

## New European Commentary: The Gospel of John

### CHAPTER 1

1:1 *In the beginning*- John's Gospel expresses the same truths as the other Gospels, but in more spiritual and abstract terms. He chooses to record the Lord's more enigmatic and spiritual words, whereas the synoptics tend to record His plainer speaking. The Gospel records are transcripts of how men like John taught the Gospel message. John's Gospel was clearly aimed by him at Jewish people who were under the influence of pagan ideas and concepts which later morphed into Gnosticism. He uses the very terms they used, but redefines them. This takes some getting used to, and we are handicapped by not knowing the full range of terms he was seeking to redefine and reposition in a Christian context.

"The beginning" refers to the beginning of the Lord's ministry, both later in John (Jn. 2:11; 8:25 "the same I said unto you from the beginning"; 15:27 "You have been with me from the beginning"; 16:4 "These things I did not tell you at the beginning"; also 1 Jn. 1:1; 2:7,13,14,24; 3:11); and in the other Gospels too ("The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus", Mk. 1:1; "[we] who from the beginning were eyewitnesses", Lk. 1:2). But there can be no doubt that the allusion is to the creation at the beginning of the physical world; but John is to use that in order to describe the huge power unleashed through the Spirit in the creation of a new world, a world of persons reborn, what Paul later terms the "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Comforter passages make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

But just as the Lord's words can be read on various levels, so the ideas of John's Gospel can be. "The beginning" translates a noun, *arche*, a word which can just as comfortably be translated 'the chief one'. And indeed it is translated similarly at times throughout the New Testament- "magistrate", "corner", "prince" etc. The ultimate "beginning", *arche*, chief one, was of course the Lord Jesus. Col. 1:18 is clear: "Who is the beginning [*arche*], the firstborn from the dead", of the new creation, the world of persons created in and through Him. So in the beginning, in the Lord Jesus, was the word, the *logos*, the message preached which had perfect congruence with His person. John's later writings also call Him "the beginning" (Rev. 1:8; 3:14; 21:6; 22:13).

The whole prologue is set out as a hymn. The New Testament is full of very high adoration for the Lord Jesus. Since those words and phrases were chosen under the inspiration of God, His Father, we would be better advised to stick with them rather than try to invent our own terms and analogies in order to express His greatness. The structure of the original text of the prologue to John's Gospel regarding the word, and also Phil. 2:9-11 regarding the exaltation of Jesus, are arranged in such a way that they appear to be hymns which were sung by the believers. Pliny the Younger (*Epistle* 10.96.7) writes of the Christians "singing hymns to Christ as to a god"; surely he had in mind these passages. It can often be that we adopt the very position falsely ascribed to us by our critics; and perhaps that's what happened here. The

critics of early Christianity wrongly claimed that the Christians thought of Jesus as God; and this eventually became their position for the most part, *although it was not originally*.

#### *Was the Word-*

The essential *logos* of the Gospel is the message of Christ crucified. There in the cross is the kernel of everything; there was the "beginning" of the new creation. John later speaks of the Lord Jesus as being the 'faithful martyr' in His death, and thereby being "the beginning [saw] of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). The beginning was not only at the beginning of the Lord's ministry; the essential beginning of the new creation was when the blood and water came out of His side. Yahweh Himself was totally bound up in the death of His Son. God was there with Him and in Him, to the extent that He was in Christ there, reconciling the world unto Himself. In this sense, the *logos* of Christ and the death of the cross "was God". There the Father "was with" the Son [see notes under 16:25,32].

In Hebrew thought, it was quite common to speak of God as having an intention which was then fulfilled. Indeed, this kind of thing is found in the literature and epics of other Semitic languages. Thus the Exodus record records God's commands regarding the tabernacle, and then Moses' fulfilment of them. The prologue to John speaks of God's *logos*, His word or intention, coming to "flesh" in the Lord Jesus. This is classic Hebrew thinking, albeit written in Greek. We will demonstrate below that in Hebrew thought, a representative can be spoken of as being the person who sent them, or whom they represent. Thus the Hebrew way of reading John 1:1-14 would never come anywhere near interpreting it as meaning that 'Jesus is God'. This is a result of not reading the passage against its Hebrew background.

#### **"The word"**

Just look at the many times this phrase occurs in the Gospel records. It doesn't mean 'the whole Bible'. It means clearly enough and without any dispute 'the Gospel message' (e.g. Mk. 2:2; 4:33; 16:20; Lk. 3:2; Jn. 12:48; 14:24; Acts 4:4; 11:19). The Gospel was preached to Abraham in that it comprises the promises to Him and their fulfilment in Jesus (Gal. 3:8). That word of promise was "made flesh" in Jesus; "the word of the oath" of the new covenant, of the promises made to Abraham, "makes the son" (Heb. 7:28). This is just another way of saying that the word- of the promises, of the Gospel- was made flesh in Jesus. Note how in Rom. 9:6,9 "the word" is called "the word of promise"- those made to Abraham. The same Greek words translated 'Word' and 'made' occur together in 1 Cor. 15:54- where we read of the word [AV "saying"] of the Old Testament prophets being 'made' true by being fulfilled [AV "be brought to pass"]. The word of the promises was made flesh, it was fulfilled, in Jesus. The 'word was made flesh', in one sense, in that the Lord Jesus was "*made...* of the seed of David according to the *flesh*" (Rom. 1:3)- i.e. God's word of promise to David was fulfilled in the fleshly person of Jesus. The Greek words for "made" and "flesh" only occur together in these two places- as if Rom. 1:3 is interpreting Jn. 1:14 for us. But note the admission of a leading theologian: "Neither the fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal Word... in terms which compel us to regard it as a person" (1).

#### **" In the beginning was the word"**

John's Gospel tends to repeat the ideas of the other gospel records but in more spiritual terms. Matthew and Luke begin their accounts of the message by giving the genealogies of Jesus, explaining that His birth was the fulfilment, the 'making flesh', of the promises to Abraham and David. And Mark begins by defining his "beginning of the gospel" as the fact that Jesus was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. John is really doing the same, in essence. But he is using more spiritual language. In the beginning was the word- the word of promise, the word of prophecy, all through the Old Testament. And that word was "made flesh" in Jesus, and on account of that word, all things in the new creation had and would come into being. Whilst John is written in Greek, clearly enough Hebrew thought is behind the words. "The Hebrew term *debarim* [words] can also mean 'history'" (2). The whole salvation history of God, from the promise in Eden onwards, was about the Lord Jesus and was made flesh in His life and death.

Luke's prologue states that he was an "eyewitness and minister of *the word*...from *the beginning*"; he refers to the word of the Gospel that later became flesh in Jesus. John's prologue is so similar: "That which was from *the beginning*, that which we have heard, which we have *seen with our eyes*, that which we *beheld*...*the word* of life" (1 Jn. 1:1 RV). Jn. 1:14 matched this with: "*The word* was made flesh, and *we beheld* his glory". John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

Jesus was the word of God shown in a real, live person. All the principles which Old Testament history had taught, the symbology of the law, the outworking of the types of history, all this was now living and speaking in a person. Luke's Gospel makes the same point as John's but in a different way. Over 90% of Luke's Greek is taken from the Septuagint. All the time he is consciously and unconsciously alluding to the Old Testament as having its fulfilment in the things of Jesus. As an example of unconscious allusion, consider Lk. 1:27: "A virgin betrothed to a man". This is right out of Dt. 22:23 LXX "If there be a virgin betrothed to a man...". The context is quite different, but the wording is the same. And in many other cases, Luke picks up phraseology from the LXX apparently without attention to the context. He saw the whole of the OT as having its fulfilment in the story of Jesus. He introduces his Gospel record as an account "of those matters which have been fulfilled" (Lk. 1:1 RV). And "those matters" he defines in Lk. 1:2 as the things of "the word". The RV especially shows his stress on the theme of fulfilment (Lk. 1:20, 23, 37, 45, 54, 55, 57, 70). In essence he is introducing his Gospel just as John does.

In passing, it is interesting to reflect upon the Lord's comment that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is in their midst. For this evidently alludes to a Rabbinic saying preserved in the Mishnah (*Aboth* 3.2) that "If two sit together and study Torah [the first five books of Moses], the divine presence rests between them". The Lord was likening Himself (His 'Name') to the Torah, the Old Testament word of God; and His presence would be felt if that Law was studied as it ought to be.

In confirmation of all this, it has been observed that " The numerical use of *logos* in the Johannine writings overwhelmingly favours " message" (some 25 times), not a personified word; and elsewhere in the NT the use of " word" with genitival complement also support the message motif: " word of God" ... "word of the Kingdom" ... "word of the cross" " (3). So our equation of " the word" with the essence of the Gospel message rather than Jesus personally is in harmony with other occurrences of *logos*. That said, there evidently is a personification

of sorts going on. Personifications of the word of God weren't uncommon in the literature of the time. Thus Wisdom of Solomon 18:15 speaks of how "Thine all powerful word leaped from heaven down from the royal throne". Because "for the Hebrew the word once spoken has a kind of substantive existence of its own" (4), e.g. a blessing or curse had a kind of life of their own, it's not surprising that *logos* is personified.

One way of understanding the prologue in Jn. 1 is to consider how it is interpreted in the prologue we find in John's first epistle. It appears that John's Gospel was the standard text for a group of converts that grew up around him; John then wrote his epistles in order to correct wrong interpretations of his Gospel record that were being introduced by itinerant false teachers into the house churches which he had founded. For example, " God so loved the world..." (Jn. 3:16) seems to have been misunderstood by the false prophets against whom John was contending, to mean that a believer can be of the world. Hence 1 Jn. 2:16 warns the brethren that they cannot 'love the world' in the sense of having worldly behaviour and desires. On the other hand, John saw the faithful churches to whom he was writing as those who had been faithful to the Gospel he had preached to them, as outlined in the Gospel of John. He had recorded there the promise that " You will know the truth" (Jn. 8:32), and he writes in his letters to a community " who have come to know the truth" (2 Jn. 1), i.e. who had fulfilled and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus which he had preached to them initially. This thesis is explained at length in Raymond Brown(5) .

With this in mind, it appears that the prologue of 1 Jn. is a conscious allusion to and clarification of that of Jn. 1. Consider the following links:

<b>In the beginning was the word</b>	<b>What was from the beginning</b>
The word was with God	The eternal life which was with [Gk. in the presence of] God
In [the word] was life	The word of life
The life was the light of men	God is light
The light shines in darkness	In Him there is no darkness at all
The word became flesh And dwelt amongst us and was manifested to us	This life was revealed
We beheld his glory	What we looked at
Of his fullness we have all received	The fellowship which we have is with
Through Jesus Christ	the Father and with his son
The only Son of God	Jesus Christ

You will note that the parallel for "the word" of Jn. 1 is 'the life' in 1 Jn. 1, the life which Jesus lived, the type of life which is lived by the Father in Heaven. That word was made flesh (Jn. 1:14) in the sense that this life was revealed to us in the life and death of Jesus. So the word becoming flesh has nothing to do with a pre-existent Jesus physically coming down from Heaven and being born of Mary. It could well be that the evident links between the prologue to John's Gospel and the prologue to his epistle are because he is correcting a misunderstanding that had arisen about the prologue to his Gospel. 1 Jn. 1:2 spells it out clearly- it was the impersonal "eternal life" which was "with the Father", and it was this which "became flesh" in a form that had been personally touched and handled by John in the personal body of the Lord Jesus. And perhaps it is in the context of incipient trinitarianism that John warns that those who deny that Jesus was "in the flesh" are actually antiChrist.

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## Notes

(1) G.B. Caird, *Christ For Us Today* (London: SCM, 1968) p. 79.

(2) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: SCM, 1971) p. 261.

(3) Raymond Brown, *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982) p. 164.

(4) C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1960) p. 264.

(5) *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) and in his *The Epistles of John* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982). These are lengthy and at times difficult reads, and I can't agree with all the conclusions, and yet I'd heartily recommend them to serious Bible students. One pleasing feature of his writings is his frequent admission that Trinitarian theology is an interpretation of what the NT writers, especially John, actually wrote- and they themselves didn't have the trinity in mind when they wrote as they did. He comments on the hymn of Phil. 2 about Christ taking the "form of God": "Many scholars today doubt that "being in the form of God" and "accepting the form of a servant" refers to incarnation" [*The Community Of The Beloved Disciple* p. 46].

*And the word was towards God, and the word was Divine-* That is a strictly correct translation. The word of the Gospel, which is epitomized in the life and person of the mortal Lord Jesus, was Divine. John is writing for Jews, whose supreme focus upon God led them to ignore the possibility of His deep manifestation in other persons or things. John is emphasizing that the message of the Gospel, the life and person of His Son, is the essence of Him. To believe in God meant to believe the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. To reject that was to reject God Himself.

Not believing in God and not believing in His word of the Gospel are paralleled in 1 Jn. 5:10. God is His word. The word "is" God in that God is so identified with His word. David parallels trusting in God and trusting in His word (Ps. 56:3,4). He learnt this, perhaps, through the experience of his sin with Bathsheba. For in that matter, David "despised the commandment (word) of the Lord... you despised me" (2 Sam. 12:9,10). David learnt that his attitude to God's word was his attitude to God- for the word of God, in that sense, was and is

God. By our words we personally will be condemned or justified- because we too 'are' our words. When Samuel told Eli of the prophetic vision which he had received, Eli commented: "It is the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:18). He meant 'It is the word of the Lord'; but he saw God as effectively His word. "The word", the "word of the Kingdom", "the Gospel", "the word of God" are all parallel expressions throughout the Gospels. The records of the parable of the sower speak of both "the word of God" (Lk. 8:11-15) and "the word of the Kingdom" (Mt. 13:19). The word / Gospel of God refers to the message which is about God, just as the "word of the Kingdom" means the word which is about the Kingdom, rather than suggesting that the word is one and the same as the Kingdom. "The gospel of God" means the Gospel which is about God, not the Gospel which is God Himself in person (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1 Pet. 4:17). So, the word of God, the word which was God, the Gospel of God, was made flesh in Jesus. "The word of Jesus" and "the word of God" are interchangeable (Acts 19:10 cp. 20; 1 Thess. 1:8 cp. 2:13); as is "the word of the Gospel" and "the word of Jesus" (Acts 15:7 cp. 35). The word wasn't directly equivalent to Jesus; He manifested the word, He showed us by His life and words and personality what the Kingdom was like, what God is like; for the word which He "became" was about God, and about the Kingdom. He was the entire Gospel, of God and of His Kingdom, made flesh. He could speak of His words abiding in us (Jn. 15:7), and yet make this parallel to He personally abiding in us (Jn. 15:4,5; 14:20). "The word was God" can't mean that the word is identical with God- for the word "was with God", or "was in God's presence". The NEB therefore renders: "What God was, the Word was". G.B. Caird suggests the translation: "In the beginning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God's own being" (1).

In the person of Jesus, there was an uncanny and never before, never again experienced congruence between a human being and his words. And our witness should be modelled on His pattern- we should be the living embodiment of the doctrines we preach. The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which Jn. 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh. It seems to me that many of us need to learn these things in our hearts; for our preaching has so often been a matter of literal words, Bible lectures, seminars, flaunting our correct exposition of Bible passages and themes. When the essential witness must be of a life lived, a making flesh of the word which is God. To ignore this will lead us into literalistic definitions of literal words, arguments about statements of faith, endless additions of words and clauses to clarify other words...whereas "the word" which the Lord Jesus manifested was not merely human words. There was far more to it than that. It was and is and must ever be a word made flesh. This is why nothing can replace personal witness and personal, one on one teaching as the way that conversions are really made. And yet increasingly we tend to try to use media to preach- TV, CDs, internet, video, tapes etc. There is nothing personally 'live' in all this; there can be no communication of truths through their incarnation in our own personalities. And yet this was how God communicated with us in His Son; and how we too reveal His word in

flesh to others.

