinity any better than the rest, but they have some idea of what's going on. They show an early sign of being modern students: they let someone else ask the hard questions.

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave. (Joh 14:8-31 NIV)

### Beginnings of the Trinity

It is a mark of the early church that practically no one was a theologian. Those who had encountered the risen Lord needed no theology; their worship was for a person, not a system. But as the years went by more and more people asked the question: how could God be three – and yet one? And therefore, how could Christ be God, and God be one? We shall look at some of the answers.

### Christ – equal with the Father

It is interesting that Christ's answer to Philip's question is, "Don't you know *me*?" He expects Philip to put two and two together. Philip is not buying it. So Christ explains it to him:

- ✚ First, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me.” Have you ever seen a Moëbius strip? It’s simply a strip of paper, given a half twist, with the ends taped together. If you try to color the “outside,” you will find that the outside is also the inside! If we can do that with paper, then perhaps we have a picture of what Christ is saying here.
- ✚ His words are not his own; they are the Father’s words. If you don’t think so, then why would God give him the power to work miracles? Do you not see that the miracles authenticate the message as being from God?

Philip, I suspect, is still working through this. Jesus’ focus on this last night is on the future – the establishment of the church. For that reason he gives them further understanding in terms of what will happen after Pentecost. The church will need these proofs if the world is to understand that Christ and the Father are one – yet separate.

- ✚ He tells them that they will be able to work such miracles. How? By the coming of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity.
- ✚ Indeed, they will do greater things. (Remember that Jesus did not preach outside the boundaries of ancient Israel.)
- ✚ But they will do them in the name of Christ.

This happened (and I’m not at all certain it’s finished). So it is we see the equality between Father and Son.

#### Christ – Inferior to the Father

The Father is greater, says our Lord. He makes this point explicitly. But he gives us further detail:

- ✚ He asks the Father; the Father does not ask Him.
- ✚ Indeed, it’s the same relationship we have with Him; we ask Him, we plead with Him – not the other way around.
- ✚ He is obedient to the Father, doing *exactly* what He commands.

There it is: in the same passage of Scripture, in plain language answering a plain question, the contradiction of the Trinity is shown. This we must now resolve.

#### The Trinity

The problem has occupied better minds than mine for millennia. Here are two explanations which may assist us.

First, let us take the problem of being more than one, and yet one. Dorothy Sayers gave us an excellent answer to this one. Consider a book; in her case, a detective novel. It comes in three forms:

- ✚ There is the story as it exists in her brain. Anyone who has written will understand this. There must be a conception of the book in the brain first.
- ✚ The book is then incarnate in paper form.
- ✚ The book then has an effect on the reader; the book may now be said to be “in” the reader.

God the Father is like that story in her brain. Unseen, but definitely knowable by others, it gives rise to a physical form (the paper version of the book). As we read it, it “dwells in us” by having an effect on us.

The ancients would have put it this way: The essence is the same; the attributes are the same; the accidents are not. That last is rather a technical term, so let's take an example.

Consider a rose. Not just any rose, but a rose which exactly expresses just what it is to be a rose. It has the essence of rose; it shows us "rosy-ness." That essence is not just in its genetic material; it also includes such things as the effect that roses have on ladies.

Then that rose has attributes – things that roses must have to be a rose. These are things like petals, roots, and thorns. Finally, any specific rose has accidents – those things that are true, but not "must haves" – things like a specific color, a specific fragrance, a specific location.

The ancient writers can then speak of God in the same way. The essence of God is his existence; all three persons have that. Of all three it can be said, "I AM."

But "I am" what? God is his attributes. We say that God is love, for example. The three persons have the same attributes as well. It is only in the accidents – physical form, for example – that they differ.

Enough of the theology and philosophy. Let's look at the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

### Third Person Singular

That the Holy Spirit is a definite and distinct person in the Godhead can be seen here in Christ's words. He (that's one) will ask the Father (that's two) to send the Holy Spirit (that's three). Christ describes the characteristics of the Holy Spirit to them:

- ✚ He is the spirit of truth, and therefore a counselor. Isn't that characteristic of the Holy Spirit in our lives? There is no bludgeoning, just the still small voice telling us, "You're wrong, you need to repent of this."
- ✚ He is "in us." The "in-ness" He has is the same that Christ and the Father have.
- ✚ He is with us forever – God, the Eternal I Am.
- ✚ And – significantly – He comes in Christ's name. Each person of the Trinity gives glory to another.

### The Mission of the Holy Spirit

Christ reveals to them the purposes of the Holy Spirit.

- ✚ First, He is to be our Counselor.
- ✚ He is also the Spirit of Truth. For this reason, the church cannot remain in error – but is always corrected by the Truth.
- ✚ He will remind the disciples of everything Jesus has said (both in terms of recording them and in terms of living by it).
- ✚ He is also the teacher of these things.
- ✚ Finally, He is "in" us – just as Christ is in the Father.

### The world cannot accept Him

Some make the mistake of thinking that Christ and the Holy Spirit are mutually exclusive – both can't be at the same place at the same time. But recall that at Christ's baptism the Spirit was there. The

real reason for the delay is to give time for the sacrifice to be made. It is interesting: Passover marks the start of the spring planting season; Pentecost is the harvest festival. Jesus is slain at Passover – and the fruit of the Spirit begins at Pentecost.

Why are Christians so “different” from others in this world?

- ✚ The Spirit is “in” us – in the same sense that Christ is in the Father, and the Father is in Christ. But – like the book in the novelist’s head – the world cannot see it. Only the results can be seen.
- ✚ The world cannot see that. But we know what’s going on inside us. The still small voice can only be heard from between the ears.

The world cannot see the Holy Spirit, but we know who is in us.

### Promises and Conditions

This section of Scripture contains within it some of the great promises Christ has made for us. Promises, to be valid, must be claimed.

- ✚ He promises that we (the church) will do what he has done. The church is the Body of Christ on earth, and continues his mission: to seek and save the lost.
- ✚ He promises we will do even greater things. We have gone where he never walked; spoken to those unspoken to; carried his name to the farthest reaches of the planet.
- ✚ He promised he would not leave us as orphans. He did not. He gave us the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ He promised that we would have his peace – the peace that surpasses all understanding. Great promises; but there are conditions.

### Conditions

One of the difficulties with the “chapter and verse” division of the Bible is that we can take words out of context. As long as we quote the entire verse, we feel it should stand alone. Much evil has come of this. Here are the conditions Christ attaches to his promises:

- ✚ First, we must be obedient to his commands. How often we find ourselves wondering why our life is so powerless – as we ignore his commands. Our disobedience disconnects us from the power of God.
- ✚ We must also have faith in him. Do we believe God will act, or is this just an afterthought to our plans? Do we plan with him in view, or out of view? Do we trust him first, or only when desperate?
- ✚ Finally, we must love Him, deeply.

### After the Resurrection

It is a remarkable fact: Jesus was crucified at Passover; the Spirit comes at Pentecost. These two festivals mark the beginning and end of the harvest season. God’s timing is displayed in this.

But in between those festivals, Jesus appeared to his disciples many times. But as far as we know he never again appeared to those who did not believe. There is a reason for that. If you wish to

see God, you must use the right instrument. A microscope will show you no stars; a telescope no bacteria. The right instrument for seeing God is the pure heart.<sup>57</sup>

“The heart,” said Marechal de Saxe, “is the starting point of all things pertaining to war.” It is true of spiritual warfare as well.

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew 5:8

## Church and World - John 15

“Since then love is a thing mighty and irresistible, not a bare word, let us manifest it by our actions.”

In those few words Chrysostom proclaims the power of love and our reaction to it. His comment was made in preaching on this chapter of John; we shall take it in detail. We shall examine this chapter in three sections. First we shall consider the relationship between a Christian and his Lord; then the relationship of the church and her Lord; finally, the relationship of the church to the world.

### The Individual Christian

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.**

**(Joh 15:1-9 NIV)**

### Everyone gets cut

Have you noticed in this passage that all the branches get cut? Some get cut off, others get pruned – but the shears are applied to all. From the point of view of the branch, all we can see is that we are separated. What does this mean?

- ✚ If you are not producing the results of the Christian life. God eventually cuts you off from the church. Note that the church may not throw you out – but God will.
- ✚ If you are, God takes those results and removes them from you. Why? So you won't be bogged down with yesterday's results. (It is also a help to keeping the ego in check).
- ✚ Either way, you are going to see a separation. People you know and love will leave, find another class or whatever.