“The word was God”. The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person. And this, of course, was why the unbelieving Jews just didn't understand the literal words which He spoke. They asked Him to speak plainly to them (Jn. 10:24); and the Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person?

As the word of God, the message of God in flesh, Jesus was God's agent, and as such could be counted as God, although He was not God Himself in person. P. Borgen brings this out in an article 'God's Agent In The Fourth Gospel' (2). He quotes the halakhic or legal principle of the rabbis, that "An agent is the like the one who sent him", and quotes the Babylonian Talmud Qiddushin 43a: "He ranks as his master's own person". This, therefore, was how those in the 1st century who understood Jesus to be God's agent would have understood Him. John Robinson, one time Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, observed that popular Christianity "says simply that Jesus was God, in such a way that the terms 'Christ' and 'God' are interchangeable. But nowhere in Biblical usage is this so. The New Testament says that Jesus was the Word of God, it says that God was in Christ, it says that Jesus is the Son of God; but it does not say that Jesus was God, simply like that" (3). And he goes on to apply this good sense to an analysis of the phrase "the word was God" in John 1. He argues that this translation is untenable because: "In Greek this [translation "the word was God"] would most naturally be represented by 'God' with the article, not *theos* but *ho theos*. Equally, St. John is not saying that Jesus is a 'divine' man... that would be *theios*. The NEB, I believe, gets the sense pretty exactly with its rendering, 'And what God was, the Word was'. In other words, if one looked at Jesus, one saw God"- in the sense that His perfect character reflected that of the Father (4). The lack of article ["the] before "God" is significant. "In omitting the article before *theos*, the author intends to say that the Logos is not actually God but only... a divine emanation" (5).

#### Notes

- (1) G.B. Caird, *The Language And Imagery Of The Bible* (London: Duckworth, 1988) p. 102.
- (2) In *Religions In Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) pp. 137-148.
- (3) John Robinson, *Honest To God* (London: S.C.M., 1963) p. 70.
- (4) *Ibid* p. 71.
- (5) Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology Of The New Testament* (London: S.C.M., 1971) p. 266.

1:2 *This existed, in the beginning, with God*- The word, not the Lord personally, existed in the beginning with God. As noted above, the essence of the Gospel was not made up by God at the time of Jesus, as John's Jewish audience tended to think. His purpose in His Son had been

from the beginning; in whatever way one wants to read "the beginning". Be it the beginning of the Christian message or the beginning of creation. God is not making up His story as He goes along, as it were. That was the typical Jewish objection to the Gospel; that it is something new, and they preferred to stay with what they considered to be the original. The point is that the original essence of God was the things concerning His Son and His Kingdom.

The Hebrew idea of being "with" someone can carry the idea of being 'in their presence'. 2 Kings 5:1,2 speak of how Naaman was "with" his master, and the RVmg. gives "before" or 'in the presence of' as a translation of this idiom. He is paralleled in the record with the maid who was "before" (RVmg.) her mistress, Naaman's wife. When we read that the word was "with" God, the idea is that the word was always before God, in His presence, in His perspective. Applied to an abstract idea like the logos, surely the idea is that God always had this plan for a Son before Him, in His presence / perspective.

The idea of a "word" being "with" God or even another person has an Old Testament background. Job comments: "Yet these things you have concealed in your heart, I know that this is with you" (10:13; NIV "in your mind"). Similarly Job 23:13, 14: "What his soul desires, that he does, for he performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with him". God's essential plans are therefore 'with Him', in this figure of speech. When those plans are revealed in words, i.e. they are openly verbalized, it would be true to say: "I will instruct you in the power of God; what is with the Almighty I will not conceal" (Job 27:11). Wisdom, personified as a woman, was "with God" before creation- it was not 'with' the sea, but it was 'with' God (Job 28:14; 8:22,30). To hold a plan in one's own mind is to have it 'with' them. The Hebrew text of Gen. 40:14 bears this out, when Joseph is begged: "Remember me with yourself". So for the essential purpose of God in His Son to be 'with' Him does not in any sense imply that a person was literally 'with' God in Heaven. Note the parallel between the word of God and the work of God in Ps. 106:13: "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel". Whatever God says / plans comes to concrete fulfilment; and the idea of a Son was always in His mind. That word became flesh, became real and actual, in the person of Jesus.

The basic idea in John 1 is repeated in Proverbs 8. In the beginning, there was a logos / word / intention with the Father. His 'idea' of having a Son was not thought up at the last minute, as some sort of expediency in order to cope with the unexpected problem of human sin, as some of the critics and false teachers of the first century taught. In fact, it wouldn't be going too far to say that John actually has Proverbs 8 in mind when speaking about the logos being in the beginning with the Father. Prov. 8:22-31 (ASV) reads: "Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of his way, Before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, Before the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth, When there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills was I brought forth; While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, Nor the beginning of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there: When he set a circle upon the face of the deep, When he made firm the skies above, When the fountains of the deep became strong, When he gave to the sea its bound, That the waters should not transgress his commandment, When he marked out the foundations of the earth; Then I was by him, as a master workman; And I was daily his delight, Rejoicing always before him, Rejoicing in his habitable earth; And my delight was with the sons of men".

The key issue is whether "wisdom" in Proverbs is in fact the Lord Jesus personally. A brief



glance at Proverbs surely indicates that wisdom is being personified as a woman. Wisdom in Proverbs stands at the gates and invites men to come listen to her. She dwells with prudence (Prov. 8:12), and in Solomon's time cried out to men as they entered the city (Prov. 8:1-3). None of these things are intended to be taken literally. "Wisdom" is wisdom- albeit personified. Wisdom was "possessed" by God- and yet the Hebrew word translated "possessed" is defined by Strong as meaning 'to create'. When God started His "way" or path with men, He had principles and purpose. He didn't make up His principles as He went along. And this was what was being said by John's first century critics. Therefore John alluded to Proverbs 8 in explaining that the essential purpose of the Father was all summarized and epitomized in the person of His Son; and that logos was created / conceived by the Father from the very beginning. Note that Prov. 8:24,25 describes wisdom as being "brought forth" by the Father from the beginning. Again, God as it were hatched a plan. Even if we were to equate wisdom with Jesus personally, He was still created / brought forth from the Father. Somewhat different to the false Trinitarian notion of an 'uncreate' Jesus who 'eternally existed'. Wisdom was the "master workman" (Prov. 8:30), or 'the one trusted / believed in' (Heb.)- in the sense that all of God's natural creation was made according to and reflective of the principles of "wisdom". John's allusion to Prov. 8 shows that this "wisdom" was above all to be embodied and epitomized in God's Son. From this it follows that the whole of the natural creation was designed with the Lord Jesus in mind. Somehow it speaks of Him; will be used by Him; and will in some sense be liberated and redeemed by Him from "the bondage of corruption" to share the glorious liberty of us God's children (Rom. 8:21-24). And perhaps this is why we sense that the Son of God was strangely at peace with the natural creation around Him, and could so effortlessly extract deep spiritual lessons from the birds, flowers and clouds around Him. "Then I was by [Heb. toward] him" (Prov. 8:30) is the idea behind the Greek text of Jn. 1:1: "The word was [toward] God". It wasn't Jesus personally who was with God or God-ward; it was the word / wisdom / *logos* which was, and this was then "made flesh" in the person of the Lord Jesus. And this *logos* was the "wisdom" in Proverbs.

We've demonstrated that John's Gospel begins with the idea that the "word" of God in the Old Testament was made flesh in the person of the Lord Jesus. But John actually continues that theme throughout his Gospel. He continually refers to things which the Jews saw symbols of the Torah- and applies them to Jesus. Examples include the bread / manna and water, and also light. The Assumption of Moses speaks of the Torah as "the light that enlightens every man who comes into the world"- and this is exactly the language of Jn. 1:9 about Christ. Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to discover that nearly all the phrases used in the prologue to John's Gospel are alluding to what Jewish writers had said about the "Wisdom of God", especially in Proverbs and the apocryphal writings known as the Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus (1). And they understood "Wisdom" to primarily refer to the Torah. For example, Jn. 1:14 RVmg. states that the Lord Jesus as the word made flesh "tabernacled amongst us". Yet Ecclus. 24:8 speaks of Wisdom 'tabernacling' amongst Israel. *Skenoo*, the verb 'to tabernacle', is of course related to the noun *skene*, the tabernacle. As Israel lived in tents in the wilderness, God too came and lived with them in a tent- called the tabernacle, the tent where God could be met. The idea was that God wasn't so far from them, He chose to come and be like them- they lived in tents, so He too lived in a tent. He didn't build a huge house or palace to live in- because that's not how His people lived. He 'tented' in a tent like them. This pointed forward to the genuine humanity of the Lord Jesus; for the human condition is likened to a tent in 2 Cor. 5:1. So rather than proving that 'Jesus was God', this whole prologue to John's Gospel actually proves otherwise.

The language of pre-existence was applied by the Jews to the Torah and Wisdom, and so when John demonstrates that the ultimate Wisdom / Torah / logos / word which was from the beginning has now been fulfilled in and effectively replaced by Jesus, he's going to reference that same 'pre-existence' language to make his point. As an example, the Mishnah stated (Aboth Nathan) that "Before the world was made the Torah was written and lay in the bosom of God" (2). John's desire is that his fellow Jews quit these fanciful ideas and realize that right now, in Heaven, the Son of God is in the bosom of the Father (Jn. 1:18). He right now is the word-made-flesh. The uninspired Jewish writings spoke of the descent and re-ascend of Wisdom (1 Enoch 42; 4 Ezra 5:9; 2 Bar. 48:36; 3 Enoch 5:12; 6:3), and Philo especially connects Wisdom and the Logos. It seems that these wrong Jewish ideas found their ways into Christianity, and were taken over and wrongly applied to Jesus. Indeed I would go so far as to argue that John's 'Logos' passage in Jn. 1:1-14 is in fact a deconstruction of those wrong ideas; he alludes to them and corrects them, just as Moses alluded to incorrect pagan myths of creation and shows a confused Israel in the wilderness what the true story actually was.

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#### Notes

(1) This is shown at great length throughout Rendel Harris, *The Origin of The Prologue To St. John's Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1917).

(2) Cited in C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1953) p. 86.

1:3 *All things created came into existence on account of it; and without it nothing created came into existence*- The "it" can as well be translated "him". Speaking of the *logos* as a person was quite common amongst the Jews- and they in no way understood that God could have any other god in existence or equal with Him. One of the most thorough surveys of the logos theme concludes: "It is an error to see in such personifications an approach to personalisation. Nowhere either in the Bible or in the extra-canonical literature of the Jews is the word of God a personal agent" (1). It was the apostate Jew Philo who began to speak of the logos as "the second God, who is his logos... God's firstborn, the logos" (2). And it was this interpretation which obviously came to influence Christians desperate for justification of their idea of a Divine Jesus; but such justification is simply not to be found in God's word. All talk of a "second God" is utterly unBiblical.

However, whilst in a sense the logos was God's word, plan and intent personified, it became actual flesh / concrete reality in the person of Jesus. That God created and accomplished the physical creation by His word was an obvious Old Testament doctrine (Is. 55:11). By the time John was writing his Gospel [somewhat later than the others], the idea of believers being a new creation in Christ would have been developed in the early ecclesia (2 Cor. 5:17 etc.). The Greek translated "made by..." occurs often in John's Gospel. It clearly describes how the Gospel of the Lord Jesus 'made' new men and women; lives were transformed into something new. The phrase is used in the immediate context of John 1: "to become ['be made'] the sons of God" (1:12), in that grace and truth came ['were made'] by Jesus (1:17). "All things" therefore refers to the "all things" of the new creation. Note how Jesus came unto "his own things" (1:11 N.I.V.), i.e. to the Jewish people. "All things" which were made by him therefore comfortably refers to the "all things" of the new creation- which is just how Paul uses the phrase (Eph. 1:10,22; 4:10; Col. 1:16-20). Quite simply all of us, in "all things" of our spiritual experience, owe them all to God's word of promise and it's fulfilment in Christ. This is how totally central are the promises to Abraham! "All things were made by him"!

Consider other occurrences of “made by” in John’s Gospel:

4:14 The water of the life of Jesus shall be [‘made’] in the believer “a well of water springing up into everlasting life”

5:9,14 the lame man “was made” whole

10:16 the believers shall be made (RV ‘shall become’) one flock

12:36 may be [‘made’], RV ‘become’, “the children of light”

15:8 So shall ye be [‘made’] my disciples

16:20 Your sorrow shall be turned [‘made’] into joy.

All these examples speak of the creative power of the Lord Jesus in human lives, through the agency of the Spirit. This Spirit was poured out as a result of His sacrifice. The very same Greek words are used in 19:36 [cp. Lk. 24:21] in describing the cross: “These *things* were *done* [s.w. ‘made’]”. All things of the new creation were made on account of His cross.

"Apart from him not a thing came to be" (Jn. 1:3) is a phrase repeated by the Lord Jesus in Jn. 15:5, where He says that "apart from me" we can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The things that came into being in Jn. 1:3 would therefore appear to be the things of the new life enabled and empowered in Christ. In this sense Jesus can be described as the creator of a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), a new world, but a world of persons. The allusion is indeed to the power unleashed at the natural creation but the reference is not to that, but to the new world of believers in Christ. But in practice, it is the word of the Gospel, the message of Jesus, which brings this about in the lives of those who hear and respond to it. We are born again by the word, the “seed” of the living God (1 Pet. 1:23 RV mg.). In this arresting, shocking analogy, the “word” of the Gospel, the word which was made flesh in the person of Jesus, is likened to the seed or sperm of God. We were begotten again by “the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creations” (James 1:18). In God’s word, in all that is revealed in it of the person of our Lord Jesus, we come face to face with the imperative which there is in what we know of Him to be like Him. In this feature of God’s word, as it is in the Bible record and therefore and thereby as it is in and of His Son, we have the ultimate creative power, the dynamism so desperately needed by humanity, to transform our otherwise shapeless and formless lives. And in a multitude of lives, “All things were made by him”. As the Lord Jesus was sent into this world, so are we. We evidently didn’t personally ‘pre-exist’; and so we cannot reason that He did because He was sent by the Father. ‘Sending’ in Scripture can refer to being commissioned to speak forth God’s word (Is. 48:16; Jer. 7:25; Ez. 3:4,5; Zech. 2:8-11). Thus God is often described as sending forth His prophets. We too must allow ourselves to be sent forth as our Lord was, making the word of the Gospel flesh in us as it was in Him. For like Him, we personally are the message which we preach. The word of God / the Gospel is as seed (1 Pet. 1:23); and yet we believers end our probations as seed falling into the ground, which then rises again in resurrection to be given a body and to eternally grow into the unique type of person which we are now developing (1 Cor. 15:38). The good seed which is sown is interpreted by the Lord both as the word of God (Lk. 8:11), and as “the children of the Kingdom” (Mt. 13:38). This means that the word of the Gospel becomes flesh in us as it did in our Lord. The word of the Gospel is not, therefore, merely dry theoretical propositions; it elicits a life and a person. We will be changed; not just physically, but we will each be given our own, unique ‘body’, as Paul puts it. There will be eternal continuity between who we now become, and who we grow into throughout eternity. This is the amazing power of the word of the Gospel; for this is the seed, which transforms the essential you and me into a seed which will rise up to great things in God’s future Kingdom. In all this, the Lord was and is our pattern. “All things were made by him”.

## Notes

(1) G.F. Moore, *Judaism In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927) Vol. 1 p. 415.

(2) References in James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) p. 221.