### Indications

So how do I know the difference between being pruned and being slashed off? By the results in my life. Here are a few simple tests, taken from this section:

- ✚ Does your life bear “much fruit?” Can you say how you have influenced others for Jesus Christ?
- ✚ Does God prune that fruit? Does he remove the people you have ministered to, and turn them over to someone else? (Usually a problem for teachers, but applies to all).
- ✚ Do Christ's words remain in you? Are there Scriptures you have memorized which come back at just the right moment?
- ✚ Does God answer your prayers? When you ask something in his name, does he give it to you?
- ✚ Does your life bring glory to God?

Doesn't sound so good? Let's look at your relationship to Jesus Christ – for without the vine, you're firewood.

## Relationship to Christ

Jesus describes the relationship as being one where he is in us, and we are in him (in the singular). It's as confusing as the passage where he proclaims that God is in him, and he is in God. But let's take that as our example. Christ and the Father are one; yet each is a person in the Trinity. You and I are to be in Christ, and have Christ in us, in the same way. That's how close we are to come to him. We want the same relationship between Christ and us that exists between Christ and the Father.

One preliminary step must be performed. We must be cleansed by the word. This refers to baptism in the first place, and repentance later on. These steps must be guided by what Christ has taught us.

If we do this, we will remain with him. But he gives us a warning: he is the "true" vine – which means there are false ones. There is only one Christ:

- ✦ He is the only Mediator between God and man, for he is the one who is both God and Man. No one else qualifies.
- ✦ He is the great source of life; he alone gives life. All others give us over to death.
- ✦ He is also the head of the Church – which, as we shall see, means that we are to be obedient to him.

## Christ and the Church

Sometimes it helps to know your verbs. If the Church is to be what Christ wants her to be, the key verb is "remain."

**"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other. "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."  
(Joh 15:9-18 NIV)**

### Purpose: joy

Why is Christ teaching his disciples this? Most of us listen to a teacher for our own profit – so our parents won't catch us playing hooky, or to learn a skill, or to obtain a degree. This teaching was given for joy:

- ✦ First, that Christ (as the head of the church) might have joy in us. Not just that he would be pleased to have us around, but rather that his surpassing joy would be found in us.
- ✦ To do this, we must find our joy in him. There we have another "me in him, him in me." The joy of Christ and our joy in Christ are that close together...

### Method: obedience

How are we to accomplish this? By being obedient to Christ. How obedient? As obedient as Christ is to the Father. What are we commanded to obey? Love one another.

It sounds so easy. But recall the example: Christ went to the Cross in obedience to the Father. The example is the high, holy one.

### Limit

Is there a limit to this obedience? Yes, a perfectly natural one, and a perfectly divine one. Christ laid down his life for his friends (that's us). You cannot do more than that, and that is the limit he gives to us.

### Result

The result of this obedience to the command of love is a complete change in the relationship between God and man. In the Old Testament we read a lot about people being told to "choose you this day whom you will serve." We sometimes miss the phrase, "the chosen people." Like Israel of old, we are the people chosen by God – for a new relationship with him.

We are no longer just servants of God. We are friends. How could this transition happen? Only at the Cross, where Jesus reconciled mankind to God. (Reconciliation is expensive, especially for the one doing the reconciling.) The effect of this transition is awesome: the friends of God will receive whatever they ask for in the name of Christ.

### Test

But does this really work? Let's take the test. Do we love each other?

- ✚ Do we love each other in action? Can we say that we care for each other? Are we known for the fact that the poor among us rely upon the church for sustenance and aid?
- ✚ Do we love each other in words? Is our speech about our fellow Christians gracious, or are we constantly carping at someone in the name of Christ?
- ✚ Do we love each other in prayer? Do we go to the throne of grace on behalf of our fellow Christians, no matter what the circumstances? Robert E. Lee prayed nightly for Abraham Lincoln.

### Church and the World

We must now take a good look at the relationship between the church and the world. It is not a pretty sight.

**"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.' "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.**

**(Joh 15:18-27 NIV)**

### The reality of the dichotomy

Most Christians, when first exposed to this concept, are puzzled. Why should there be conflict between the church and the world? As Rodney King once put it, "People, can't we all just get along?" There are serious reasons for the conflict.

- ✚ First, because the methods of the world are opposite the methods of the church. The world enforces its order – by force. As Mao Tse-Tung once put it, "power grows out of the barrel of a cannon."
- ✚ Next, because the goals of the world are opposite the goals of the church. The world seeks pleasure; the world seeks gain; the world seeks pride. Christ's church seeks the joy of God, the treasures laid up in heaven and the humility to know who is God.
- ✚ Finally, because the world claims moral supremacy (in one way or another) which belongs only to God. There can be only one true moral authority.

### Root Cause

We should not be surprised that the world hates the church. It hated Christ first, before the Church was formed. Why?

"Because of my Name." The Name of God represents his authority to both reign and rule – and the world claims both those as its own. It is a question of authority: when God's commands conflict with the world's orders, who will be supreme?

But why the church? Why not just Jesus? Because Jesus has chosen us. Not for our merits, to be sure, but we are chosen nonetheless. Those in the church possess what those outside cannot have; if they can't have it, no one can.

Ultimately, it is because they have not believed God. Those who reject the Gospel are their own condemnation. It is well said that God drafts no one for hell; they're all volunteers.

### What should we do about it?

The Christian response to this hatred is well known. The true church:

- ✚ Expects this persecution. We've been warned.
- ✚ Rejoices when it comes – for it is a sure sign that we are indeed saved.
- ✚ Accepts it with humility; it really belongs to Christ. We are privileged but a little while to share his sufferings, and then to share his glory.

## The Counselor - John 16:1-16

It may strike you as a curious point, but I can find no reference in the Scriptures where Jesus is portrayed as comforting his disciples. The point is parallel to Moody's comment about trying to find Jesus discoursing at a funeral. He never delivered a funeral sermon or eulogy – because all his funerals turned into resurrections. Here, the night before the Crucifixion, Jesus gives them comfort for what they are about to bear.

**"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.  
(Joh 16:1-4 NIV)**

### Warning

Christ has just come off his statement about the church and the world (last week's lesson). To further strengthen his disciples, He continues that now with a warning which tells us just how the world will attack the church: with the weapons of Satan.

- ✚ It begins with *social pressure*. In terms the disciples would understand, they would be thrown out of the synagogue – for all practical purposes, they would be ostracized in Jewish society of the time. We feel that same pressure today. It is a subtle, delicate thing. Christians are denied employment or promotion because “that religious thing might cause trouble.” In every organization there are “ins” and “outs” – and the Christian will be with the “outs.” You have been warned.
- ✚ Next we see the application of *legal authority* – where it does not belong. In our time we see the forced acceptance of homosexuality by law. Even the homosexuals admit that they are a very small minority, but by our courts they have found the way to have themselves portrayed as noble sufferers at the hands of the evil right-wing fundamentalists. To protect the world from Christ we send forth “justice.”
- ✚ Finally, when these fail, we see the use of *force, violence and intimidation*. The world is not reluctant to use such things – when the easier methods fail.

### Why?

It occasionally occurs to the Christian to ask, “Why? Why on earth would anyone want to do such a thing?” The answer is rather simple: these are the people who don't know God (but think they do). They have created their own version of God – and since they believe it, it must be true, right? The problem starts there. Once convinced of their own righteousness, the rest flows automatically. This is one good reason why Christians should remember that they are sinners.

How will you know who these people are? Simple enough: just look for the ones applying social pressure, law and force to exalt what you plainly know to be evil.

### Leaving

**"Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and**

**judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.**  
(Joh 16:5-11 NIV)

#### Good for me to go

Christ is announcing his departure. Tomorrow will bring the Crucifixion; on the third day the Resurrection. The obvious reason that it is “good” for him to leave is just that: without the Crucifixion, there is no redemption. Man cannot be reconciled to God without it.

That view, however, is seen much more clearly after the Resurrection than before it. So Jesus gives them another reason – their own benefit. He tells them that the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, will come to them.

The obvious question – unasked, of course – is why the Counselor couldn’t show up now. For the next three days the disciples are going to need some comfort. They’re not going to get it. Why, then, didn’t the Holy Spirit come when so needed?

The answer is both simple and deep. Until the curse of sin is atoned for, the Spirit cannot come – for He will not stay where sin continues. His arrival in the Old Testament was for specific purposes of God, and the Spirit came only to certain, selected individuals. Now the Spirit is in the Church. Our Counselor, our Comforter, is with us.