1:4 *In it was life, and that life was the light of men*- "Life", *zoe*, in John's Gospel means spiritual life, the life which is eternal in the sense that it is the kind of life we shall eternally live. Many times, John records the Lord offering eternal life to us now. We shall of course die, but we can live today the life we shall eternally live. The "it" or "he" here is clearly to be understood as the Lord Jesus; He was "the word made flesh" according to :14, but even before :14 the idea is presented to us. The prologue to John's letter states that the Lord is "the word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1). The life was "in", within, the Lord Jesus in the sense of 5:26: "The son has life in Himself". "Eternal life... is in His Son" (1 Jn. 5:11,20). He was the life as He was the light; "I am the life... I am the light" (11:25; 14:6). His Spirit, His mind within, was the life which is to be the light of our whole existence. In this sense the believer in Him, through receiving His Spirit of life and living, has life within (6:53).

The real life was lived in the human Jesus. His life was the life which we shall eternally live in God's Kingdom. It's why such a relatively large percentage of the New Testament is taken up with the four Gospel records of His life. It is that life which is the light of men, i.e. those who believe. For John goes on to lament that many in the Jewish world had refused that light and life. Indeed, they had sought to kill that life in crucifixion. The light of our lives is to be the life the Lord lived and still lives. Our focus is to be wholly upon Him. This is the essence of Christianity, Christ-ness; and not true theology in itself. The connection between the life and 'seeing' it is found several times later in John. Those who disbelieve in the Son of God do not "see life" (Jn. 3:36). His life is not their light. Those who follow Him have "the light of life" (8:12). John's Gospel consistently speaks of "life" being given to the believer by the Lord; but the "life" in view is His own life. This is another way of expressing the gift of the Spirit.

"The light" is used by the Lord in John's Gospel to refer to His living amongst men. His brief life in first century Palestine was the time when "the light" was seen by the world; but He urged men to believe in Him whilst they had that light. His life was the light- the believer will "have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12), the Lord's life. As long as He was in the [Jewish] world, He was the light to that world (9:5). They were to walk after Him whilst they had that light (12:35); "while you have light, believe in the light" (12:36). And yet there are clear statements that the light continues to shine now in the lives of the believers. The paradox is resolved by connecting it with the promise of the Holy Spirit comforter. The Lord comforted the disciples that although He was indeed physically leaving them, yet through the gift of His Spirit it would be as if He were still present amongst them. And so indeed the Lord was "the light" during His mortal life, lived amongst the darkness of men in Palestine. But that light continues to shine, in that He is present amongst the believers, and they live as if in the light of His presence. To join in the first century disciples in following the Lord Jesus, focused on living His life, having His Spirit, thinking His thoughts... is to "walk in the light". And that is the closest the NT ever comes to offering a 'basis of fellowship'; if we walk in the light, then we have fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:7), even if we may have differences of interpretation and theology. Or as Paul puts it, we are "of one mind" if we strive to have the

one mind, that of the Lord Jesus. John's later work, Revelation, concludes by speaking of how the light of the Lord Jesus shines both now and eternally. Our living in the light of Him is what shall eternally continue, and defines the nature of our eternal experience. It is utterly critical, therefore, that in this life we come to a total focus upon Him.

1:5 *This light shines in the darkness, but the darkness cannot understand it*- As noted on :4, "the light" was the life lived within the mind of the Lord Jesus during His mortal life. But He shines on, in that those who follow Him in turn have His life and light within them, and thus become "the light of the world" just as He was. It is true in Him as well as in us, that we are the light that shines in the darkness (1 Jn. 2:8). But "the darkness" refused to understand it. Judaism therefore was "the darkness"; John saw no common ground between true Christianity, and those who rejected the Lord Jesus as the total and defining light of their path. They were in darkness; for not following Him means walking in the darkness, stumbling around with no ultimate sense of direction (12:35). And that is the Lord's opinion of all non-Christian religion. Those who preferred the darkness did so because they didn't want the light of the Lord's perfect character to reveal their sins (3:20,21). The darkness refers to hating ones' brother (1 Jn. 2:9,11), and Judaism hated their brother Jesus, as well as being characterized by bitter hatred amongst themselves, as witnessed by the various opposing sects within Judaism. To walk focused upon the life and character of the Lord Jesus means we are walking in the light, and hatred of our brethren will not characterize that walk. This is a sober warning to those who name the name of Christ but hate their brethren in Christ. They are clearly not focused upon Him and His light, having refused to receive His Spirit.

The allusion is clearly to how the light shone out of the darkness at creation. The Lord Jesus is therefore "light" to us in the sense that He illuminates. The initiative is His; we are the subjects of His action. This is the grace / gift of the Spirit. Paul understood the illumination of the light as something happening within the hearts of believers: "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). I have to emphasize- this is His action, performed by grace upon the hearts of His people.

3:19-21 and 12:32-46 [see commentary there] suggest that one level of meaning of Jesus as "light of the world" was that in the darkness that came over the land at the crucifixion, He upon the cross was the light of a darkened world. The Lord was "the beginning of the [new] creation of God" (Rev. 3:14); each believer who enters the spiritual world is enlightened by the light of Christ crucified. The Lord on the cross is the epitome of all that He was and is; His life, His word / *logos*, His Spirit.

John's Gospel is full of reference to Essence concepts. It's been widely argued that John's language alludes to the threat of incipient Gnosticism, and this may be true. But it's likely that John was written quite early, even before AD70. In this case, when John speaks of light and darkness, children of light and darkness, the Jewish 'Satan' / adversary to Christianity as "the ruler of this world", he would also be alluding to these common Essene ideas. For John, following the light means following Jesus as Lord; the darkness refers to the flesh, the desires within us to conform to the surrounding world and its thinking. His point, therefore, is that instead of fantasizing about some cosmic battle going on, true Christians are to understand that the essential struggle is within the mind of each of us.

1:6 *It happened that a man of God was sent. His name was John-* AV "Sent from God", *para* God. The similarity of language was in order to emphasize that the in the same way as the Lord was sent from God, so was John. There is no way therefore that such language refers to any superhuman descent of a pre-existent being, because it is used of John the Baptist. Indeed this is but one of many examples of where John's Gospel uses exalted language to describe the person of Jesus- but actually, if one looks out for it, John uses the very same terms about all of humanity. Here are some examples:

<b>About Jesus</b>	<b>About humanity generally or other human beings</b>
Came into the world (9:39; 12:46; 16:28; 18:37)	1:9 [of "every man"]; 6:14. 'Came into the world' means 'to be born' in 16:21; 18:37
Sent from God (1:6; 3:28)	3:2,28; 8:29; 15:10
A man of God (9:16,33)	9:17,31
'What I saw in my Father's presence' (8:38)	The work of ' <i>a man</i> who told you the truth as I heard it from God' (8:40)
God was His Father	8:41
He who has come from God (8:42)	8:47
The Father was in Him, and He was in the Father (10:37)	15:5-10; 17:21-23,26
Son of God (1:13)	All believers are 'the offspring of God Himself' (1:13; 1 Jn. 2:29-3:2,9; 4:7; 5:1-3,8)
Consecrated and sent into the world (17:17-19)	20:21
Jesus had to listen to the Father and be taught by Him (7:16; 8:26,28,40; 12:49; 14:10; 15:15; 17:8)	All God's children are the same (6:45)
Saw the Father (6:46)	The Jews should have been able to do this (5:37)
Not born of the flesh or will of a man, but the offspring of God Himself	True of all believers (1:13)

1:7- see on Lk. 1:14.

*This one came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe in the light-* Potentially, all Israel could have believed in the light and been saved. John's mission could have been totally successful; but human beings were allowed their freewill, and so that potential wasn't realized. The Gospel of John is a transcript of his preaching of the gospel,

and it seems that he was involved with preaching to converts of John the Baptist. He writes to his converts perhaps alluding to this by saying that although they had believed / received the witness of men, i.e. John the Baptist, they needed to accept that the far greater witness to the Lord Jesus was that given by God in the gift of the Spirit, the life of Jesus within them (1 Jn. 5:9,10,11). This general scene is not unknown today- those who say they are convinced Jesus is the Messiah because He fulfilled prophetic witness about Himself; and yet they are apparently resistant to receiving the gift of His Spirit within them.

1:8- see on Lk. 12:49,50.

*John was not the light, but was sent that he might testify concerning the light-* As noted on :7, John was witnessing to the disciples of John the Baptist, and some of them apparently felt that he was an end in himself. They were not giving due weight to his message about the Lord Jesus; instead they were just approvingly focusing upon his calls for repentance and criticism of Jewish society.

1:9 *The true light, who by coming into the world enlightens every man-* The true light may refer to the Lord as the antitype of the *shekinah* glory which appeared in the darkness of the tabernacle. Judaism in moral darkness are thereby associated with the tabernacle system. The AV offers "which lighteth every man that cometh into the world". But whichever translation we choose, the parallel is still established between "the world" and "every man". The world is the world of believers. Those who enter that world of newly created persons are enlightened by the Lord Jesus as "the true light". This is something He does to them, and is not merely a function of their own academic study of Scripture. The same word is used of how the Spirit enlightens our eyes to perceive that which cannot be 'seen' by natural unaided faculty (Eph. 1:18; 3:9). We have been "enlightened" by the Spirit (Heb. 6:4; 10:32; 2 Tim. 1:10). And the same word is used of how we shall eternally be enlightened; but that process begins now (Rev. 21:23; 22:5).

1:10 *He was in the world, and though the world had originated on account of him, the world recognised him not-* "The world" in :9 is the world of the believers. The world "originated on account of him" = AV "the world was made by him". The parallel is clear with "All things were made by him" (:3), and as noted on :3, the "all things" refer to the "all things" of the new creation. The phrase is used that way by Paul several times. "He was in the world" could likewise be understood as referring to the "world" of the new creation; for if the reference is to the literal world, then the statement seems too obvious to need making. The parallel in the prologue of 1 Jn. 1 would be John's reference to how the early believers had seen, touched and handled the word, the Lord Jesus. He had been amongst them. But then "the world recognised him not" appears to shift the reference of "the world" away from the world of believers, the new creation, to the Jewish world- defined in :11 as "His own", i.e. the Jewish people generally, or perhaps those of Nazareth in particular, who did not accept Him. At first blush, this may seem unacceptable to have two different meanings for "the world" within one verse. But I suggest the contrast is purposeful; the point being that there are two worlds in view, that of the believers or the new creation; and the Jewish world, who rejected the Lord. They were literally worlds apart; there was no overlap between them. And that is a theme of John's message.

John appeals for men to be baptized with the twice repeated personal comment: "...and I knew him not", in the very context of our reading that the [Jewish] world "knew him not" (Jn. 1:10, 31,33). He realises that he had withstood the knowledge of the Son of God, just as others had. See on Jn. 3:29.

Understanding "the world" as a world of persons rather than the physical world of material "things" is reflected in the way that John uses the term *kosmos*. So many interpreters have assumed that *kosmos* refers to the physical, literal world; whereas deeper reflection surely indicates that it refers rather to the world of *persons*. Thus "the world was made on account of Him [Christ], and the world did not know him" (Jn. 1:10; 1 Jn. 3:1-3) doesn't mean that Jesus created the literal planet; but rather that the world of persons was made on account of Jesus, but that world didn't know or accept / recognize Him. It is this "world" into which 'every believing man comes' (Jn. 1:18); and it is the "sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) which Christ bore- not the sin of the literal planet, but the sin of the world of persons who want their sins to be carried by Him. God sent His son into the world to save it, and loved this world through giving Christ for it (Jn. 3:16)- clearly referring to the world of persons rather than the physical planet. The Lord in Lk. 11:49-51 speaks of the creation of humanity as "the foundation of the world"- for He says that Abel was slain at "the foundation of the world"- i.e. of the world of persons. In the same way as these passages in John have been misread as referring to a literal, physical, concrete world, so we too tend to see this world more as a world of things than a world of persons. For seeing the world as a world of persons demands a huge amount from us, and the kind of sensitivity to humanity which leads ultimately to the death of the cross. The new creation was brought into being by the cross. The Jewish world's rejection of the Lord was crystallised in the crucifixion.

1:11 *He came to his own people*- This may specifically refer to the Lord's rejection by "His own" at Nazareth. The context here speaks of both the word which was "in the beginning", and of Jesus personally, whom John had witnessed to. Acts 10:36-38 RV puts this in simpler terms: "He sent the word unto the children of Israel, preaching the gospel of peace by [in] Jesus Christ... that word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth". The sequence and similarity of thought between this and John 1:1-8 is so great that one can only assume that John is deliberately alluding to Luke's record in Acts, and stating the same truths in spiritual terms: 'In the beginning was the word of the Gospel which was with God. And then John came witnessing to Jesus, and then the word as it was in Jesus came to the Jews...'. Paul pleaded with his fellow Jews: "Brethren, children of the stock of Abraham...to us is the word of this salvation sent forth" (Acts 13:26 RV). Yet he also wrote that in the fullness of time, God "sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). The Son of God was "the word of this salvation" / Jesus. "The word was God".

*And they of his own people rejected him*- The Greek specifically avoids stating that all His own people rejected Him; for the faithful minority accepted Him. "His own people" is a clear statement of the Lord's humanity, wedged within a context which is a hymn to His greatness. Frequently in the New Testament we meet this kind of juxtapositioning of language emphasizing Christ's humanity alongside terms which emphasize His Divine side. This is typical Hebraic logic, whereby blocks of material are placed next to each other, in order to create a dialectic between them which leads to the intended conclusion. Back in Exodus, we find Pharaoh's heart hardened by God, and yet him hardening his own heart. Greek thinking panics here- for it works by step logic, logically reasoning from one statement to another.



There appears to our European minds to be a crisis of contradiction, which many find worrying. But the Hebrew mind is far less phased. Rather the two seeming contradictions are weighed up and the conclusion reached- e.g. that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but God confirmed him in this. The language used about the Lord Jesus in the New Testament is similar. John Knox got somewhere close to understanding this when he wrote that "we do not experience the humanity and divinity of Christ in ways as separate as this language suggests; we are aware of them together". John's Gospel is maybe the most evident example. In the context of all the high, lofty language relating the Lord Jesus to the *logos*, that was God from the beginning, we read of Him coming "to his own", *eis ta idia*, his own heritage of people and place; and being rejected by "his own people", *hoi idioi*, the Jews of his time and setting (Jn. 1:10-12). It is the "son of *man*" who is spoken of as having descended from Heaven (Jn. 3:13; 6:62). Truly "the Christ of John is actually more human than in almost any of the other New Testament writings". So often does John's Gospel baldly speak of the Lord Jesus as "the man": Jn. 4:29; 5:12; 8:40; 9:11, 24; 10:33; 11:47, 50; 18:14, 17, 29; 19:5.

1:12- see on Jn. 3:3; 3:13.

*But whoever accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God-* "Accepts" or "receives" is the term used of receiving the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2:38; Rom. 5:17; 1 Pet. 4:10). The idea is not of our intellectually accepting truths, but of receiving what we are given. And we are given Him, His life, His Spirit; or as it is here expressed, the power or force to become God's children. This power is clearly that of the Spirit, given to those who show their belief in His Name by baptism into it. This gift of the Spirit is alluded to in the next verse, and the ideas here are developed further in 3:3-5 in talking of the birth of the Spirit rather than that of the flesh. Rom. 8:16 is clear that we become "the children of God" (same Greek words as here) through the work of the Spirit. John four times uses the term "children of God" when writing to his converts, those who had heard the gospel of John and been baptized (1 Jn. 3:1,2,10; 5:2). He saw them as God's children because the Spirit had worked in them to make them His.

1:13 *These were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God-* The context has spoken of the work of the Spirit in forging the children of God (see on :12); and these words are taken further in 3:3-5 where we find that birth of the flesh is contrasted to the birth of the Spirit which comes through water baptism.

The contrast between human will and God's will recalls the two kinds of "world" spoken of (see on :10). The Lord's death was as a result of Him being given over "to their [man's] will" (Lk. 23:25 s.w.), but the birth of the new creation was by the will of God. This phrase is frequently associated with the Lord's death (e.g. Acts 2:23; Lk. 22:22; Mt. 26:42; Jn. 4:34; 5:30; Heb. 10:9,10; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17,18). We were born by the will of God, i.e. the death of the Lord fulfilling that will. The later references in John to the Lord coming to do God's will refer to His coming in order to die the death of the cross. John's account of how blood and water issued from the Lord's pierced side is an evident allusion to childbirth; he saw the ecclesia as being born out of the pierced body of the Lord at the time of His death.

1:14 *For this, the word became flesh, and indwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth-* The climax of this verse

is "Full of grace [gift] and truth". The gift or grace of the Spirit was given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification. Here we have the explanation of "For this..."; the preceding verses have spoken of the gift of the Spirit, and this was made possible by the Lord's humanity, death and resurrection.

Because Jesus was the *only* Son of God, therefore He is *full* of the Father's grace and truth. Jn. 1:14 makes this connection between fullness and only Sonship. Because of the wonder of this, we should therefore hear Him, respecting and thereby obeying His word simply because of our appreciation of who He is and was- the Son of God (Lk. 9:35). And yet this description of Him as the begotten Son of God connects with how we have just read that we too are to be born of God and not of the flesh, if we accept the spirit of Jesus.

It seems that in the Lord Jesus alone we see the perfect fusion of "grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14); in Him alone mercy and truth met together, in His personality alone righteousness and peace kissed each other (in the words of the beautiful Messianic prophecy of Ps. 85:10). Somehow it seems that we both individually and collectively cannot achieve this. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ our Lord, without which we are "none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

"We beheld his glory" makes John's Gospel his personal testimony. It would seem that the Gospels were so clearly etched in the minds of the first century believers because the message of the Gospel was preached in the form of reciting a 'Gospel', a record of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This is why 'gospel' as in the message and 'Gospel' as in the four Gospels are the same word, although this seems to be overlooked by many. The Gospel according to Matthew is the good news about Christ which Matthew preached and then wrote down. John of all the Gospel writers makes it openly apparent that his preaching of the Gospel is based around a recital of the things which he himself saw and heard in the Lord's life (1:14; 19:35; 21:24). His Gospel is full of what have been called "the artless notes of the authentic eye-witness" (e.g. his comment that "the house was filled with the odour of the ointment"). John begins his preaching of the Gospel by saying that he had beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14)- and I suggest he was referring to how he beheld the cross and the Lord's manifestation of the Father's glory there (Jn. 17:24). The cross, the glory of the Lord shown there, was what motivated John's preaching, just as it should ours. The cross impels us to witness.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of the glory of God

as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

It's evident to even the most casual reader that there are many connections between John's Gospel and the Revelation. John's later writing, just like Paul's, was shot through with references to the Gospels. The same phrases and words are used. But the question is, What is the connection between them? One comment I have in answer to this is to observe that much of the language of the Gospel of John relating to the *present* status of the faithful is repeated in Revelation and applied to the faithful in their *future* glorification. This observation is best explained by examples:

#### **John's Gospel**

God tabernacled amongst us in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14 RVmg.)

Rivers of water flow now in the experience of the believer (Jn. 7:38,39)

The manna / bread of life is given to the believer now (Jn. 6)

At the crucifixion, the prophecy of Zech. 12:10 was fulfilled when the Jews looked upon the Christ whom they had pierced (Jn. 19:37)

#### **The Revelation**

"The tabernacle of God is with men" at the second coming of Jesus (Rev. 21:3)

The river of water of life bursts forth once Jesus is enthroned upon earth in the future (Rev. 22:1)

Those who overcome will be given "the hidden manna" to eat at the Lord's return (Rev. 2:17)

The same Zech. 12:10 passage is quoted in Rev. 1:7 and given a future application, to the response of the Jews at the Lord's second coming.

I would suggest a chronological progression in Jn. 1:14:

“The word was made flesh”- His birth

“And dwelt among us”- His life

“And we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth”- His death on the cross. Christ’s glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). John thus begins his Gospel with the statement that he saw the Lord’s death. However, it is also so that John “saw his glory” at the transfiguration; and yet even there, “they saw his glory” (Lk. 9:32) as “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish”. His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John’s many allusions to Moses’ experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son has *declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked, we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John’s tenses) displayed to us in the cross. Mark how the naked man, covered in blood and spittle, was there declaring God’s glory. Aaron the High Priest bore the judgment for Israel’s sins, in another anticipation of the cross, whilst arrayed in garments of glory and beauty (Ex. 28:30). And so was the naked Lord arrayed, for those with spiritual sight. Thus the word was manifested in glory through the cross; and thus 1 Cor. 2:1,2 links the crucified Christ with “the testimony of God”. See on Jn. 19:19.

The essential *logos* of God in Christ was articulated not only in the birth of the Lord, not only at the start of His, but supremely in His death. John’s Gospel is packed with allusion to Moses. Here the reference is to Moses cowering in the rock, beholding the glory of Yahweh and hearing the declaration of the Yahweh Name. Speaking of His forthcoming death, the Lord was to say: “And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26). This second declaration of the Name was to be in His death. The same allusion back to the declaration of Yahweh in Ex. 34 is to be found in John 12:27-28: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again”. This second glorifying of the Name was surely in the Son’s declaration of the Name in His death. And this connects will with the evidence elsewhere presented that the Yahweh Name was closely connected with the Lord’s death, in that ‘Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews’ in Hebrew would have used words, the first letters of which spelt ‘Yahweh’. John’s claim that he beheld the glory of God’s Son may therefore be a specific reference to the way he describes his own ‘seeing’ of the crucifixion in John 19:35: “And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe”. He seems to be saying: ‘I saw Him there. I really and truly did’. He uses the same kind of language in 1 Jn. 4:14: “we have seen and do testify [cp. “his record is true”] that the Father sent the son to be the saviour of the world” in the cross.

“The only begotten of the Father” is a phrase nearly always used in the context of the Lord’s death (e.g. Jn. 3:16). The love of God was defined in the way the Lord laid down His life in death (1 Jn. 3:16); but it is equally defined in that “God sent his only begotten son into the

world, that we might live" (1 Jn. 4:9). God sending His son into the world was therefore in His death specifically [see notes under 3:14-18]. And it was through this that life was won for us. As He hung covered in blood and spittle, as He gasped out forgiveness for His enemies, God's Son as it were came into the hard world of men. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness did not and does not overcome it. There, the word, the essential love and grace and judgment and mercy of Yahweh, was made flesh, and tabernacled amongst us.

The common translation "dwelt" can give the sense that John is merely saying 'Jesus lived in Israel'; but there is far more to it than that. In clear allusion to his Gospel, John opens his first letter by speaking of the Lord Jesus, whom "we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled [a reference to the taking down of the body and embalming?], of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness [cp. 19:35] , and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 Jn. 1:1-3). The manifestation of the Son was supremely in His death (1 Jn. 3:5,8; 4:9 cp. Jn. 3:16; Heb. 9:26 Gk.; 1 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 17:6 cp. 26). And John exalts that they saw this, and now they too declare / manifest it to the world. One cannot behold the cross of Christ and not witness it to others. John says that he beheld "his glory". Christ's glory is elsewhere used by John with reference to the glory He displayed on the cross (Jn. 12:38-41; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1,5,24). However, it is also so that John "saw his glory" at the transfiguration; and yet even there, "they saw his glory" (Lk. 9:32) as "they spake of his decease which he should accomplish". His glory and His death were ever linked. The fullness of grace and truth is one of John's many allusions to Moses' experience when the Name was declared to him- of Yahweh, a God *full* of grace and truth (Ex. 34:6 RV). The Name was fully declared, as fully as could be, in the cross. The Law gave way, through the cross, to the grace and truth that was revealed by Christ after the Law ended (Jn. 1:17). In His dead, outspent body grace and truth finally replaced law. John goes on to say that the Son *has declared* the invisible God (Jn. 1:18)- another reference to the cross. The implication may be that as Moses cowered before the glory of the Lord, *even he* exceedingly feared and quaked; we likewise should make an appropriate response to the glory that was *and is* (note John's tenses) displayed to us in the cross. All of God's word was made flesh in the crucified body of the Lord Jesus. The very essence of Yahweh and all His self-revelation was epitomised there. Therefore when the Son of man was lifted up, men knew the truth of all God's words [see notes on 8:21-28].

The Lord was "full of grace and truth". Yet according to Phil. 2:7 RV, on the cross the Lord emptied Himself. Yet there He was filled with the essence of Yahweh's own character; for the RV of Ex. 34 stresses that Yahweh is a God whose name is *full* of grace and truth. On the cross He was emptied of self and yet totally filled. The fact that the word was made flesh in the crucifixion explains why the atonement is described time and again with metaphors, as if it is a struggle for language alone to convey what happened. In the person of the crucified Christ, the ideas, the language, the words... became real and concretely expressed in a person. There is far more revealed by meditation upon the cross than can ever be put in words. There, the word, all the words, were made flesh. It is possible to see the fulfilment of the idea of the word being made flesh in Pilate's mocking presentation of the bedraggled Saviour: "Behold the man!". Rudolph Bultmann commented: "The declaration "the Word became flesh" has become visible in its extremest consequence". There in the spat upon Son of God we see humanity as it is meant to be; "the flesh", "the man" as God intended, unequalled and unmatched in any other human being.

John uses the same word for 'dwelling' in writing in Revelation of how the Father and Son shall dwell with men, and shall be their sole light, the only light that shines forth in their experience and existence. These ideas are all used here in 1:14 and the context regarding what He is doing now in the hearts of His people. This gift of His life is therefore a pre-experience, a foretaste, of the life we shall eternally experience. In this sense we "have eternal life" now. We live the life we shall eternally live- His life. Paul puts in another way when he says that the Spirit is given to us as the foretaste or deposit guaranteeing our final salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).

How exactly was the word made flesh in the person of Jesus? It was not simply a question of the nature of His birth. 'The word' was a title given to the Lord in recognition of His achievement in being and becoming the 'word made flesh'. It wasn't something which automatically happened to the Lord, as an irresistible process in which He played no part. The Lord's Old Testament allusions, His familiarity with and use of His Father's words doubtless had a lot to do with His becoming 'the word made flesh'. If Paul alluded to the words of the Lord Jesus once every four verses on average, it is to be expected that the Son of God quoted and alluded to His Father's word even moreso. And this is what we find, when we search the Lord's words for their allusions to the Old Testament.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the written record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

The level, depth and multiplicity of Old Testament allusions becomes the more amazing when we accept that these were spoken words, some of them clearly spoken unprepared and off-the-cuff. Literature can be crafted to pack multiple allusions. But when a speaker produces such a depth of allusion, one can only marvel at his intellectual depth. But with the Lord, it reflects His utter familiarity with the Father's word, grasping the real spirit of it all. He breathed it, thought it, spoke it, lived it. And in all He said, this was reflected. He truly was "the word made flesh". The following are just a few examples from the first words of Jesus; but the list can be continued. The simple fact is that on average, the Lord is alluding to the Old Testament at least 3 times in every verse! This means that every phrase of every sentence He is recorded as speaking- is alluding to His Father's word. It would've been like an orphaned son 'finding' his late father's words. He would read the words with such delight, and somehow eagerly pick up their sense in the way nobody else could.

*The Words Of Jesus*

*Old Testament Allusions*

Mt. 3:15 Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.

Ez. 18:19,21 fulfil righteousness

Mt. 4:4 It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God

Dt. 8:3 direct quote

Mt. 4:7 It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Dt. 6:16 direct quote

Mt. 4:10 Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Dt. 6:13 direct quote

Mt. 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Ps. 40:17; Is. 41:17; 61:1

Mt. 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn:

Is. 61:1-3; 66:2

for they shall be comforted.

Is. 40:1

Mt. 5:5 Blessed are the meek:

Ps. 37:11,20; Is. 60:21; Prov. 22:24,25; 25:8,15

for they shall inherit the earth.

Gen. 15:7,8; Ex. 32:13

Mt. 5:6 Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Gen. 49:18; Ps. 17:15; 119:20; Jer. 23:6; Is. 45:24; 51:1; 55:1; 65:13

Mt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

2 Sam. 22:26,27; Ps. 18:25,26

Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Ex. 33:20; Job 19:25-27; Ps. 17:15; Is. 6:5; 38:3,11

If you follow through some of those allusions- and there are surely many more that I've not picked up- it becomes apparent that the Lord had a mind capable of operating on several different levels of allusion at once. So it was not simply that He was hyper-familiar with His Father's word. He had the intellectual ability, with all the intelligence of God's very own Son, to think and speak on several levels at once. Hence His words were absolutely *full* of God's thoughts and words. He was so fully and deeply "the word made flesh". And in analysing *from where* in the Old Testament the Lord quoted, we find that He had His

favourite places- just as we'd expect from a genuine man. He appears to have been especially fond of the references to the "Servant" in the latter half of Isaiah; and also of the Psalms. He quotes from them both literally and freely, with all the confidence and appropriacy of a person who is thoroughly familiar with the text. But the way and extent to which He applied it all to Himself makes Him in very reality "the word made flesh".

It wasn't only in words but in actions too that the Lord was the word made flesh. The Lord Jesus lived life; He didn't just let events happen to Him. Much as I respected Harry Whittaker both as an individual and an expositor, I can never understand why throughout his monumental *Studies In The Gospels*, he repeatedly makes the point that the Lord Jesus didn't go around consciously trying to fulfil Bible prophecy. My reading of the Gospels tells me that the Lord did do exactly this. The writers stress that He did action X or spoke word Y in order to fulfil Bible prophecy A and B. He consciously made the word flesh in Himself. A case can be made that He carefully planned out His ministry; He didn't just let events happen to Him. I don't find it hard to believe that He consciously engineered the timing of His own death to be at Passover time, after a three and a half year public ministry. He purposefully seems to have pressed all the buttons in Jewish expectations to lead them to revolt against the dashed expectations they had of Him. His actions in the temple could be read as almost asking to be killed. He knew what makes people tick and act to an extent we can't begin to understand. He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:60). He laid down His life- it wasn't taken from Him.

1:15 *John testifies of him and cries out, saying: This was he of whom I said: He that comes after me is ranked above me! For he was senior to me-* The record of John urgently crying out is perhaps mentioned because John was preaching to some who considered John the Baptist as the saviour, and were focused upon him rather than the Lord Jesus. John's message repeatedly featured his statements that he was nothing and the Lord everything.

John's comment that he came "after" Jesus, and that Jesus was the redeemer rather than he himself contain a strange allusion to the words of the redeemer-who-was-incapable-of-redeeming in Ruth 4:4- Boaz told him that "I am after thee", but in the end the incapable-redeemer plucked off his shoe as a sign of unworthiness to redeem (Ruth 4:7). And John surely also had this in mind when he commented that he was unworthy to unloose Messiah's shoe (Jn. 1:27). The allusions are surely indicative of the way John felt like the unworthy / incapable redeemer, eclipsed before Boaz / Jesus.

1:16- see on Eph. 3:19.

*Of his fullness we all received, with grace upon grace-* As noted on :14, the allusion has been to Moses nervously beholding God's glory and the declaration of His Name, Yahweh the God full of grace and truth. Moses was seen as the unapproachable acme of spirituality; but now all who have perceived the Lord's glory have seen as Moses did. And so much more. That fullness of the name declared in Ex. 34:4-6 ["A God full of..." grace and truth] has now been received by us. And it is piled on- grace upon grace. We are not like Moses merely beholding a theoretical statement of these things, but actually participating in them and receiving them, through the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is clearly in view as "grace" is used, 'gift', so often referring to the gift of the Spirit.