#### The purpose of the Spirit

One of the enduring puzzles to Christians is the concept of “the unforgivable sin.” We are taught that such a thing exists; but if you ask the average Christian to tell you what it is, he has no idea. Let’s begin with this: what is the purpose, the task of the Holy Spirit?

- ✦ *He is to convict the world of sin.* We are taught that the work of men is to believe in the Christ. If you will not believe, how can you be forgiven? How will you believe that you need a Savior if you do not know your peril? And how will you know your peril if you have no sense of sin?
- ✦ *He is to convict the world of righteousness.* Of righteousness? Yes indeed. The horrible nature of sin is best seen at the Cross; for the Cross is the penalty paid for our sin. The innocent Son of God was crucified to make atonement. If there is sin, there must also be righteousness, and the measure of righteousness is the Cross. Until we see our sin and his righteousness, how can we be saved?
- ✦ *He is to convict the world of judgment.* The prince of this world (Satan) now stands condemned. He has put to death an innocent man. For all others Satan may defend himself in that they were sinners, but not this one. The Prince of Evil is condemned. But God is not finished – yet. The conviction is recorded, but the merciful God has held off execution so that for some time the sons of Adam might be redeemed.

#### More to come

**"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."**

## (Joh 16:12-16 NIV)

### Too much to swallow

It is a great comfort to the teacher to know that even the disciples, in close personal contact with Jesus for three years, neither received all that he would teach nor did they comprehend it right away. Perhaps I am not the only thick head who has ever puzzled over such things. Why is this?

- ✚ God, in his mercy, teaches us as we are able to learn. His revelation to Israel was progressive; his revelation to us is likewise progressive.
- ✚ As we learn, we grow in Christ. By this we should know that God is not finished with us, as we are always growing.
- ✚ Indeed, in this life none of us reaches the point where God has nothing more to teach us. His mercies are ever new.

### Spirit of Truth

This growth is largely the function of the Holy Spirit. He, by the gifts he gives the church and its members, is to bring us to maturity in Christ. We should know that that these gifts and our use of them are in accord with the purposes of the Father. For the Holy Spirit, like Jesus, is one with the Father. This one-ness is our guarantee that we are following correctly. If not, He will convict us of our faults.

- ✚ He speaks only what He hears – as Christ did on this earth. God is three yet one, and He is one of the three.
- ✚ We are explicitly told that the Spirit will reveal the future to us. This was accomplished in John's Revelation. It also applies to us; we are warned by the Spirit of what comes.
- ✚ The Spirit brings glory to Christ. Have you noticed that the persons of God bring glory to each other, not themselves? It is a lesson for us.

Christ never comforted his disciples; he had no need. But the need has now arrived. The provision of God's supply for God's work does not fail; at precisely the right time, the Holy Spirit comes. It was true then, it is true today.

### Lessons to take home

- ✚ Persecution? In ways mild, in ways strong, we should expect it.
- ✚ When it happens we should seek comfort in the Holy Spirit, who is given as Comforter and Counselor.
- ✚ We are not to pass judgment on others; rather, we are to proclaim Christ and his truth, then let the Spirit do his work of conviction.
- ✚ Recognize that you are not fully grown yet – the Spirit has more work to do in your heart as you grow in grace.

## Birth Pains - John 16:17-33

### Pain

One of the certainties of teaching the Bible is that you will eventually deal with pain. As soon as the subject comes up, one of the female members of the class will point out (usually at great length) that men really don't understand pain, as they don't give birth. This does not deter me. I am one of those rare individuals for whom Novocain simply has no effect on dentistry. Everything the dentist does hurts – a lot.

My dentist is a kind, Christian gentleman. He's quite well aware of the problem, and does not tell me "it's all in your head." (It is all in my head, if you think about it – but you know what he means.) He handles the problem gently. He begins by telling me what he's going to do; how much it will hurt; and how long it will last. He then tells me why this is better than my running out the door screaming. Kindly note two things:

✚ All that talk does not reduce the pain one little bit.

✚ But it does make me more able to deal with it.

That's what's going on in the upper room, in this lesson.

Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, **'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,'** and **'Because I am going to the Father'?**" They kept asking, "What does he mean by **'a little while'**? We don't understand what he is saying." Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, **"Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. 'Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.'**" Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." **"You believe at last!"** Jesus answered. **"But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'"**

**(Joh 16:17-33 NIV)**

### Before

Jesus describes the transition in a few words. But let us give some thought to the disciples' state of mind as this begins:

✦ Up until this point they have “asked for nothing” in His name. We understand this to mean that they asked him for everything, not relying upon the authority of his name. Why would they, when he is physically present with them?

✦ They’ve also been believing what they want to believe. Miracles they have seen, but the mystery of the Atonement is still before them. They are not willing to understand his death.

How depressing, then, to have the matter brought up yet again. We can only conclude that depressing the disciples was precisely what Jesus planned. It makes sense (in the next chapter). The disciples are going to be confronted with an armed mob, come to arrest Jesus. Their physical resistance would complicate things. Jesus rather prepares them for the idea that they will scatter and grieve.

There is an advantage in this. At the Resurrection, they will not be so hard on themselves and each other. The joy of that day should not be clouded by recriminations.

### During

Just what did Jesus tell them would happen?

✦ First, that they would not see him.

✦ Next, that they would grieve and mourn.

✦ Then, that the world around them would rejoice.

✦ But then, a little while later, they would indeed rejoice.

It is a clear picture. But is it not also a clear picture for us? Have you ever had the time when Christ left you alone? When you felt that his comfort just did not extend to you?

He does that at times – to strengthen you. It’s like teaching a young child to ride a bicycle. There comes a time where you must let go of the bike and show them that they can stay up by pedaling. It’s a scary time for a young child – followed by the joy of knowing they can ride.

See, too, the method of God: the thing that causes you pain for a short while is that which brings you joy later. The Cross should always remind us of the pain by which Christ made the atonement – and the joy we have because of it.

More than that; the Cross, the Resurrection – they change everything.

### After

If there is any characteristic we can use to describe the early church, it is joy. They rejoiced in circumstances we would think highly depressing. This joy is contagious – and no one can take it away.

More than that, the relationship between man and God has changed. Jesus here gives us some of those changes:

✦ First, that God the Father will give us what we ask for in Christ’s name (more on what that means later).

✦ Next, he will do that – so that our joy may be complete. Complete, and always ours, the church should always show that joy.

✦ He also states that the Spirit will tell us *plainly* what is the truth. You can see this in the New Testament. Only in the New Testament do we get letters which explain the doctrine clearly.

This business of asking “in Christ’s name” is not at all a trivial change. The Resurrection brought about the priesthood of believers – the concept that we, as Christians (not specially selected ones), can ask God the Father for *anything* in Christ’s name is foreign to the Old Testament. We have become what the priests were – those who could talk directly with God.

The Name is important. You will recall that God described the Temple – 500 years before it was built – as being the place where He would put his Name. That Name is now placed in us. This changes our relationship to God.

- ✚ It changes our understanding. No longer is God far off and to be feared. No longer is the knowledge of Him confined to the select few.
- ✚ It changes our attitude. He now draws us close, which is to our comfort. But it also implies that we are being held responsible for those things that used to be the duty of the priest.

Most of all, there is a change in dominion. After the Cross, the prince of this world, Satan, has been overcome. The Cross was, if you will pardon the analogy, the Gettysburg of spiritual war. There was a lot of fighting left in the Civil War after Gettysburg. But the issue was no longer in doubt.

### In My Name

This is one of the passages in the New Testament that makes prayer sound like magic. The reasoning goes like this:

- ✚ If you’re a “real” Christian, you can ask God for anything.
- ✚ If you end the prayer with the phrase, “in Jesus’ name, Amen” then you are asking in Jesus’ name.
- ✚ If you’re real, and do it in Jesus’ name, you’ll get whatever you ask for. Just name it and claim it.

So, if your prayers don’t turn out the way you wanted, either you’re not a real Christian, or this method just doesn’t work (and you’re an idiot). Right?

Well, no, wrong. We need to understand that phrase “in His name.” It carries some connotation with it.

- ✚ First, it means *in accordance with his will*. If my boss delegates authority to me, it’s not so I can do what I want – it’s so I can do what he wants. If I don’t do that, it’s obvious that there will be trouble. It doesn’t matter what the delegation of authority form says on it – you have to use it correctly. If this is so in earthly things, how much more so in things of God?
- ✚ Next, it means *doing things in God’s way*. Have you asked for justice, a verdict upon your enemies, the ones who torment you? He will provide it – in His way. We may ask for things which are in his will – and also provide God with detailed instructions on how this should be brought about. This is impudent, imprudent and impotent. God will work things in his way. Usually, these means taking something evil – and making a greater good out of it.
- ✚ Then, it means *waiting for his time*. Most of us have trouble waiting overnight for God to act – let alone (say) a week. If it is done his way, it will be done in his time. It is entirely possible that the reason he allows us to pray is (in part) so that we will be taught patience. We are, after all, destined to be eternal. So perhaps a lesson in patience is not out of place.
- ✚ It must be done in faith – that is, *trusting him for the results*. Note that this means trusting him not only at the time we speak the prayer – but until he answers. This is sometimes difficult when one of the results is a changed “you.”