"His fullness" is literally 'His filling'. The word and idea is often used in the context of being filled with the Spirit. We have been filled with what the Lord Jesus was full of- the Spirit, the characteristics of the Name. Again, the idea of filling suggests something done to us, so long as we are open to it, rather than a self-filling by our own intellectual effort. If we are in the body of Christ, in that body we receive "the fullness of Him that fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Eph. 3:19 is specific that it is through the indwelling of the Spirit, in the "inner man", "in our hearts by faith", that we are "filled with all the fullness of God". Through the Comforter, the gift of the Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", "your joy may be filled up" (Jn. 16:24 s.w.); hence the Lord's disappointment that at that time, "sorrow has filled up your heart" (Jn. 16:6). He wished for that to be displaced by the filling of the Spirit, which would be of joy and not sadness. The Lord's spirit of joy would be filled up in the hearts of His followers, "within themselves" (Jn. 17:13). The reference is continually to internal filling, "within", rather than to the external miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Rom. 15:13 uses the same word: "The God of hope fill you [up] with all joy and peace... through the power of the Holy Spirit". The Lord ascended to Heaven and received the Spirit so that He might fill up all things of the new creation (Eph. 4:10). And thus Eph. 5:18 simply exhorts: "Be filled with the Spirit". We are to be open to it, and we shall be filled with it. The same word and appeal is to be found in Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:9; 2:10; 4:12. It is a major New Testament teaching that cannot be ignored. Hence John later appeals to his converts to allow themselves to be filled with joy (1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12).

The Father's whole spirit / attitude is of wanting to lavish grace. Our spirit likewise must not be mean- totting up the cost of all the things the visitors have eaten, etc. But God's lavishing of grace is not only in material things, but supremely in His patient forgiveness and salvation towards us. Are we super abounding in forgiveness, or do we grudgingly offer it only upon evident repentance from others? Such legalism is associated with Moses, but grace and truth, "grace upon grace", came by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:16). Grace is 'ever increasing' ("grace upon grace") in that as we grow in Christ, we perceive that grace more and more. God not only forgives, but He *delights* in doing so (Is. 62:14; Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love.

1:17 *For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ-* The Lord is here presented as the mediator of a different covenant, with far superior blessing mediated. The contrast is between the law being "given", and the gift / grace of the Spirit 'coming'. We have not been given a set of commandments and left to get on with it. Grace and truth have come to us, and we saw on :16 that these things have entered within our very hearts. There are many Christians today who have received nothing from their religion but a set of commandments 'given' to them; they need to open themselves to allow the coming of grace into their hearts, the gift of the Spirit. We have just read that it was the personality of the Lord Jesus which was full of grace and truth (:14). But His personality, His Spirit, enters ['comes'] to us. For through the Comforter, the promised Holy Spirit which "shall be within you", He 'comes' to us, in the fullness of His personality and character (Jn. 14:18). John's later greeting to his converts "Grace be with you... in truth" (2 Jn. 3) was therefore no mere standard introduction to a letter; he believed that grace and truth really could enter them in abundance, and he wished this for them.

1:18 *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known-* "Made Him known" or [AV] "declared" is another allusion to the declaration of God's Name and the fullness of His character and glory in physical form to Moses (see on Ex. 32:30-32; Lk. 16:23; 1 Cor. 8:4-6). Again, all believers are positioned with Moses, who was denied his request to see God. But effectively, we have seen God in His Son; he who perceives / sees the Son has seen the Father. John parallels the word becoming flesh, with the Son declaring the Father who cannot be seen (Jn. 1:18). This is a reference to the declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses, at which time Moses was reminded that God cannot be physically seen. Thus the declaration of the Yahweh Name to Moses is paralleled with the word / Name being made flesh. The Father glorified His Name in the Son (Jn. 12:28), who was the word of God.

John here makes clear allusion to Moses. This alludes to Moses being unable to see God, whereas the Lord now is cuddled in the bosom of the Father- such closeness, such a soft image, even now in his heavenly glory! The Lord declared God's character in His perfect life and above all on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Again, the making known or declaration of God is something done to us. And it is done to us by the Lord Jesus through His Spirit. We are given "the spirit of... knowledge in the revelation [declaring / making known] of Him" (Eph. 1:17).

1:19 *And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to ask him: Who are you?-* We wonder if that delegation included the zealot Saul of Tarsus, for as noted elsewhere, he continually alludes to the words and character of John the Baptist. These priests and Levites had been sent from the Jerusalem Pharisees, with whom Paul was associated (:24).

1:20 *He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed: I am not the Christ!-* This is a play on ideas. We would rather expect: 'He denied that he was the Christ'. But John did not deny- i.e. that Jesus was the Christ; he proclaimed that *he* was not the Christ, but Jesus *was*. The same word for "confessed" is to be found in 9:22, where any who confessed Jesus as Christ was to be put out of the synagogue. It was this threat which kept many from believing openly in the Lord, and some were even led to deny the Lord Jesus as Messiah and instead claim to be followers of John the Baptist. But John points out that John the Baptist bravely refused to deny Jesus as Christ, he confessed Him as Christ.

John's Gospel features the Lord Jesus confidently stating "I am...". The context is set for this by the way John's Gospel begins by describing how John the Baptist said "I am not..." ("I am not the Messiah", Jn. 1:20; 3:28; "I am not [Elijah]", Jn. 1:21; "I am not worthy", Jn. 1:27. By confessing his own weakness, who he was not, John the Baptist was paving the way for the recognition and acceptance of Jesus. And our self-abnegation will do likewise.

1:21 *And they asked him: What then? Are you Elijah? And he said: I am not. Are you the prophet? And he answered: No-* John knew surely that he was the Elijah prophet- for he consciously was preparing the way of Messiah and calling Israel to repentance. He was preaching in the very wilderness area from where Elijah had been taken up at the conclusion of his ministry; and he surely consciously chose to dress with the hairy garment and leather

belt which had been Elijah's badge of office (1 Kings 1:8; 2:13,14). It's also been pointed out that the Essenes and other Jewish groups at the time taught self-baptism, whereas John was consciously baptizing people himself, as if he saw himself as specifically preparing them for something. The Lord Himself of course understood John to have been the Elijah prophet. And yet- John denies he is Elijah, but focuses instead on how he is but a "voice". I therefore conclude that his humility was such that he was totally downplaying his office- as if to say 'I am so much a mere voice, that effectively I'm not the Elijah prophet- the message I preach is so far more important than the office I bear'. Those who bear 'offices' in the church of Jesus would do well to have his spirit. Perhaps this is why he seems to have made very few personal disciples- although thousands were baptized by him, having been so impressed by his message. The Epistles of Clement number his disciples at about 30; and Jn. 4:1 comments that the Lord Jesus made more disciples than John did. I take this as a fine reflection upon his selfless witness, focusing so much on his message rather than developing any personal following. He was 'the friend of the bridegroom', the one who arranged the marriage of the bridegroom and sought out the bride. And that, really, is what we are about too, with all the sense of dedication and earnestness which a such a person has when aiming to find a partner for one they know to be a truly good man.

1:22 *They replied to him: Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. How do you describe yourself?*- This recalls the concern of the local Roman governors to have some reason for sending Paul to Rome for trial. The Jewish angst about men like John the Baptist was not because they had done anything wrong, but because of the hard to define touching of conscience achieved by their preaching of the Lord. The AV "What sayest thou of thyself?" alludes to the way that a teacher was supposed to confidently introduce themselves and their mission in words which were uniquely theirs. The Lord alludes to this when He insists that He does not "speak of Myself" (12:49; 14:10) but only speaks the Father's words. Perhaps He learnt that from John's example, who refused to speak of himself but just quoted the Father's words (:23).

1:23 *John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord-* When asked who he was, John's reply was simply: "a voice". He was nothing; his message about Jesus was everything. In all this there is a far cry from the self-confident, self-projecting speaking off the podium which characterizes so much of our 'preaching' today. So John's appeal to repentance was shot through with a recognition of his own humanity. It wasn't mere moralizing. We likely don't preach as John did because we fear that confronting people with their sins is inappropriate for us to do, because we too are sinners. But with recognition of our own humanity, we build a bridge between our audience and ourselves. See on Lk. 3:7.

"Make straight" translates a Greek word which without doubt means "immediate", or in old English "straightway". It is translated like this multiple times. The way for the Lord Messiah to come to Jerusalem in glory could have been made immediate if Israel had truly responded to John's message. There was therefore a passion and urgency in John's call for repentance. "The way of the Lord" is the term later used for the Christian path (e.g. Acts 18:25). The implication is that the Lord is ready to come any moment, is on His way to Zion- and the quicker we make His way "straight", the quicker He will arrive.

1:24 *These priests and Levites had been sent from the Pharisees-* As noted on :19, Saul may well have been amongst them. The message of John the Baptist would have been another of the goads of conscience which he was kicking against by refusing to accept the Lord.

1:25 *Again they asked him: Why then do you baptize, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?-* Like many today, they mistakenly assumed that to baptize people, you need authority. They also indicate their belief that before Messiah's revelation, there is to be mass baptisms of Jews. The command to all in Christ to go forth and preach-and-baptize (the command is all one) would have been shocking to a first century Jewish audience, who believed that only Messiah Himself or "the prophet" could baptize (Jn. 1:25). The implication of the Lord's command was that all in Him are in fact Him, in their preaching of Him.

John's humility is brought out by the way John fields the question as to whether he is "the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?". He could have answered: 'I am the Elijah prophet'- for the Lord Himself said of John that "this is Elijah", with perhaps conscious reference back to this question (Mt. 11:14). But John didn't answer that way. His reply was simply to speak of the greatness of Christ and his unworthiness to be His herald (Jn. 1:26,27). John's humility is brought out yet further by reflection on the fact that he clearly baptized huge numbers of people, and yet also had a group of people known as 'the disciples of John'. Clearly he didn't intend to found a sect, and was so taken up with trying to prepare people for the Lord's coming that he simply wished to lead them to some level of repentance and baptize them, without necessarily making them part of 'his disciples'. John's low self-estimation is seen in how he denied that he was "Elijah" or the "prophet" whom the Jews expected to come prior to Messiah (Jn. 1:21). The Lord Himself clearly understood John as the Elijah prophet- "this is Elijah" (Mt. 11:14), He said of John. John wasn't being untruthful, nor did he misunderstand who he was. For he associates his "voice" with the voice of the Elijah prophet crying in the wilderness, and appropriates language from the Elijah prophecy of Mal. 4 to his own preaching. His denial that he was 'that prophet' therefore reflects rather a humility in him, a desire for his message to be heard for what it was, rather than any credibility to be given to it because of his office. There's a powerful challenge for today's preacher of the Gospel.

1:26 *John answered: I baptize in water; but in the midst of you stands one whom you do not know-* The other Gospels all go on to say "I baptize in water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit". That latter teaching is pointedly omitted in John, and we wonder why, given the frequent references to the gift of the Spirit earlier in this chapter. Perhaps the idea is that those addressed in the synoptics were indeed baptized with both water and Spirit, but the group addressed here were baptized in water but rejected baptism of the Spirit, because they refused to know or recognize the Lord Jesus as Messiah. The gift of the Spirit involves the Lord Jesus being in our midst, and He was in their midst, but they did not know or recognize Him; rather like the Corinthians having the Spirit amongst them, but not being spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:27 *He that comes after me, his shoelace I am not worthy to untie-* Untying the shoelaces, or carrying the sandals, are idioms for 'being a herald'. John doesn't mean that he did not do this because he was not worthy to do so; he means that he was doing the work of a herald, which he was not worthy to do. His witness to the Lord is continually laced with his own confession of weakness and unworthiness. Given that his moral standards were apparently radically

higher than those around him, such humility has much to commend it. It ought to be the hallmark set upon all our witness to the Lord, and it will make our appeal the more compelling. Perhaps John was somehow aware that any who would not carry the Lord's cross with Him were "not worthy" of Him (Mt. 10:38 s.w.).

1:28 *This incident took place in Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing-* Wherever this place was, it was "on the other side" of the Jordan river, on the East bank. We wonder why John chose to baptize there, rather than on the West bank. The other name given in the manuscripts for this place is Bethabara, 'house of the ford / crossing point'. Perhaps John wanted them to perceive their baptism as a crossing over Jordan with Joshua / Jesus into a promised land.

Perhaps John's Gospel purposefully inserts the comment that John the Baptist baptized many people after stating that he was not worthy to be doing what he was doing as the Lord's herald. It is as if to draw a link between his humility, and the success in preaching which he had. Paul perhaps directs us back to John when he says that we are not "sufficient" to be the saviour of God to this world; and yet we are made sufficient to preach by God (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6 RV). How terribly wrong it is for missionary service to be gloried in and somehow a reason for those who do it to become puffed up in self-importance.

1:29 *The next day he saw Jesus coming towards him, and he said: Behold! The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!-* John the Baptist beheld the Lord Jesus walking, and commented that He *was then*, as He walked, the lamb of God (with all the sacrificial overtones of that phrase), that *takes away*, right then, three years before the cross, the sin of the world. The essence of what the Lord did on the cross was in fact ongoing throughout His life. John saw every man as in the desperate, urgent intensity of Passover night, needing to identify with the slain lamb. John sees Jesus and says "Look! The lamb of God...". The three words for "see", "says" and "Look!" are uniquely repeated in Jn. 19:26, where again we have the lamb of God, now sacrificed, on the cross. "Takes away" is the word used by John to describe the cry of the Jews: "Away with Him!" (19:15). Here we see how human volition, however bad, is used within God's plan of salvation. The "world" whose sins are taken away is the world of believing persons, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The Lord was thereby the creator of that world. The "world" simply cannot be understood as the literal universe. For it is persons who sin and whose sin is taken away by the Lord.

1:30 *This is he of whom I said: After me comes a man who is ranked above me. For he was senior to me-* Again we see John's repeated self-deprecation in presenting the Lord Jesus to others. John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me, because he is... essentially my superior- C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274. See on Jn. 8:58.

1:31 *I did not perceive him, but so he should be made manifest to Israel, for this reason I come baptizing in water-* John has just lamented that his audience do not know or perceive the Messiahship of Jesus (:26). Now he uses the same word in saying that he too did not

know or "perceive Him". He is seeking to build a bridge between himself and his audience, admitting that he who is now heralding Jesus as Messiah did not at one stage "perceive Him", presumably referring to how whilst they were growing up and in their 20s, John did not perceive that the Lord was in fact God's Son. This shows that John did not spend his entire time from childhood to 30 years old in the deserts. He had met his relative Jesus of Nazareth in that period, but had not perceived Him as Son of God and Messiah. This itself is an artless testament to the Lord's perfection and humility; He who never sinned, neither by omission nor commission, was never perceived as anything unduly special. Not even by someone as spiritually inclined as John, who would surely have heard the stories of the virgin birth from his mother Elizabeth.

One obvious encouragement to be hopeful in our witness is the Biblical implication that all men and women, potentially, have the possibility of responding to the Gospel. It was so in the first century- John the Baptist had the *potential* to convert all Israel, for He came "that all men through him might believe" (Jn. 1:7), so that Christ "should be made manifest to (all) Israel" (Jn. 1:31). The entire nation *could* have converted; but they didn't.