## Epilog

He leaves them with an epilog. It has three points, all worth repeating.

- ✚ You are going to have trouble. If you are a Christian, you should expect it. The world is going to be after you in every possible way.
- ✚ But – chin up – He has overcome the world. The greatest threat that this world has to offer is death, and he has risen from the grave. He is Lord of all things; he has triumphed.
- ✚ Because of that, we can have peace in this troubled world. The peace that comes from knowing Jesus, the Christ.

## Last Prayer - John 17

This is one of the dramatic moments of the New Testament. Christ ends the Passover in the Upper Room with one last public prayer. It is often referred to as his "High Priestly Prayer" because it involves all the elements of intercession, just as a High Priest would intercede for the people.<sup>58</sup> We will look at it in a different light in this lesson. First, the words of our Lord:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled. "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

(Joh 17:1-26 NIV)

### Christ and the Father

This prayer concerns all of us; but it is primarily a prayer from the Son to the Father. As such, it gives us some light on the relationship of the two.

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<sup>58</sup> You may find a lesson on such at <http://www.becomingcloser.org/Life%20of%20Christ/intercession.htm>

### Equality with the Father

This prayer shows us some elements in which Jesus, the Christ, can be said to be equal to the Father:

- ✦ They both share the same heavenly glory.
- ✦ Each has eternal life “in himself” – that is to say, he does not obtain it from another, as we will.
- ✦ There is an equality of possessions – all Christ has belongs to the Father, all the Father has belongs to Christ.
- ✦ Those who have obtained eternal life know the Son in the Father and the Father in the Son.
- ✦ Finally, there is that mystic “one-ness” which so frequently arises in Christ’s prayers – that He and the Father are one.

### Supremacy of the Father

In the very same prayer we see evidence that the Father is superior to the Son (there is no evidence, anywhere in the Bible, that holds the Son superior to the Father).

- ✦ The Father gives the disciples to Jesus – a gift, not a tribute.
- ✦ It is the Father who grants authority to the Son.
- ✦ Indeed, Jesus here tells us that the very words he speaks were given to him by the Father. Interpreted most crudely, this would make him a puppet. Rather, this expresses one-ness again. But even in that one-ness there is the flow from the Father through the Son and into us.
- ✦ The Father is the one who gives the work to the Son – for the Son tells us that he has completed the work the Father has given him.
- ✦ Most telling is this: the Father sends the Son into the world

This seems most curious. The Father and the Son are one; but the Father cannot be seen like the Son. The Son takes his orders from his Father. How can this be resolved? The ancients simply put it this way: He is equal to the Father “as touching his Godhood” and inferior to the Father “as touching his manhood.”

### Christ – past, present and future

The passage also drops in quite a bit of information about Jesus. The items he listed in this prayer are the ones he thought his disciples should listen to; they are facts about Jesus (past, present and future) which we should know – and are of first importance.

#### Past

By past we mean something which Jesus did before the time of this prayer.

- ✦ He has brought glory to the Father by his ministry on earth. Do you see how it is that all that Jesus does points us to God the Father?
- ✦ He has revealed the Father to those disciples selected. If God does not choose to make himself known, we can know very little of Him. If He chooses to make himself known, then we must know him by his words and by his example.
- ✦ He has given the disciples “the word” – the teaching of the last three years. That time is now at an end.
- ✦ He has protected them from the evil one by the power of the Name of God. Now Satan will have a chance to attack them directly.
- ✦ He sent them into the world – as those who proclaim the good news.

Glory to God; the revelation of his Word, protection from evil – and the task of evangelism . These are the things Jesus wants you to remember about his earthly ministry.

### Present

Even as he prays this prayer, there is something to be learned.

- ✚ “The time has come.” Surely you see that this implies the existence of the divine plan. Christ did not come when it was convenient; he came when all was ripe and ready. He did not come to stumble around on the planet; he came with a plan for our salvation. That plan is now about to come to its fruition. The Message? The Man Has A Plan.
- ✚ He now prays for the disciples – and us. He does not pray for the world, and explicitly leaves them out. The Message? There is salvation by no other name; you’re with him or against him – no one comes to the Father except by the Son.
- ✚ He tells them this – so that their joy may be complete. There is a short time of sorrow coming, then the dawn. When that dawn breaks, there will be great joy.

### Future

His prayer also looks to the future. What does he proclaim for the future?

- ✚ First, that he will again be glorified as he was from the beginning. We shall see that glory when He returns.
- ✚ Next, that he is about to go to the Father. Three days to the Resurrection; 50 days to Pentecost; 40 days to the Ascension – not a lot of time.
- ✚ But He promises that he will continue to make known that which we need – so that the love of God may be in us.

### His Commands to Us

All well and good; can we put down our pencils? Not just yet. There are lessons to be learned from this prayer! Lessons – on what we are to be, what he wants us to have and what he wants us to do.

#### He wants us to be...

- ✚ In the world, but not of the world. He does not proclaim monasteries for the masses, but rather that the Christian keep himself separate from the world and its ways.
- ✚ To be one – one body, one church. To be one to the same extent that He and the Father are one.
- ✚ Sanctified – set apart for the service of God. How is this to be done? We are to be sanctified by the truth.

#### He wants us to have...

- ✚ The knowledge of Christ and the Father. He wants fellowship with us; if we are to have that, we must know Him and know the Father. Therefore he hides nothing of who he is.
- ✚ The full measure of his joy. He wants us to be rejoicing Christians, utterly unconquerable by the pains and grey drabness of our world.
- ✚ Eternal life – he wants fellowship with us not just now but forever. He wants us to be like him, and he is eternal.
- ✚ Christ in us – so much so that we shine with his love, and the world can see him in us.

He wants us to ...

- ✚ Intercede. If nothing else, this prayer is a model of intercession. We are to imitate our Lord.
- ✚ Accept the word given to us. We are to study the Scriptures and find in them the Living Word.
- ✚ Spread the Gospel. He sent the 12 out, he sent the 70 out. He prayed for them, He prayed for us – and He sends us out.

## Denial - John 18:1-28

The story of the arrest of Jesus, and Peter's denials, is told in all four Gospels with slightly varying details. The passage presents a rich set of opportunities for the teacher. The more conventional choice of topics would examine the trials of Jesus; the Life of Christ series does just that. We shall, instead, examine the denials of Peter – for they are a window upon our own lives.

When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons. Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, **"Who is it you want?"** "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. **"I am he,"** Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, **"I am he,"** they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, **"Who is it you want?"** And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." **"I told you that I am he,"** Jesus answered. **"If you are looking for me, then let these men go."** This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: **"I have not lost one of those you gave me."** Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) Jesus commanded Peter, **"Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"** Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him and brought him first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it would be good if one man died for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in. "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not." It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself. Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching. **"I have spoken openly to the world,"** Jesus replied. **"I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."** When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby struck him in the face. "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" he demanded. **"If I said something wrong,"** Jesus replied, **"testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"** Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, saying, "I am not." One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow. Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

[\(Joh 18:1-28 NIV\)](#)

### Preliminary: Violence

It is a curious thing: have you ever considered what happened to the head of the disciples that he would betray his Master? The answer is found here. Peter uses a sword – to cut himself off from the Lord. The ear is merely an incidental item. After three years of discipleship, you'd think Peter would know better. This is an act of disobedience.

Christ, as He always will for those He loves, rebukes Peter. Indeed, it is a sharp rebuke, but it is followed with something which must have embarrassed Peter. Christ heals the ear cut off by Peter.

Sin separates us from Christ. Hiding in this passage – in plain sight – is the reason for the denials. Peter has sinned; he has disobeyed his Master *and he has not repented of it*. Make what you like of the circumstances, Peter has separated himself from his Master – which now leads to consequences that Peter swore would never happen.

Sin makes the denials easy. It is an old story that we tell a pack of lies to avoid being found out in one. Peter at this moment is feeling the pangs of rebuke coupled with the stress of seeing Jesus arrested. The problem is clear; Peter does not instantly appeal for its solution. The anger is still with him on the road to denial.

The sequence is clear also. Sin starts it; denial progresses until Peter calls down curses upon himself. Step by step we shall see how denial is formed in the disciple.

### First Denial: Entry

Peter encounters the gate as he follows Jesus through the first part of his trials. We can draw a parallel in our own lives. The first type of denial seems harmless.

#### Gratifying our curiosity

It seems such a small thing. Peter wants to follow Jesus. He wants to know what will happen to his Master – and no doubt is telling himself that he really wants only to help. The gate and the servant girl are in the way. This is how it starts:

- ✚ “It’s such a little thing – a little white lie. And the cause is so important.” That’s how it starts. We’re curious, it’s important – who would know? Does it happen to us? They don’t build strip joints for once in a lifetime customers.
- ✚ “And nobody got hurt – right?” We know it’s sin; but as long as we can’t point to a victim (other than ourselves) we think it’s no problem. If it’s my business, whose problem is it? Or do we really believe in solo Christianity?
- ✚ “I really ought to know.” Do you hear the rationalization? I’m only going to do it once, and I really ought to know – it will enlighten me. The oldest lie in creation (Satan used it on Eve) is that evil is enlightening.

#### Being “one of the guys”

If there is anything in the human being that will change the way we act, it is group pressure. Candid Camera once did a stunt where everyone in the elevator faced the rear of the elevator. I leave the results to your imagination.

One of the reasons for being one of the guys is the *facelessness* it brings. Since we’re one of they guys, no one will single us out for ridicule. We’re just part of the big crowd. (Look around during our worship services. What do you see?)

The nicest thing about this is that we get reassurance without asking for it. No one has to see our insecurities; just being part of the crowd makes insecurity vanish like steam. Interestingly, you feel

this way even if those in the crowd have no idea who you are. It just may be that they're looking at you to accept them.

### Clearing the hurdle

This type of denial usually comes at a gate. Some hurdle, something blocking our road, must be overcome. The only way we can see it is to pretend that we're not a Christian. We deny our Lord – and clear the hurdle.

The fact that we clear the hurdle should be a warning bell. It's not, for most of us. It's seen as a sign of approval. After all, the cause is righteous, and a cost benefit analysis will show clearly that it was a minor denial with a major result.

Indeed, so it is – but not as we think. The small, first denial paves the way for those which follow.

We leave the first denial still thinking that things are OK – no need of repentance yet. It's no real problem. Or is it?

### Second Denial: Needs

In the second denial we meet our needs face to face. We want, we need, and a little denial of our Lord seems a small price to pay. After all, a man's got to eat.

#### Bodily needs

For a guy who has overeaten as much as I have, you'd think I'd never worry about my next meal. Here, Peter wants only to warm himself by the fire. It's cold out. Does this seem like a big deal? It is.

✚ It's a big deal if you do not have self denial in hand. Peter does not; make what you like of that. He's cold. He doesn't want to be cold. For the price of denial there is warmth at the fire.

✚ Even if there is self denial, it must be based upon the providence of God. Peter is trying to do it all himself.

#### Security

In hindsight the question of keeping warm by the fire seems so trivial. It's easy to say that Peter erred where we would not. But consider: isn't it usually the case that the causes of our insecurity are highly visible – and the root of our security is not? We say we trust God – until our eyes tell us we can't.

How do most of us handle such a thing? We are confident of the Lord when we can see his works – when we're at the church the providence of God seems much more reasonable that it does on Monday morning.

#### “Enough”

Often enough, denial comes so that we may “enough.” We rationalize that we have to eat, so a little denial is not really a problem. It's not like we are greedy or profiteering about this; we simply want “enough.”

- ✦ But do we recognize “enough?” Do you ever challenge your ideas of what you want and what you need? Can you put a measure at “enough?”
- ✦ Sometimes we don’t think in terms of “enough” as much as we do “all I want is...” a new car, a nicer house, a sexier wife, ... Where does it end?
- ✦ It ends when “enough” has gradually, slowly turned into “more.”

One thing for sure. The first type of denial left us reassuring ourselves that everything was still OK. The second one ends with us rationalizing our denial.

### Third Denial: no pain and suffering

For as often as our Lord warned us that we would suffer in this world, we spend a lot of time and money avoiding it. When we deny our Lord to do this, we run quite contrary to his commands and indeed his statement of how life is. This is one denial that will not work, but it will show us the depths we can descend into – and how little we get for it.

#### Exclusion

It seems so devastating: we are “out” and everyone else in the whole world is “in.” We therefore are desperately attempting to be “in.” We are so insecure about this.

Herein we must begin to talk about mature Christianity. Such a denial means that we value our crowd more than our Christ. We are like a little child with his teddy bear or blanket. This is something we must have, at all costs.

#### Pecking order

Sometimes the temptation is a little more subtle than that. Sometimes we just want to maintain our place in the pecking order. We know we’re never going to be number one in the group – that’s reserved for the totally cool, of course – but we definitely want to be ahead of number twenty. At the top of the group, the signs of status are obvious. They’re obvious too at the bottom. It’s in the middle that the signs of status are uncertain, and therefore cause much more worry. After all, we could be sliding in position and not know it. But there is a worse case.

#### Humiliation

What could be worse than losing our place in the pecking order? Our status? Try this: be the one the group humiliates and laughs at. The only reason they allow you to stay in the group is that it’s wildly funny to laugh at you. You’re “in” but your role is class clown.

This can be a cruelly effective way of getting people to deny their faith. All you really need to encounter is one member of the group with a quicker wit and more acid tongue than your own.

What does this do? It means that you value your membership in that group so much that you are willing to play the part of village idiot to retain it.

It leaves you in the group – without Christ. How Satan must laugh that we prefer being in our little group *even to the point of being humiliated in public* to the love and fellowship of Christ! Just as Peter called down curses on himself, we rationalize that being the clown means that at least we’re in. How is it that such a thing could happen in the church?

It is simple enough. All that is required is for God's people to do nothing. God knows that we need the fellowship of other human beings. He has provided the church for us – because solo Christianity is not real. It is in the church that the odd, the different, those who are at the bottom of the pecking order of life may find refuge. They will find that refuge only if we provide it.

The solution is so simple. "Love your neighbor as yourself." How do you want to be loved? Don't you want to be "in" instead of "out"? Then consider: what do you do to welcome and include those who feel left out? Are you glad you're one of the beautiful people at church, or are your arms open for those who never will be beautiful?

As often as you have done it for the least of these, my brothers, you have done it to me. Even Dumbo had one friend – a mouse.

## Render Unto Caesar - John 18:28 – 19:16

(A more conventional treatment of the character of Pontius Pilate may be found in the Life of Christ series.)

The founder of the church encounters the state. Up until this point, the Roman Empire is unaware of the existence of this man Jesus. His only acknowledgement is the famous "render unto Caesar..." In this passage, we see how the church-state relationship is always a tense one.

Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?" "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you." Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." "But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected. This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled. Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" **"Is that your own idea,"** Jesus asked, **"or did others talk to you about me?"** "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" Jesus said, **"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."** "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, **"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."** "What is truth?" Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?" They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" And they struck him in the face. Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!" But Pilate answered, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." The Jews insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. "Where do you come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered, **"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."** From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar." When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour. "Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked. "We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered. Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified. So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

(Joh 18:28-19:16 NIV)

## Urgent Necessity

The relationship between church and state has a long history of trouble in it. It is troubling in the best of times that such a relationship must be defined. Indeed, among the pearls of wisdom in this struggle are that things should be left vague, and arguments made over trivial, not important, items. In democratic states the method varies. There is an official Church of England, which has the right to hold canonical court upon its members. No such thing exists in the United States. But in all societies there is a set of boundaries which the state imposes upon the church – and the church resents.

Until recently, the relationship in the United States descended from the English legal system. The doctrine of “urgent necessity” prevailed. Any action against the church could only be justified if it met the criteria of urgency and necessity. A common example would be fire sprinklers:

- ✦ They meet a “necessary” form of government – to save lives is a necessity for a government.
  - ✦ They are also “urgent” in that when the fire breaks out, it’s too late to install the sprinklers.
- This doctrine reflects the nature of government and the nature of the church:

- ✦ Government is said to be “temporal” - that is, existing in time. Its purposes are not eternal but here and now. It is therefore fitting that they should attempt to save lives from fire, for example.
- ✦ The church is eternal, living in a temporal world. Her actions reflect the will of her Lord, Jesus Christ. As such, she is bound to a higher authority.

So we would like to think. But the state has been redefining its basis for power lately. The basis for power determines the kind of government which eventually will arise.