"That (Christ) should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31) seems to make baptism a pre-requisite for accepting Christ. Indeed, Jewish theology expects baptism to be associated with the coming of Messiah and the Elijah prophet. Therefore the Jews asked John: "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias?" (Jn. 1:25). See on Mt. 17:11. For Israel to call upon themselves the Name of the Lord when they repent, it is fitting that Elijah baptizes them into His Name. Zech. 13:1 may hint at latter day baptisms among repentant Jewry: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David... for sin and for uncleanness". Israel will call upon themselves the Name of Yahweh our righteousness by being baptized into the Name of the Father and Son (Jer. 33:16).

1:32 *And John testified, saying: I have beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him-* As noted on :31, John did not perceive that his relative Jesus was God's Son. It was not until he saw the Spirit descending on the Lord that he realized that his relative Jesus was the Son of God. It was by the activity of the Spirit that he came to this perception. His earlier not knowing or perceiving who Jesus was thereby enabled him to build a common platform with the Jews who still would not know or perceive Him (:24 s.w.).

1:33 - see on Mt. 3:8.

*I would not have perceived him except He that sent me to baptize in water, He had said to me: Upon whomsoever you shall see the Spirit descend and remain upon him, the same is he that baptizes in the Holy Spirit-* As noted on :31 and :32, John was preaching preparation for the coming of Messiah without knowing who Messiah was. It was not until the Lord's baptism that he realized. We wonder why, therefore, he met Jesus with the comment that 'I have need to be baptized of You, and not You by me'. Maybe he said that out of deep respect of his relative Jesus as a better man than him, which again reflects his humility. For it was only after the Lord's baptism that the Spirit came upon Him, and John realized that this was the Son of God.

The Spirit descending *and remaining* upon the Lord was the sign that He was God's Son. The same word, often translated "abide", is used of how the Spirit is to both come and abide with all believers after they receive it at baptism. The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was intended to come and dwell / remain within the hearts of the recipients (Jn. 14:17 s.w.). The gift of the Spirit is the proof that God abides / remains within us if we allow the Spirit to abide / remain within our hearts; and this is the proof that we are "the sons of God" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). The Lord's baptism is therefore intended to be programmatic for us all. All who are baptized receive the gift of the Spirit, which accounts for that zeal and verve within them after baptism; but so many do not let it abide. The Corinthians had been given the Spirit, but by the time Paul wrote to them, they were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

1:34 *I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God*- John's later references to our need to testify that Jesus is Son of God, to witness publicly to what we "have seen", is therefore all an appeal to follow the example of John in witnessing.

1:35 *The next day John was standing with two of his disciples*- Out of those who came out into the desert to be baptized, some remained with John and devoted themselves to his teaching. We must remember that not until he had baptized the Lord did John understand that He was the Son of God. We can better understand why his disciples needed to be properly baptized into Jesus in Acts 19; for if they were John's disciples before the Lord's baptism and had then returned from the desert, they would not have been taught that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

1:36 *And he watched Jesus as he walked and said: Behold! The Lamb of God!*- We sense here John's deep love and admiration of the Lord, watching Him from a distance and uttering words of adoration. Again we see his selfless spirit, asking his own followers to instead follow Him. John's usage of the term "Lamb of God" suggests he was one of the few who perceived that the Lord must die, and His blood was required to save Israel.

We can read of the cross, speak of it; and yet totally fail to realize the powerful imperatives which abound in its' message. Andrew and John heard John the Baptist call Jesus the "lamb of God", and followed Him, in apparent acceptance that He was the Messianic sacrifice. And yet in reality, they could not at that time accept the saying that Jesus was to die at Jerusalem in sacrifice, and that they were to shoulder His cross and follow Him there.

1:37 *And the two disciples, hearing him speak, followed after Jesus*- The followers of John went off and followed the Lord. This was just what John wanted. This is in sharp contrast to the gaining of personal following which so many Christian preachers have been guilty of. The two disciples were Andrew (:40) and presumably John, who always avoids mentioning his own name in his preaching of the Gospel which we have transcribed here in the Gospel of John. John's encouragement of others to "follow after Jesus" is therefore based upon his own personal example. And in this again we have a pattern for our witness.

1:38 *Jesus turned around, and observing they were following him, said to them: What do you seek? And they replied: Rabbi (we would say Teacher). Where are you staying?*- The disciples were asked: "What seek ye?", and they reply: "Where dwellest thou?". Remember that this is John, one of them, recording their response (see on :37). It's as if he's pointing out how inappropriate was their response to Jesus; rather like the record of Peter wanting to build

a tent for Jesus, Moses and Elijah so they stay a bit longer. *They* had responded inappropriately- and yet they urged their hearers and readers to respond appropriately.

John is highlighting how they misunderstood. They asked where the Lord was abiding that night, thinking in terms of a physical house, and for a limited time- maybe just that night. But as John will demonstrate at length, the Lord abides not in houses, nor temporarily, but permanently in the hearts of believers through His Spirit. 'Abiding' is a major theme in John. Several times he records how the Lord Jesus 'abode' in houses or areas during His ministry (Jn. 1:38,39; 2:12; 4:40; 7:9; 10:40; 11:6), culminating in the Lord's words that He would still abide with them through the Spirit gift, but would physically leave them soon (Jn. 14:25). The repeated teaching of the Lord is that actually, He will permanently abide in the heart of whoever believes in Him. And all the stories of Him 'abiding' a night here or there prepare the way for this. Those hearts become like the humble homes of Palestine where He spent odd nights- the difference being that there is now a permanent quality to that 'abiding', "for ever". This is how close and real the Lord can come to us, if His words truly abide in us.

1:39 *He said to them: Come, and you shall see. They went therefore, and saw where he stayed; and they stayed with him that day. It was about the tenth hour-* As noted on :38, the Lord abides in hearts through the Spirit. But that will only be perceived if we ourselves come after Him, consciously following Him in our thinking and life decisions.

Consider the way that Jesus says: "Come and see"- and somehow Philip finds himself soon afterwards using those very same words when talking with his friend Nathanael: "Come and see" (:46). And so reflection upon the actual words of Jesus, a love of them, allowing them to abide in us, is a major part of what it means to be a Christian, a Christ-like one. Consciously or unconsciously, we shall begin to speak, think and reason as He did; to have His spirit in us, both developing it consciously, and being open to receiving it. This is where those red letter Bibles, which print the words of Jesus in red, are really a helpful focus for us.

In John, the Lord often invites men to "come" (Jn. 1:39; 4:16; 5:40; 7:37; 21:12); and members of "the bride" also, quite naturally and artlessly, invite others to "come" too (Jn. 1:41,45,46; 4:29). My point is that the natural response of the one who hears is to say to others "come". It won't be something which has to be done as a great act of the will, we won't need to be fed with ideas by some preaching Committee; he that hears will say, "Come".

1:40 *One of the two that had heard John and had followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother-* We wonder why in :35 and :37 "the two" were not immediately introduced to us in the narrative as Andrew and the disciple whom Jesus loved (John). I suggest it is in order to help us play Bible television with the scene, of men totally transfixed in observing the Son of God; all personal issues, even their names, became subsumed beneath He was and is all and in all.

1:41 *The first thing he did was to find his brother Simon; and he said to him: We have found the Messiah (we would say Christ)-* Andrew "found" Christ and then [s.w.] 'finds' his brother for Christ. What we hear and learn we naturally desire to spread to others. To immediately share ("the first thing he did") the good news about the Lord Jesus is something which comes absolutely naturally to those who find Him. It is this spirit which needs to be, and indeed can be, even in those who were as it were schooled into Christ through a Christian upbringing.



Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah half way through Mark's record of the Gospel (Mk. 8:29) is presented by him as a climax of understanding. And yet according to Jn. 1:41, Andrew and Peter had known this right from the start. The implication is surely that they, as simple working men, probably illiterate, had merely repeated in awe words and phrases like "Messiah" and "Son of God" with no real sense of their import. Yet again, the Lord gently bore with their misunderstandings, and Peter of his own initiative, 18 months later, came to gleefully blurt out the same basic ideas but with now far deeper insight- although he still incorrectly perceived the Messiah as one who would not suffer but provide instant glorification. Thus the spiritual growth of the disciples is revealed.

1:42 *He took him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said: You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas (we call him Peter)*- There is reason to think that like Paul, Peter is held up as a pattern for all who would afterwards believe. The way Peter is brought to Jesus and named by him has evident connection with the bringing of Eve [cp. the whole bride of Christ] to Adam [cp. Christ] to be named (Gen. 2:22,23 = Jn. 1:41,42).

"Son of John" is "Barjona", and could as well be read as 'Son of Jonah'. The Lord's comment 'Simon bar Jona' may have reflected His understanding that Simon Peter had the characteristics of Jonah even then. The incident of Peter being called to accept the Gentiles occurred in Joppa, where Jonah likewise had struggled with the problem of preaching to the Gentiles.

"Cephas" or "Peter" means literally 'rocky', and Peter of course is portrayed as anything but rock-like in his faith. He started drowning on the water, denied the Lord, was later influenced by the Judaizers to betray the principles of Gentile salvation by grace. But with righteousness imputed, he was counted indeed as a rock. He did endure to the end; and the Lord sees not as we do. He saw Peter's basic faith as solid and loved him for it; the temporary moments of weakness were insignificant in the final picture of the man. We too need to stop focusing upon the temporal failures of others and respect them for their continued faith; for so many fall away from their basic faith despite appearing the pictures of stable church members.

1:43 *The next day Jesus decided to go into Galilee; and he found Philip. Jesus said to him: Follow me*- Jesus 'found' Philip, and he in his witnessing 'found' Nathanael (Jn. 1:43,45). Our finding of men for the Lord reflects His finding of us. The Lord realized His new converts were from Galilee; perhaps they even knew Him from His earlier life there. He may have fixed holes in their boats for all we know. But He realized that their faith would be deepened by having to witness to Him, and demonstrate their association with Him, in their home area. See on 2:1. The command to witness is largely for our benefit; for we become more deeply conscious of our faith when we have to explain it to others, especially family members and acquaintances.

1:44 *Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter*- "City" is misleading. These fishing villages were just hamlets, collections of houses where most people were either relatives or related by marriage. A fair case can be made that many of the disciples were related to each other. See on :43.

1:45- see on Lk. 2:49.

*Philip found Nathanael and said to him: We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote! Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph-* See on :41 for the significance of finding others for the Lord as a result of our being found by Him. Truly, God is in search of man; and so is His Son. As we distribute invitations to this world to know Him, He is not indifferent. He wishes their success. All the apparent disinterest in our witness is not met by Him indifferently, nor should we ever consider it a reflection of His displeasure or distance from us. The way Philip speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" suggests that they had earlier known Him, but never had any clue that He could be the Messiah. John the Baptist likewise knew Him but didn't realize He was Messiah until the theophany after the Lord's baptism. In this we see an artless insight into the Lord's utter perfection; that despite never sinning, nobody had the slightest suspicion that He was God's Son or Messiah. He achieved His sublime perfection and the good deeds that went with it somehow incognito.

*1:46 And Nathanael said to him: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him: Come and see-* Like many primitive people, there was the sense that all people from a particular town or area are "not good". We have here an insight into the Lord's utter humanity; He was known as one "out of" Nazareth, He spoke and acted like a man from Nazareth. We can also reflect that His earlier history of having been born in Bethlehem was presumably unknown to people. Mary and Joseph had kept all that to themselves, and the Lord Himself had not spoken of it.

The teaching of both Old and New Testaments concerning the ultimate value and meaning of the individual person was radical stuff, so radical that it was rarely fully understood even amongst the people of God. For example, it was important to know where a person was from- because people from certain areas were understood as being a certain person. Hence the Jewish refusal to accept that Jesus could be Messiah, because He was from Galilee, and "out of Galilee arises no prophet" (Jn. 7:52), indeed nothing good could come out of Nazareth (Jn. 1:46). This led to what we would call today stereotyping and racism. People didn't travel very far, and so this of itself reinforced some of the stereotypes. Horizons were extremely limited for the average person. Vergil could say that "to know one Greek is to know them all"; and Philo likewise made total generalizations about Egyptians in his writings. Paul refers to the common maxim that "Cretans are *always* liars... lazy drunkards" (Tit. 1:12)- but goes on to appeal to the Cretan believers to *not* be like that, to challenge and break the stereotype! It's the same with the Corinthians- the very term "Corinthian" meant a drunkard, shameless man. And yet it was in this very city that so many were called to the Lord, and He attempted to turn them away from that very stereotype they had been born into. And the very fact that the Son of God was from "that despised Nazareth" was the ultimate deconstruction of this understanding- that leaders, kings etc. could only come from some areas and not others. We need to ask ourselves whether we don't follow the same kind of stereotypes when we assume things about people- he's from *that* family, she's from *that* country, they're from *that* church / ecclesia... These attitudes deny the wonderful meaning and value of the individual of which our Lord showed us in His teaching, life, death and current work amongst us.

He was "despised and rejected of men", as Isaiah had foretold so long before. It's perhaps hard to feel from our distance the extent to which Galilee was despised by the Jerusalem Jews. Although Jerusalem to Galilee is only around 100 km., "only in exceptional circumstances will someone living in Jerusalem have travelled to the distant province of Galilee, as the *Life* of Josephus shows... a journey to Rome would be more likely for a better

class Jerusalem dweller than one to provincial Galilee, which was the back of beyond... the people of Judaea despised the uneducated Galileans and were not particularly interested in this remote province". Yet it was exactly from *here* that the Son of God came! It was from the parochial, the ordinary, from the nothing special, that God's holy child came forth to change this world. So if you too feel a nobody, a cut below the rest, held back by your background... this is the very wonder of God manifestation. It's through you and me, the kids from the backstreets, the uneducated, the duffers, the dumbers... that God Almighty reveals Himself to this world.

1:47 *Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, and said of him: Behold, a true Israelite in whom is no deceit!*- This is surely another case of imputed righteousness; for Nathanael had just discounted the Lord's Messiahship on the basis that He was unlikely to be a good man, seeing He hailed from Nazareth. The allusion is to Ps. 32:2 "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile / deceit". There is deceit in the spirit of every man; but imputed righteousness means that this is not the case for the believer before God.

The Lord's basic understanding of us is that we are to become brethren *in Him*. He ever sought to teach the disciples to not only worship and respect Him, but to rise up to emulate His example, and to act and feel as part of Him. When He saw Nathanael under the fig tree, He commented that here was a man who had the good side of Jacob, an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. But the Lord then goes on to liken *Himself* to Jacob, saying that Angels would ascend and descend upon Him as they had upon Jacob (Jn. 1:47,51). What He was basically trying to say to His new disciple was that 'You're like Jacob! But, I'm like Jacob too. And you will powerfully realize the significance of this a bit later on'. He was seeking always to build up an identity between Himself and His followers. This is so different to admiring a man as one admires a picture, and assenting to him as a leader. This is about a unique and intimate relationship, bonding and identity with Him. Nathanael no doubt puzzled over the Lord's enigmatic words, as we likely have also done. His enigmatic style was to provoke just such reflection, to lead Nathanael to realize the force of the identification with Him which the Lord was inviting.

1:48- see on Mk. 7:29.

*Nathanael said to him: How is it you know me?*- The Lord had not mentioned Nathanael's name; instead He had imputed righteousness to him (see on :47) and called him a man in whom is no guile, i.e. He had used a Messianic title (1 Pet. 2:22) about a man. So by asking "How is it you know me?", I suggest Nathanael is questioning how this man from Nazareth could talk of him in such exalted terms.

*Jesus answered: Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you-* An Israelite dwelling under his fig tree is the language of Israel at peace with God, especially in the future Messianic Kingdom of God on earth (Mic. 4:4). The Lord is saying that even before Nathanael had been called to the Gospel, he had been foreknown and had been imagined as in the future Kingdom, written in the book of the redeemed from the foundation of the world. This predestination is an aspect of God's grace, as Paul explains in Romans 8. As noted above, the Lord had imputed righteousness to Nathanael, and asks him to respond to the fact that he had been chosen for the Kingdom from the beginning.