- ✦ Power may be by conquest. It is indisputable at the time, but subject to a later conqueror. “Power grows out of the barrel of a cannon” (Chairman Mao). But to rest upon the people without a state sponsored terror, the people must be convinced that the government is legitimate.
- ✦ Sovereignty may also be held to come from God (the “divine right of kings.”) In our time, this is held to be taken from the people. In this model, it is not assumed that the people are perfect; rather, that they are a safeguard against tyranny. This works well when most are Christians. Such a theory guided our constitution and (earlier) Magna Charta – the king is not above the law.
- ✦ The newer theory is that sovereignty is derived from the people - in and of themselves. The government is ultimately responsible for favoring public opinion polls, but no longer under the law. This is a subtle change in democracies, and usually not announced.

## The Jews and Caesar

We may now take a good look at how the Romans ruled in Judea, and the examples this brings to us.

### Cozy relationship

To begin with, you need to understand that Rome ruled its conquered provinces by one of two methods:

- ✦ The province might be considered unruly; if so, a Roman governor was appointed (and furnished with troops). Pontius Pilate is a good example.
- ✦ If the province was stable and peaceful, the Romans would select a local sample of the nobility and use him as puppet ruler. Herod was such a man.

In support of either of these methods you would usually find a group of quislings. In this instance, the quislings come from an unusual source: the religious world. But note this: they saw religion as a way to social and political status. Their religion made them look good. The Romans were not such fools; they saw these leaders as being a good way to govern without the investment of sending more troops. It gave the citizenry the appearance of independence without the reality.

#### **The true role of the state**

Understanding the true role of the state is made much easier if you start with one fact: the state is temporal. It deals with the here and now, not the here and forever. The state should not interfere with the church not because the state isn't good enough but because the state is established to deal with other concerns. Indeed, in our own history we have seen our government stand as a bulwark against those who would oppress the church. In this instance, Pilate would be concerned with the mob.

#### **The demand of the state**

Here we see Pilate maneuvering his quislings. There is no getting around it; this Jesus is innocent. But the leaders seem out for his blood. A good politician extracts from this unpleasant situation all that he can. "We have no king but Caesar" is the Roman loyalty oath.

Any government which is not based upon God's authority is doomed. For all authority in heaven and on earth is given to Christ. Variation from this is rightly seen as corruption.

#### **Christ and the State**

Christ, in this drama, gives us three keys to understanding the relationship of church and state:

##### **My kingdom is not of this world**

If it were, the servants would fight for it. But to grasp the sword is to grasp the weapon of Satan. The power of the church is in weapons the world cannot begin to comprehend.

We are to be "in the world, not of the world." We are not to seek the desires of power, the flesh or pride. Against the armor of humility the state has no weapon which will bite.

##### **I AM a king**

The kingship of Christ is clear: he is the king of Israel. He tells Pilate as much. He says he is a king, born to do just that, sent by the Father. He is there to testify to the truth – even approaching death.

His mission is so clear that the truth is brought forth as the source of the mission. It is still true today, those who seek the Truth, find Him.

This is why we are taught to intercede. Our rulers may seem powerful, but they are human too. We are therefore taught to intercede on their behalf – for their burdens are heavy, and all too few are those who are Christians.

No power if it were not given to you.

In this statement Christ tells us the fundamental legitimacy of government. The Christian owes the government, if it stays in its proper sphere, both service and intercession before the throne of grace. It is the Christian version of Urgent Necessity.

## The American Church

### Early Days

It is sad to see the decline of the American governmental system – which parallels the American church. That is not an accident; Jefferson himself said that our system would not work except where there was a God-fearing people.

Our Founding Fathers were, almost without exception, Christians. They believed in the equality of all men, for that was revealed in the Bible. The fact that they did not include slaves nor women in that has taken us some time to address.

But you can see the Christian view all through our constitution. There is a balance of power; why? Because men are sinners! They must be watched carefully – hence elections. Similarly, the state, composed of sinners, should rule over the Church.

If this government goes bad, the church will be persecuted. (See Thomas à Becket). That's the worry of this system.

### Present

We have changed. No longer is God the source of authority; the people are. This is government by opinion poll. This is coupled with the drive to abolish the church from public life. The concept of "sinner" is obsolete; therefore checks and balances are no longer necessary.

The biggest blow struck in this was the 1991 case before the Supreme Court in which the court threw out the doctrine of urgent necessity. When this was first published, the ACLU called for a constitutional amendment. Now, however, seeing how anti-Christian this is, they have changed their mind.

### Future

Forecasting is exceedingly difficult – especially when it concerns the future. But I think there are two continuing trends:

- ✚ The ACLU will continue to use the courts to inflict political correctness. There are instances such as the one in Pennsylvania in which a young lady, wearing a cross on her necklace, was told to take it off. She was eventually suspended without pay for a year. Why? Because that would have allowed Christianity to have a chance in the work place.
- ✚ On the local front, the ACLU will continue to threaten municipal authorities (which usually don't have the revenue to go to court so much) to send a letter to cities, school boards and other local agencies threatening them with lawsuit if they do not conform. Zoning laws are especially useful for this.

The objective of all this is the humanist society; one in which Christianity cannot be mentioned, but all the fruits of “liberation” are in front of us all the time.

Have you prayed for your country today?

## The Crucifixion - John 19:17-37

A thousand lessons could flow from this piece of Scripture and not lessen the number yet to be heard.

Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they crucified him, and with him two others—one on each side and Jesus in the middle. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written." When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did. Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "**Dear woman, here is your son,**" and to the disciple, "**Here is your mother.**" From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "**I am thirsty.**" A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "**It is finished.**" With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced."

**(Joh 19:17-37 NIV)**

There is a difference between marriage and Christian marriage; there is a difference between schools and Christian schools; there is a difference between dying and a Christian dying. Today's lesson will focus on what we might learn about our own death by examining the death of Christ.

### The nobility of Christ's death

There is a certain "air of mild self-assurance which a consciousness of spiritual dignity bestows upon a naturally modest disposition."<sup>59</sup> That air never left Jesus of Nazareth. Throughout the entire crucifixion he keeps that spiritual dignity which befits the Son of God. As McGuffey's Reader once put it, "Socrates died like a philosopher; Jesus Christ, like a God."

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<sup>59</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon*, 1937, Harper & Row, ppbk, p 83

- ✚ Note that at no time, in any account given by the Gospels, does Jesus say anything that remotely resembles a whining, poor-me attitude. Even when his strength fails him, and Simon of Cyrene is pressed to carry the cross, he says nothing.
- ✚ He suffers aloud, of course – but only in terms which uphold him as Son of Man or Son of God. The Son of Man thirsts; the Son of God asks why the Father has forsaken him.
- ✚ In all this there is no rancor, no sense of spite. He maintains his spiritual dignity through it all.

### Preparation for death

In the hour of his death, Jesus takes certain steps which look forward to the time when he will not be there. They are small things, perhaps, but instructive for us.

- ✚ By far the most generous is the blanket forgiveness he asks on behalf of those who are crucifying him. We are not nearly so astonished as we should be at this; it reflects our lack of suffering for him.
- ✚ There is also the example of the care he takes for his mother. Ordinarily, this role would naturally fall to one of Christ's half-brothers. But Christ arranges things in his own way. The Apostle of love will care for the mother of Christ.
- ✚ Even as he is being crucified, he remembers his mission: to seek and save the lost. As the one thief turns to him to beg mercy, he assures him that he will be in paradise that very day.

### “That all might be fulfilled”

Many a lesson could be spun around the prophecies fulfilled by the Crucifixion. In this lesson, we can but briefly touch on these. It is sufficient for this lesson to note that the fulfillment of prophecy was carefully done.

But in that flurry of prophetic fulfillment we can see a bit of God's purpose. He bows his head *and then* gives up his spirit. All is to be fulfilled because all is under the control of God.

### Witness

One thing remains to be seen: the witness Christ has in his suffering. There are those who see this man die, and then believe. The most famous is the centurion who commanded the soldiers who crucified him. He had seen many men die on a cross before this; it was a common form of punishment. Something about the way in which Jesus died convinced this man of the truth.

### The pettiness of the world

It's not often a subject of comparison, but look at how the world around Jesus acted.

### Pilate's sign

Pilate is a good politician. He knows this man to be innocent; he hands him over to death anyway. But in so doing he extracts a price from the Jews: “We have no king but Caesar.” He now reminds the Jews of this. The sign is drawn up; it is fastened to the cross. This was a common practice; usually the crime of the one being executed is written there. Pilate knows there was no crime. So to prod the Jews he puts down just what he was told.

Unwittingly, Pilate has told the truth. The Pharisees are outraged at the title given, even on a cross. They demand its rewording.

Pilate can be a cold fish when he wants to be. You can almost picture the look by which he reminds them who represents real power around here – and who else just pledged their allegiance to Caesar. Government can be so cold and official.

### The mob

The actions of the mob bring home to us some of the evils of our own time.

- ✦ It seems a constant of the human condition that the down-trodden, the crippled, the ailing are going to be the butt of what passes for humor. We love to laugh at someone.
- ✦ Indeed, it gets worse. Unless our laughter can inflict pain, it seems not nearly so funny.
- ✦ Imagine, then, that such people live close to you – as in, for instance, a city. The mob is always out getting a good laugh.

### The soldiers

The soldiers are all too typical of our society's attitude towards the dying:

- ✦ Their first concern is over money – in this instance, the victim's clothing. This is not pretty, but have you ever been to a funeral where the real topic of discussion is simply "who gets the money?"
- ✦ They, too, take their turn insulting him and laughing at him.
- ✦ They have a modern counterpart: the coldly efficient staff at every large hospital. While there are many in the hospitals who seem to be angels in disguise, you also meet your share of robots.

### The day of our own death

This little essay on the minor particulars of death for Christ has a motive. All of us – assuming the Lord continues to delay his return – will die. We can take some example from this death, at the very least.

### Care for those still living

Just because you're dying doesn't let you ignore the living. Should God be so gracious as to give you some warning, or even if you're just the careful type, here are some thoughts:

- ✦ Financial planning should be done and in order. Somebody else is going to have the privilege of seeing to it that your wishes will be followed. Make it easy on that person; have your affairs in order and documented.
- ✦ More subtle, but perhaps more important, are those for whom you will need to find emotional support.
- ✦ Finally, be caring to those about you. They may seem impersonal as they go about their tasks, but they might also be looking to you and see the kindness of a Christian, even in dying and death.

### Spiritual Preparation

"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." It is a lesson of itself, for it tells us that we are not headed to some land of the clouds.

- ✦ You are going to face your maker. Is there anything in your life you wouldn't want to discuss with him? Then see to it that you repent of it.
- ✦ Indeed, would you want to face him without having been forgiven?
- ✦ Worse yet, would you come to him claiming Christ but still harboring a grudge?

### **Anticipate the Resurrection**

It seems that our ancestors understood this a little bit better than we do. If you will look at some of the old cemeteries, you will find that the graves all face east. There is a reason for this: when the dead rise, these ones wanted to be facing in the correct direction to see Jerusalem. They were buried face up, feet toward the east. In doing this, they testified – even in death – that they believed in the Risen Lord, and in the resurrection and life to come. It was the last testimony they could make.

You may have such an opportunity too. In the hour of your death, ask your Lord for strength so that you might show all who see you that there is a difference. Christians should die the way they lived – trusting God.

## The Words of Christ - John 20

All my life I have been accustomed to seeing the words of Christ in red letters. It's as if he couldn't speak without scarlet ink. There is a reason for this. The words of Christ transcend all other words. It is our privilege to examine those words in this lesson.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. **"Woman,"** he said, **"why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"** Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Jesus said to her, **"Mary."** She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said, **"Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"** Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **"Peace be with you!"** After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, **"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."** And with that he breathed on them and said, **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."** Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **"Peace be with you!"** Then he said to Thomas, **"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."** Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."** Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.  
(Joh 20:1-31 NIV)

### Words to the doubter

It may seem out of order, but let's take care of Thomas first.

### Reasonable man

Thomas is like most people – he’s a reasonable man who believes in what he can see, feel and touch; the rest takes a little more proof. So when he hears this story, what is his reaction?

- ✚ Likely enough, his reaction to the women is to dismiss them entirely. Women were kept apart in this society, and I suspect Thomas took the typical view that they were just too flighty to be regarded as serious evidence.
- ✚ With his fellow apostles matters were different. Here are men with whom he has worked ceaselessly for three years. The tale they tell seems incredible – but they had the evidence of the empty tomb. Thomas wants the same kind of evidence.

Thomas, in short, accuses his fellows of wishful thinking. Today, wishful thinking belongs to those who are sure the resurrection did not happen – because it’s scientifically impossible (which is true.) From the testimony of men like Thomas our faith grew.

### “Put your hand...”

It is a serious fact: among the great religions of the world today, only Christianity invites you to examine the facts of its founding. It is no accident that Christianity is strongest in Western civilization, with its emphasis on science and technology. Why? Because Western civilization, until recently, held to the model that there could be only one truth. There was no concept of “As long as you’re sincere, that makes it true for you.” As we have thrown away the God on whom we built this civilization, it is no wonder that we turn to the mystic reality shaped by our own opinion.

Christianity, moreover, is the only religion that invites you to examine its results. The Christ who heals the broken heart, mends the tortured soul is still with us. His effects can be observed – unless, of course, you like wishful thinking.

### Because you see, you believe

Thomas is a jewel of a man. He goes from being the skeptic to the highest proclamation of faith: “My Lord and My God.” We should note that greater faith produces greater blessing. When Thomas walked in, he doubted. When he saw, he came completely to the top. It is just this sort of examination of the evidence that produced the men who changed the world.

### Words of Comfort

We turn to the words used to comfort.

### “Woman, why are you crying?”

It is a remarkable fact that Mary evidently never puts the dots together and notices these two guys as angels. So her conversation doesn’t really make a lot of sense. She bends over to look inside the tomb, and sees two men (to her) sitting at either end of the place where Jesus was laid. This, somehow, is just one more remarkably unremarked fact of the morning. She tells us what’s in her mind in two statements:

- ✚ “They” have taken him (Jesus’ body). “They” means the priests and Romans who set a guard over the grave; the ones who appear to have all the power. That Christ might be the stronger has not crossed her mind.

- ✚ “I don’t know” what they’ve done with him. It’s not like they should have moved the body; she’s puzzled.

### Speaking to Jesus

There is one consistent theme to Mary. She simply is not going to believe in the resurrection. It’s not even a question of faith and doubt to her. She was there at the Crucifixion; she saw him die.

So when she turns around with tears in her eyes and confusion in her heart, she thinks the man behind her must be the groundskeeper. This man would be in a good position to know where they put him.

Notice that Jesus asks her two questions: the first is the same one the angels asked. But the second is more specific: “who are you looking for?” The former is simply inquiring into her feelings; the latter is an offer of help. We would do to remember this at the next funeral. Mary now turns toward this offer of help – it is the human thing to do.

### “Mary”

In that one word is wrapped up so much love and care. In that word, the blurred figure of the gardener says that he knows her and loves her. Evidently her ears now heard what her eyes could not see through her tears. It is great comfort to know that our Lord knows us by name – and knowing all about us, he still loves us. The Cross changes everything.

### Words of Change

If you are like most Christians, you cherish the times of “mountain top” experience. There is a thrill at being so close to Christ. One of the difficulties on the mountain top is that we live in the valley below. So it is here with Mary. In one golden moment she has seen the risen Lord – and she is not going to let go of him. You can almost picture Jesus gently prying her loose. To relieve her fear of letting go, he tells her that he has not yet ascended – which, of course, means that he soon will. But not yet, Mary, not yet.

### Go and tell

Everything changes because of the Cross and the Resurrection. See how Jesus sends this woman:

- ✚ She is to go to *his brothers*. What a change in our relationship to God! Before the Cross we needed the system of sacrifices and priests; now we are the priests, like all believers. What a change, also, in our relationship to each other – we are now all brothers and sisters, part of the family of God.
- ✚ She is to tell them that *he is returning to his Father*. Mission accomplished, he is returning. That very obviously implies that he came from heaven, a fact which is revealed in his Ascension. It also implies that they have only a little while before he does, forty days, to be specific. During those days, Christ will heal the divisions, soothe the hurts and restore the position of his followers, preparing them for the Great Commission.

### **My Father and Your Father, My God and Your God**

The phrasing hearkens back to the Old Testament, where Ruth told Naomi that she would not go back, but would continue with her, saying “your gods shall be my gods.” It is a moment which is touching in its pathos; it is a moment rewarded by God.

The same feeling is ours; Jesus returned to God – the same God that I worship. He and I are brothers; I am the joint heir of the kingdom with Jesus Christ.

### **Words of Mission**

#### **“Peace be with you”**

Considering the lives of the Apostles, this seems somewhat out of place. If there is any one thing their lives didn’t have from the world’s point of view, it’s peace. So of course this means the peace with God and in God that we have even though the hurricane swirls around us. Why such peace? So that we might be one body, the church.