1:49 *Nathanael answered him: Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are King of Israel-* When the disciples first encounter Jesus, they heap upon Him the Messianic titles of Judaism: Rabbi, Messiah, the one described in the Law and prophets, Son of God, King of Israel. And yet the other Gospels bring out how Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God is in fact due to a special revelation from the Father, and was somehow a seminal point of faith and comprehension which Peter had reached (Mt. 16:16,17). Surely the point of the apparent contradiction is to show that over time, the disciples started to put meaning into words; the Jewish terms and titles which they had once so effortlessly used, they came to use with real appreciation. We have shown elsewhere that a mature appreciation of the name and titles of the Father and Son is indeed a mark of spiritual maturity.

1:50 *Jesus replied: Because I said to you: I saw you underneath the fig tree- do you believe? You shall see greater things than these!*- Grasping the wonder of foreknowledge and predestination (see on :48) is indeed a reason to believe. But the wonders of our personal salvation are far smaller than the greatness of God's total activity in and through His Son (:51).

Nathanael had been sitting under a fig tree when he was called to the Lord- and this was apparently the classic place where trainee rabbis sat and studied. If this is indeed the case, then the Lord's calling of him to be a disciple / follower was saying: 'Don't seek to be a rabbi. Be a disciple / follower of me, as a way of life, always'. Nathanael's focus was to be upon the wonder of God's work in His Son, rather than aiming to be a spiritual teacher of others. Our aim must be to make men and women sit at the Lord's feet and learn of Him themselves. Discipleship is to be what we are all our lives. Consider the contrast: 'disciples' in the schools of other rabbis expected to one day graduate and become teachers themselves, with disciples at *their* feet. But no, the Lord saw all of us, including those who have learnt of Him the longest and deepest, to always be disciples, awed by God's activity in His Son (:51).

1:51 *And he said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you. You shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man-* See on :47 for the connections with Jacob, and Nathanael being a Jacob-ite.

The allusion to Jacob's vision of Gen. 28:18 is clear. That vision was to show Jacob the extent of Angelic care of Him- and this was repeated for Jesus. However, the context of v. 50 is that Nathanael marvelled at Jesus' knowledge. Jesus seems to be saying that they would see even greater spiritual revelation ("Heaven open") because of the ministry of the Angels to Him, ministering spiritual knowledge to Jesus to communicate to His disciples. This would imply that apart from directly ministering spiritual revelation to Jesus, the Angels also imparted specific 'physical' knowledge to Jesus- e. g. about Nathanael under the fig tree.

Nathaniel thought he really believed in the Lord Jesus. The Lord commented: "You shall see (usually used in John concerning faith and spiritual perception) greater things than these... you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man" (Jn. 1:51 RSV). It was Jacob who saw Heaven opened and the Angels ascending and descending. And Christ's comment that Nathaniel was "an Israelite (Jacob-ite) indeed, in whom is no guile" (i.e. Jacob without his guileful side) is a reference to Jacob's name change. It confirms that Nathaniel was to follow Jacob's path of spiritual growth; he thought he

believed, he thought he saw Christ clearly; but like Jacob, he was to comprehend far greater things.

"Hereafter you will see heaven opened, and the Angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" was a prophecy of what was to happen "hereafter", and it seems relevant to the cross. Heaven, in the sense of the Most Holy place, was opened by the veil being torn down at the Lord's death. By the blood-shedding of Jesus, the way into the Holiest was made manifest. There is evident allusion to Jacob's vision of the ladder reaching to Heaven; and surely the Lord is saying that He is going to become the ladder to Heaven, linking Heaven and earth, when Heaven is opened by Him in the future. And that point was surely the crucifixion. Significantly, He says: "You will see...", another hint that the disciples, especially John, saw the crucifixion. They may well have "seen" in the Johannine sense of perceiving that there, unseen, Angels were ascending and descending in ministration. John also records how the Lord saw Himself as the gate / door (10:9), just as Jacob described what he had seen as "the gate of heaven". The stone upon which he slept, lifted up and anointed with oil to become the corner-stone of the house of God, Beth-el, was all prophetic of the Lord's death and rising up again (Eph. 2:20-22).

The theme of the Spirit is never far away in John's writings. "Greater things" is the language of what would happen when the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, was given (Jn. 14:12). The Lord foreknew Nathanael, but after His death the Spirit would be released [Angels ascending and descending] and under His command [upon the Son of Man] would be involved even more powerfully in the lives of God's children like Nathanael.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1 *On the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee-* I suggested on 1:43 that the Lord went to preach in Galilee because He wanted to take His new disciples back to their home areas and help them make public identification with Him before their families and friends. Chapter 1 closed with the conversion of Nathanael, who was from Cana (21:2). So the Lord's visits to Cana would have been to help Nathanael make a public witness and identification with the Lord.

*The mother of Jesus was there-*The incident at Cana shows her lack of perception of the true nature of her son's work at that time. The *mother of Jesus* is said to be *there*, and not to be *called*, as Jesus and his disciples were (Jn. 2:1,2), which suggests that she was following Him around, fascinated and prayerfully concerned as He began His ministry. He hadn't done any miracles before, so was she asking Him to begin His ministry with a miracle? She knew He had the power to do them- she had perceived that much. When the Lord speaks about His hour not having yet come, He is clearly alluding to His death. For this is how "the hour" is always understood in John's Gospel (Jn. 4:21, 23; 5:25, 28, 29; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 16:25; 17:1). So Jesus replies to Mary's nudge 'make them some wine!' by saying that the time for His death has not yet come. He assumes that by 'wine' she means His blood. He assumes she is on a higher level of spiritual symbolism than she actually was. He wouldn't have done this unless He had previously communed with her on this level. But apparently she was no longer up to it. She was correct in expecting Him to do a miracle [for Cana was His beginning of miracles]; and she was right in thinking that the need for wine was somehow significant. But she didn't see the link to His death. Her perception was now muddled. Yet even at this time, she is not totally without spiritual perception. When she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says (Jn. 2:5), she is quoting from the LXX of Gen. 41:55, where Joseph's word has to be obeyed in order to provide food for the needy Egyptians. The world had ground her earlier spirituality away, but not totally. For it would in due time revive, to the extent that she would risk her life in standing by the Lord's cross, and then later join the early ecclesia (Acts 1:14).

2:2 *Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the marriage-* As noted on :1, they were invited, but Mary is said to be "there". The invitation confirms our suggestions in chapter 1, that the Lord was known to people in Galilee. He may well have known Nathanael, seeing that Nathanael was from Cana (21:2) and the Lord was invited to a wedding in Cana. He was known there- but all were surprised that the carpenter from Nazareth was in fact God's son and Messiah.

2:3 *When they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to him: They have no wine!-*

Although the Lord had never done miracles before He began His ministry, Mary sensed His ministry had now begun and that He could likely save the situation through a miracle. "Ran out of" translates a term elsewhere used about man's moral deficit before God, our need for Him (Mt. 19:20; Mk. 10:21- even after apparently keeping all commandments; Lk. 15:14; Rom. 3:23; 1 Cor. 12:24; Heb. 4:1; 12:15). These people were in moral need of the wine of the new covenant; but they didn't realize their need, nor all that was being done to meet it. This was to teach Nathanael who was from Cana (21:2- perhaps the invitation was because it was a member of his family getting married). For he had been amazed that the Lord had foreknown him, sitting under the fig tree. And he is being taught that on a far wider level, the Lord foreknows human need for His blood and life, and would provide even whilst they were

yet sinners and ignorant.

2:4 *Jesus said to her: Woman, what have I to do with you?*- When He says “What have you to do with me?” (AV), He seems to be struggling to dissociate Himself from her; for the idiom means ‘How am I involved with you?’ (2 Kings 3:13; Hos. 14:8). It can be that “My hour has not yet come” can bear the translation “Has not my hour come?” (Jn. 2:4), as if to imply that, as they had previously discussed, once His ministry started, their bond would be broken in some ways. And yet Mary understandably found this hard to live up to, and it took the cross to lead her to that level of commitment to her son’s cause.

*My hour is not yet come*- This may refer to the ‘hour’ of the cross, whereby the true wine / blood would be outpoured, that which had been offered before being inadequate. The governor of the feast, cp. the Jewish elders, “knew not whence it was” (2:9), using the same words to describe how they knew not from whence was the Lord, and didn’t ‘know’ / comprehend to where He was going in His death (7:27; 8:14; 19:9). The Lord saw His giving of His life blood on the cross as prefigured by His provision of wine to ignorant people in Cana in their unknown need. But He transforms that which is most ordinary- water- into that which is the most refined, fine wine. His ultimate provision for human need was not prefigured by turning wine into water, as we would expect if He were some pre-existent God who became man. Instead, the most ordinary, water, is turned into wine. It was His humanity which enabled our salvation.

Perhaps when Jesus said to Mary “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn. 2:4 RSV), He was trying to get her back to spiritual mindedness and is frustrated with her low level of spiritual perception. He tries to lead her back to a higher level by linking the giving of wine with His hour which was to come, i.e. the cross. In Lk. 1 her song shows how spiritually perceptive she was- now she seems to have lost that. She is concerned with the immediate and the material rather than the spiritual. "Woman" was a polite form of public address, but apparently it was unusual for a man to use it to his mother. The Lord felt and stressed that separation between her and Him right now at the start of His ministry, coming to a climax at His death where He told her that He was no longer her son but John was. She must have been *so* cut by this, if indeed as I have suggested it was the first time He had said this to her.

2:5- see on Jn. 2:1.

*His mother said to the servants: Whatever he commands you, do it!*- This uses three Greek words which recur in Mt. 7:24,26: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them". Mary had heard these words but applies them in a more material way rather than the spiritual, moral way which Jesus intended. Is this another indication she had slipped from her teenage intensity and spirituality by the time His ministry began?

The theme of John’s writings is that “the word” which was in the beginning, the word of the Gospel, the word of command which brought forth all creation in the first place, is the same word that has been made flesh in Jesus, and which can likewise work a powerful new creation in the lives of all who allow that word to abide in them. Hence the emphasis of John upon the manner in which the *word* of the Lord Jesus was sufficient to bring about amazing

miracles. Even Josephus noted this unique feature of the Lord's ministry: "Everything that he [Jesus] performed through an invisible power he wrought by word and command". It can be argued that all the historical incidents recorded by John are exemplifications in visual terms of the principles outlined in the prologue in chapter 1.

*2:6 Nearby there were six stone waterpots, placed there for the Jewish custom of purifications, each holding 75 to 115 litres-* The idea was that Mosaic purification ritual was not the answer to human need. The Lord's life and blood, encased as it were within the strictures of the Mosaic system, was what was required. Waterpots of that size were all made of stone; but the point is made to emphasize how the Lord was like the stone of Daniel's image, a stone cut out from the earth. It was His humanity which was so necessary in order to bring forth the wine of the new covenant. The wine was poured out from the waterpots into another vessel; there was no way the servants would pour directly into the cups from a 100 litre capacity stone waterpot, that no man could carry alone. So the source of the new wine was in a sense hidden; and John has been developing the point that although John and the disciples knew of Jesus, His humanity had shielded their eyes from knowing what was within Him.

We note the super abundance of wine. At least 600 litres was created, maybe as much as 700 litres. The Lord would have left them with the question: 'What ever is such a huge amount of wine doing in our waterpots? Who put it there? Didn't we see you all pouring water into the pots, as if preparing for cleansing from some major defilement?'. The answer would have been: 'This is Jesus of Nazareth...'

*2:7 Jesus said to them: Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them to the brim-* "To the brim" again speaks of the vastness of the provision (see on :6). We need have no fear that our sins somehow cannot be dealt with by the Lord's sacrifice. His provision is of a massive scale. The filling demands reference back to how "of His fullness have all we received" (1:16). Again we see how historical incident in John's Gospel is an exemplification of the principles with which he begins in his prologue. We are filled with His fullness, His Spirit (see on 1:16), so that we might bear out of ourselves to others in their unperceived spiritual need.

*2:8 And he said to them: Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast. So they took it-* "Draw out" is only used elsewhere in speaking of how the Samaritan woman drew out water from the well, which symbolized the water of life which believers in Jesus could now draw out to meet the thirst of others, drawing from the Spirit deep within themselves (4:7,15). So the servants who 'knew' the Lord's work were to draw out His wine to the Jewish leaders, those in the best places of the banquet, as they are elsewhere described. They took or better 'carried' the wine, as John envisages his converts taking or carrying the message of Jesus to others (2 Jn. 10 s.w.).

*2:9 When the master of the feast tasted the water which had now become wine, and not knowing where it came from (but the servants that had drawn the water knew), he called to the bridegroom-* The contrast between knowing / perceiving and not doing so continues the message of chapter 1. The Lord's servants knew Him, but the Jewish world generally did not. The way the wine was to be taken to the master of the feast may speak of the Lord's desire to convert the Jewish leadership; and in chapter 3 He calls Nicodemus the master of Israel



(3:10). The proximity to this account makes us wonder whether Nicodemus was the master of this feast in Cana; at the very least, the Lord's appeal to this "master" was repeated in His appeal to "the master of Israel" in the next but one historical incident which John records.

2:10 *And said to him: Everyone serves good wine first, and when all have drunk freely, serves something inferior. But you have kept the good wine until now!*- The wedding feast at Cana had been going on for some time, to the point that men had drunk so much wine that they could no longer discern its quality. For *methuo* = 'to drink to intoxication', not simply "drunk freely". The Lord didn't say, as I might have done, 'Well that's enough, guys'. He realised the shame of the whole situation, that even though there had been enough wine for everyone to have some, they had run out. And so He produced some more- actually, over 600 litres of it. He went along with the humanity of the situation in order to teach a lesson to those who observed what really happened.

The Lord clearly had no problem in making wine at Cana. Would He have shared a mug of wine with the boys when, say, someone had a birthday? And therefore would a 21st century Jesus have shared a beer with His fellow workers? Now in my image of Jesus I'm not sure He would have done. But perhaps in your image of Him, He would have. Apart from the memorial meeting, I don't drink, and haven't done for many years. I know how in many cultures this seems to erect a barrier between me and those I seek to make contact with. But when Jesus made the water into wine, He provided about 180 gallons [400 litres] of it. At a time when surely some were already rather the worse for wear from alcohol- for the master of the feast pointed out that the best wine [i.e. with higher alcohol content!] was brought out only when people couldn't tell the difference, because they had "well drunk" (Jn. 2:10- Gk. *methuo*, 'to drink to intoxication'). I wouldn't have done that. At least, not to that extent- for you can be sure, they drank it all up. But He did, so comfortable was He with His humanity. And this perhaps was what made all kinds of people so comfortable with Him, prostitutes and old grannies, kids and mafia bosses, saints 'n' aints. We seem so often ashamed of being human, indeed, some have taken their understanding of 'sinful human nature' to the extent that it's almost a sin to be alive. Whatever we say about human nature, we say about our Lord. Let's remember this. But Jesus was happy with who He was.

2:11 *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, thereby revealing his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*- "Jesus... manifested forth his glory" through his miracles. His miracles therefore were a demonstration of the character ("glory") of God, not just to relieve human grief as he came across it. Therefore they are all capable of allegorical interpretation; there are seven miracles in John called "signs". Contrast how the glory of God was manifested to Moses, who peeped at it from the rock. Yet Jesus was the glory of God, higher than the Angel who actually manifested the glory.