This peace affects us in many ways. Not the least is in the weapons we choose in life. To accept the peace of God you must use his weapons of spiritual warfare – the love, joy and peace of God being among same. We are sent out – but we are sent in God’s way, not in man’s.

#### **“As the Father has sent me...”**

There is something thrilling about this; as God the Father sent Jesus out to seek and save the lost, so are we sent to seek and save the lost. We share the same mission with him.

- ✚ If we share the same mission, we must use the same weapons. Christianity is not a religion of conquest, but of triumph.
- ✚ If we share the same mission, we share the same spirit – the Holy Spirit. Here, well before Pentecost, the Spirit is given to the disciples.

#### **“If you forgive...”**

This passage has been exploited over the years. It has a simple meaning. We have the same mission as Christ; we are to use the same weapons that Christ used – and one of those weapons is the powerful one of forgiveness. *We are given the same authority that Christ has!* By the Holy Spirit in us we can bring forgiveness to those who have offended us. If we do, then such a person is forgiven both on earth and in heaven.

But there is more: we, as the church, are given the responsibility (and therefore the authority) to forgive as Christ did. We are privileged to send someone out forgiven, and forgiven completely, by God. It is no light thing. What he’s telling us is simply this: God is willing to forgive those who are willing to repent. He needs hands, feet and voice to bring this message to the world. He uses ours.

There is an awestruck attitude when a Christian teaches the Resurrection. Such a teacher is holding in his hands that which is far too high and holy for him. Were it not for the command of our Lord, those who understood this best would talk of it least. But our Lord does command it, and therefore we should be bold to do it.



## The Path of Restoration - John 21

One might conclude that the Gospel of John ended with the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter. It clearly has all the marks of a finale. But it is the universal testimony of the early church that the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter is clearly included. Perhaps – we will not find out in this life – John felt it so embarrassing to Peter that he withheld it. This may be; if so, it is likely that Peter told him to include it anyway.

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, "**Friends, haven't you any fish?**" "No," they answered. He said, "**Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.**" When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. Jesus said to them, "**Bring some of the fish you have just caught.**" Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "**Come and have breakfast.**" None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "**Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?**" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Feed my lambs.**" Again Jesus said, "**Simon son of John, do you truly love me?**" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Take care of my sheep.**" The third time he said to him, "**Simon son of John, do you love me?**" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "**Do you love me?**" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "**Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.**" Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "**Follow me!**" Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.**" Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "**If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?**" This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

(Joh 21:1-25 NIV)

## Prelude

### The power of the ordinary

To most of us, “I’m going fishing” implies a trip to the mountains or the sea, but always a good time. It is something we do with our leisure. To Peter and the others, however, this represents going back to the old line of business, for his trade was that of a fisherman. We may ask why they did this.

- ✦ First, I think, it was their occupation – something at which they made money. They were still unsure of what was to happen, and it never hurts to lay in a little cash.
- ✦ More probably, there is a certain comfort in doing something by manual labor which you have done many times before. Being an apostle was tough; they felt much more at home as fishermen.

### Common sense

If there is any one thing which pops up as an objection to Christianity, it will be this: it is against common sense. This is quite the case; divine sense is higher, greater and better than our common sense.

We see that here – with a little background. Boats in those days did not have a rudder as we know it. They were steered by putting a board over one side and using it like a rudder. That board would be tucked under someone’s arm and muscled around until the heading was right. Given that most people are right handed, they’d want to do this on the right hand side of the boat. That side became known as the steering board side – shortened by our time into starboard. The other side was the one you put up against the dock (to avoid damage to your steering board). That side was the port side.

Now, if you are fishing with a net, the very last thing you would want to do is to throw the net from the right (starboard) side of the boat. It is very likely to foul your steering board. So when Jesus tells them to throw the net on that side, it is against plain sense to do it. At that point, having been at it all night, it could only be a sense of frustration which led them to try such a stupid thing.

### The extraordinary ordinary

Our Lord is, once again, teaching them who is Lord of All. The night’s empty nets are forgotten in this huge catch. It is an extraordinary event – in an ordinary way. God often works that way.

There is a Peanuts cartoon that tells us of this. Snoopy has his water dish in his mouth; he’s thirsty. He takes it over to a pipe sticking up out of the ground with a hose faucet on it. He kicks the pipe – and it begins to rain. The rain fills his water dish; he drinks from it; and on the way back to his dog house he thinks, “I’ll have to think about that one.”

You see it, I hope. The not-quite-miraculous event in ordinary times. It serves not so much to convince us as it does to bring God to our minds. In his mercy, he does this quite a bit, for it is the gentlest way of restoring the common sense Christian in an uncommon relationship.

## The Process of Restoration

It is not sufficient to bring about the repentance of a sinner. It is necessary, but not sufficient. To be sufficient we need to bring about the restoration of the sinner. Christ here shows us four steps:

- ✚ The solemn, deadly inquiry
- ✚ The humble answer
- ✚ The demonstration of faith
- ✚ The warning of suffering to come

### Solemn inquiry

See first that Jesus asks the critical question: do you love me? He will repeat the question with another verb at the end, but that is condescension to Peter's failings. All the questions of the old covenant disappear; Christ does not ask Peter if Peter fears him, or if Peter will work for him. The core question: Do you love me?

- ✚ The first time, Jesus adds the phrase, "more than these?" The reference is to the fishing boat and nets; how many today are married to their jobs?
- ✚ The second time, Jesus simply asks; no conditions.
- ✚ The third time Jesus uses a verb which does not imply so great a love (the two verbs are translated "Truly love" and "love" in the NIV).

All this is done with great formality ("Simon, son of John") so that all will know that what is being said is of first importance.

### Humble answer

"Lord, you know..." Peter makes the only true reply to this. He acknowledges the Lord's omniscience. By offering no defense, he throws himself on the mercy of Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not let the matter rest with one inquiry. As Peter betrayed him three times, so shall the question come. As our Lord was hurt by those three times, Peter is hurt by the third repetition. It is an exquisite example of speaking the truth in love.

### Demonstration of faith

A verbal agreement is not sufficient. Christ tests Peter again in the task he gives him. Curiously, there is an alteration of thought in these three queries:

- ✚ The first time he is to "pasture" Christ's "lambs".
- ✚ The next time he is to "watch over" Christ's sheep.
- ✚ Finally, is to "pasture" Christ's "sheep"

We can but conclude he intended Peter to carry out the tasks assigned without reference to who is whom.

### The Warning of Suffering

Christ knows what Peter will suffer. It may not seem like it, but this is an aspect of restoration: shared suffering.

Permit me an example: suppose you decide that you don't like football, despite being on the team. You tell the coach, and he sits you on the bench, where you will wait. Now suppose you change your mind. How do you know the coach has accepted you? You are accepted when you're allowed to wear pads under the uniform and go out and get yourself knocked silly. You are accepted when you join in the suffering.

Christ suffered too; the servant is not above his master. Therefore, all of us who truly believe should expect suffering.

### Restoration of the Believer

The restoration of a believer follows the same pattern:

#### Do you love the Lord?

Remember that Jesus started out by asking Peter, "Do you love me *more than these?*" If you are not willing to place Christ above all else – family, job, esteem – then you will not be restored. For example:

- ✚ Are you in church only on Sundays which are convenient?
- ✚ Do you spend time, daily, in prayer?
- ✚ What is your giving like? Inside and outside the church.

These are uncomfortable questions. Jesus asks them, so that we might realize that we need to put him first.

#### The Humble Answer

"Lord, you know..." was Peter's answer. If you had to call Christ as your witness of the love you have for him, what would be his testimony? Here are a few more questions which may make it easier to decide:

- ✚ Do you act like a Christian, all the time?
- ✚ Is he our constant companion in prayer?
- ✚ Do we set aside time each day for him?

#### Demonstration of faith

This may sound heretical at first. After all, we are saved by faith, not by works. But we are not talking about salvation but restoration. If only for ourselves, we need to show the world our restoration.

- ✚ Do we use the gifts given us by the Holy Spirit?
- ✚ Are we willing to be servant leaders for the one who washed the disciples' feet?
- ✚ Or did your mind immediately reach for an old and familiar excuse which will logically defend our lack of action?

#### Warning of Suffering

If you are a Christian, you should expect to suffer for it. It really is that simple. So I have but two questions for you:

- ✚ You are going to suffer because of him; do you really expect it, or does it come as a surprise?

✚ When it comes, do we share it with Christ – so that he may be our comfort?