The real Christ must be the concealed basic pattern behind a person. But one of the problems in seeking to build up an image of the man Jesus is that He Himself didn't proclaim so much about Himself in so many words. He never specifically announces that He is Messiah- that fact is stated by who He was in life. His miracles were a *phanerosis*, a rendering apparent, of His glory (Jn. 2:11). The glory of God is essentially His character (Ex. 33:18). The Lord started to reveal this, to let this show, after age 30- beginning, it seems, with His *arche-miracle* of making the wine at Cana (Jn. 2:11 Gk.). But even that was a revealing of His glory to only a few- because even the governor of the feast thought that it was the bridegroom, and

not Jesus, who had somehow pulled out new supplies of wine. The guests were drunk (see on :10). The revealing of His glory, spoken of by John in such startling terms as His arch-miracle, was in fact only to the disciples and perhaps a few others who perceived what had happened. This, I submit, is how to understand the Biblical references to the glory which the Lord Jesus had "from the beginning"- i.e. of His life and His ministry, but which was only made apparent later. Certainly until that point at Cana, He somehow restrained that glory within His very ordinariness- to the extent that people were utterly shocked when He stood up in the synagogue and basically proclaimed Himself to be Messiah.

The language of "He manifested forth his glory" is used of how He would do so on the cross, which was to be a greater manifestation of his glory (see on Jn. 1:14). The historical incidents in John so often are a foretaste of the Lord's final death; for He lived the Spirit of that death and self-sacrifice throughout His life.

*2:12 After this he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother and brothers and disciples; and there they stayed for a few days-* "Went down" reflects the topography of the area, and is the kind of thing a genuine eyewitness like John would recall. The mention of His "brothers" being with Him could suggest that they initially followed Him, but then disbelieved in Him as the pressure got tougher (7:5); with James and Jude then returning to faith in Him after the resurrection. This meant that James and Jude had for a time left the faith; and yet were greatly used by the Lord in His early work in the church.

*2:13 The Passover of the Jews was at that time; and Jesus went to Jerusalem-* John repeatedly describes the Jews feasts and temple as being "of the Jews", whereas the Old Testament refers to them as "of Yahweh". The Jews had hijacked God's religion and made it serve their own ends. This is a stern warning for us all. Rarely is the Lord called simply "Jesus"; usually some title is added. But John juxtaposes his frequent references to the Lord's very high status with such statements of His utter humanity; in order to deliver the right balance in impression concerning the person of the Lord Jesus.

*2:14 And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting at their tables-* These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anti-climax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest.

Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple. This cleansing of the temple was repeated at the end of His ministry; see on Mt. 21:12.

*2:15 He made a whip out of cords and drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables-* The Lord had the power to make them disappear. He could do all things. But His making of a whip and getting so physical with them, driving them out along with their cattle, all rather sounds like He was treating them as if they were in spiritual Egypt. The language recalls how the Egyptians treated the Israelites and then drove them out of their land to the Red Sea. So this was not simply unrestrained anger on the Lord's part; in the same way as the judgment wrath of His Father was also intended to bring about spiritual realization and a movement further in the correct direction. It was surely miraculous that the Lord was not seized and charged for this kind of behaviour. This of itself demonstrated to the thoughtful that His final

arrest and crucifixion was only because He and His Father allowed it; in that sense, He gave His life rather than having it taken from Him.

2:16 *To them that sold the doves he said: Take these things away! Do not make my Father's house a market-* Doves were the offering of the poor. Mary would have bought doves for the Lord's presentation from the same or similar men, 30 years previously. The Lord doesn't tell them to charge reasonable prices for the doves. Even though they were a necessary part of Mosaic ritual, He demands that they be taken right away and not sold at all. This suggests that even then He saw Mosaic ritual as dispensable. And perhaps His idea was that sacrifices should not be bought for money, which turned spirituality into mere religion. The doves could be caught, or even brought with the worshipper on their journey to the temple. There was to be a more personal relationship between offerer and sacrifice than merely passing over coins to a merchant to meet the correct ritual requirement. This speaks to us today.

2:17- see on 14:29; Mk. 10:38.

*His disciples remembered that it was written: Zeal for Your house shall consume me-* This would have been an example of how the Comforter brought such things to their remembrance (14:26). He knew himself that "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Ps. 69:9); the same Hebrew word is used as in Lev. 6:10: "take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed". Even in His life, the Lord felt that He had reached this point of total consumption as a living sacrifice. A Psalm evidently relevant to the final crucifixion is applied to the Lord's behaviour; as if the disciples later realized that this early visit to Jerusalem was a living out in the Lord of the final one. As so often, the spirit of the Lord's final death was seen in Him and His ways throughout His ministry.

2:18 *The Jews therefore answered and said to him: What sign will you show us, seeing you do these things?-* Paul alludes to this when writing later that "the Jews require a sign" (1 Cor. 1:22). Perhaps he was amongst those Jews who asked this question; for Paul would have been living in Jerusalem at this time. Time and again, Paul's preaching and pastoral work reflects his own weaknesses, just as ours should. Cynical Israel asked exactly the same of Moses, in effect; superficially, "the people believed" (Ex. 4:31) after they saw the signs. The hollowness of Israel's 'belief' in Moses was matched by the experience of Christ. And yet they still both loved Israel to the end despite this desire for the visible and concrete rather than the internal and spiritual.

2:19 *Jesus answered and said to them: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up-* In what sense did the Lord raise up His own body? I think the answer lies in Jn. 5:19-21: "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he show him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and giveth them life, even so the Son also giveth life to whom he will. For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son; that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father". This makes it clear that all power and possibilities that Jesus had, were in fact given to Him by God. In fact, whatever God is spoken of as doing, it would be appropriate to speak of the Son doing it. This was and is the nature of their relationship. The one thing that it would seem God did for Jesus, in a way that Jesus could not do for Himself, was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God. It is emphasized so many times that God raised Jesus from the dead.

And yet it's as if Jesus almost enjoys making the point that even in the matter of resurrection, so connected is He with the Father, that in a sense, He raised Himself up- because whatever, literally whatever, God does, in a sense Jesus therefore does it too. This is why He could say about His life in Jn. 10:18: "I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father". He was given this authority by the Father (1). But even in the very thing where it seems God would be separate from His Son- i.e. in resurrecting the Son- Jesus wanted to emphasize that in a sense, He was still united with the Father. Because the Father so loved the Son, that whatever the Father did, He wished His Son to somehow be associated with. And so Jesus can speak of how in that sense, He [Jesus] was involved in His own resurrection- even though the repeated and obvious Biblical emphasis is upon the Father resurrecting His Son back to life. We see this theme touched on again in Jn. 10:18, where the Lord teaches that He has received a commandment to lay down His life and take it again, and yet He says that He has been given the authority / empowerment to do this, and therefore He will not die merely because of being unable to avoid the machinations of His murderers. So we could conclude that He obeyed a command to die and rise again- but was empowered by God to do this.

Another consideration in Jn. 2:19-21 is that Jesus speaks specifically about the 'raising up' of His body as a tabernacle. The 'body' of Christ frequently refers not so much to His literal body as to His spiritual body, i.e. the body of believers. In a sense, it is Jesus who has raised them up.

### Notes

(1) It has been suggested to me by Chris Clementson that the Greek word *exousia* translated "power" or "authority" in Jn. 10:18 can mean 'privilege'- and this is a possible meaning given for the word by James Strong in his concordance. Other N.T. usage of the word definitely suggests 'power' or 'authority', but this idea of 'privilege' is worth bearing in mind.

*2:20 The Jews replied: Forty-six years was this temple in building, and will you raise it up in three days?*- The connection between temple and building is intended to recall how God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. The Lord was saying that if *they* destroyed the temple [cp. killing His body], then in three days He would raise it up. His idea was clearly that *they* would destroy the temple; but at His trial, this is turned around against Him to imply that He had threatened to destroy the temple. But the Jews were in fact guilty of what they considered the most heinous crime-the destruction of the temple. Their killing of the Lord Jesus therefore meant that their temple would be destroyed in AD70; and they were responsible for that rather than the Romans.

*2:21 But he spoke of the temple of his body-* I noted on :18 that Paul may have been present at this time, and he alludes to some of the Lord's words here in 1 Corinthians. We have another such allusion here; for the other time we read of the body as a temple is in 1 Cor. 6:19, where the indwelling of the Spirit means that our bodies become the temple. The Lord's body becomes ours, ours becomes His, through the presence of His Spirit within. What was true of Him becomes true of us, if we are truly "in" Him.

2:22 *When he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he spoke this, and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken-* This 'remembering' would have been the result of the function of the Comforter (14:26), which likewise works with us to illuminate Scripture so that we see its personal relevance. Unaided intellectual effort will not achieve this. Which is why there is no direct link between academic Bible study and personal spirituality.

Both Matthew and Mark record how the people later mocked the Lord Jesus over His comment that if the temple were destroyed, He would rebuild it in three days (Mt. 27:40; Mk. 15:29). This had also been an issue at the Lord's trial (Mt. 26:60). Yet John records that when the Lord actually said those words, the disciples didn't believe those words and actually forgot them until the time of the resurrection (Jn. 2:22). The implications of that are tragic. The Lord's critics remembered His words more than His disciples did. And as He stood there in the awful loneliness of His trial, and hung there in the desolation of crucifixion, and heard those taunts based around His earlier words... He would've known that His own men had forgotten those words and likewise disbelieved them. No wonder after the resurrection He raised the matter with them. My point in this context is that John's comment in Jn. 2:22 about the fact the disciples forgot those words until after the resurrection... is actually a conscious recognition by the disciples of their own tragic weakness in understanding and support of their Lord. And it is within their own preaching of the Gospel that they make this point. Our witness likewise should be shot through with allusion to our own moral fallibility.

2:23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did-* Israel also saw signs and believed for a moment, but not for long. As noted on :24 and :25, such belief is merely surface level. But it is still noted for what it was; it was not insignificant. The Lord Himself learnt from this, so that when faced with the appeal to come down from the cross so that they would believe, He resisted. Faith comes by hearing God's word; not by seeing miracles. The miracles recorded by John were all object lessons, intended to visually enhance the message being taught, and were not performed simply to meet human need.

2:24 *But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he understood mankind-* Reflect a while on what is really being taught in Jn. 2:23-25: "Many *believed* on his name, beholding his signs which he did. But Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man; for he knew what was in man". When a person trusts / believes in the Lord properly, unlike those who believed only a surface level, then the Lord trusts Himself unto them. He believes in them as they have believed in Him. Paul often speaks of how the Lord has trusted / committed [s.w.] the preaching of the Gospel unto him (1 Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; Tit. 1:3). We believe, and therefore we speak forth the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:13).

Perceive the parallels within the Jn. 2:23-25 passage:

He knew all men = He knew what was in man

Jesus did not *trust* [s.w. 'believed'] himself unto them = because he needed not that anyone should bear witness concerning man.

If we truly believe in Jesus, He believes in us, and we therefore bear witness concerning Him. If we don't truly believe in Him, He will not commit / trust / believe Himself unto us. But by grace we have truly believed. It is therefore axiomatic that we bear witness of Him. God has therefore trusted us with the job of preaching His Gospel. That He trusts us, believes in us, is a surpassing thought. If you trust someone completely with a task, to the point it is clear that

now if they don't do it, it won't be done, they often respond with a maturity and zest which wouldn't be seen if they merely were given partial responsibility [children are a good example of this]. And so God has done with us.

There seems a purposeful ambiguity in how the process of calling upon the name of the Lord is described in the Greek text; it can mean both us calling upon ourselves His Name, and also His Name being named upon us by Him. Joel 2:32 says that all those whom *the Lord* calls will *call on His Name*, a prophecy fulfilled in baptism. In similar vein, the Lord Jesus lived, died and rose as the representative of all men; and those who know and believe this chose to respond by identifying themselves with Him in the symbolic death and resurrection of baptism, and subsequent life in Christ- they make Him their representative, as He has chosen to be theirs. They respond to His willing identification with them by living a life identified with Him. Likewise if a man truly believes in Christ, He will 'commit himself' unto that man- the very same word for 'believe in[to]'. We believe into the Lord, and He believes into us.

*2:25 And because he did not need any testimony concerning himself from any human being. For he understood what was in man-* See on :24. One repeated theme of the Gospel records is that "Jesus perceived / understood..." (Mt. 22:18). We read this so often. Now it could mean that a bolt of Holy Spirit informed the Lord of the contents of men's minds. But I prefer to think that He was so sensitive to people that somehow He was able to read minds, to read body language, to be perceptive to a very high degree (Jn. 2:24,25). And so as the mind and compassion of Jesus become ours, so it seems to me that we too will develop better people skills, become more perceptive of what a contact is really driving at, what their real hang ups are... what they really and truly seek and need. "He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:25) may be a description of how far the Lord got in this kind of thing; rather than an indication of some magical gift He was given. And so when I am asked 'How best to preach? What to say to people...?', there is no simplistic answer. It's a matter of who we are, of our own perception and reflection of Jesus and of others, not the specific form of words we may use. The Lord doesn't need testimony from us as men; but He asks us to make it. All the work of preaching and witness is therefore for our benefit; it is we who learn and have our faith deepened by articulating our faith to others. He Himself has no need of it in itself.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews-* There were no more than 5000 Pharisees. The chances are that Saul the Pharisee knew him, and the conversion of Nicodemus would have been another prod in Saul's conscience which he kicked against. I suggested on 2:9 that he may have been the "master of the feast" to whom the Lord's new wine was brought.

3:2 *The same came to him by night, and said to him: Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God. For no one can do the signs you do, except God be with him-* Although miracles do not lead to permanent faith, the Lord's miracles all the same demonstrated that He was from God. Even His hardest enemies could not deny that His Spirit could produce notable miracles (Acts 4:16). "We know..." may well be a tacit admission that even the Pharisees recognized the Lord's connection with God. The fact many Pharisees later "became obedient to the faith" would suggest that their madness against Him was a function of their bad conscience. "This is the son, come let us kill Him" likewise reflects their passive, maybe subconscious, recognition that He was from God.

Nicodemus says that he perceives that Jesus is "from God" because of His miracles. But the Lord replies that only if a man is born again can he see or perceive the Kingdom of God; and only if he is born again by baptism of water and spirit can he enter into the Kingdom. It's easy to overlook the fact that the context of the Lord's comment was about His being Messiah, and how men could perceive / recognize that. If we read "the Kingdom of God" as a title of Himself, all becomes clear. Through baptism, birth of water and spirit, we enter into Christ. He was then and is now, the very essence of the Kingdom; the ultimate picture of the Kingdom life. There was a perfect congruence between His message about the Kingdom, and His own character. And this is what will give our preaching of that very same Kingdom a like power and convicting appeal to men and women.

3:3 *Jesus answered and said to him: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God-* "Anew" is literally 'from above'. Natural descent was not enough to see the Kingdom; which was a direct hit on the Jewish idea that by reason of birth they were the children of the Kingdom. Again we see a connection to the prologue; we are to be spiritually born not of the will of the flesh but "of God" (1:13).

Seeing the Kingdom is developed in :5 to "enter the Kingdom". The contrast between seeing and entering is clearly alluding to Moses, who was allowed to see the Kingdom but not enter it. The Lord is inviting His followers to imitate Moses- a very high challenge to those under the influence of Judaism, who considered Moses to be the unreachable pinnacle of human spirituality. The Lord gently makes this challenge by firstly inviting Nicodemus to become as Moses who saw the Kingdom- and then saying that actually, he could come to a higher status than Moses, and actually enter the Kingdom. We find here the Lord equating the promised land, which Moses saw but could not enter, with His Kingdom. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation. Note the parallel in Jn. 3:3,5: "Except a man be born again, he cannot *see* [perceive] the kingdom of God... he

cannot *enter* into the kingdom of God". If we truly see / perceive the things of the Kingdom in this life, then we will enter it in the future. Israel 'saw' the land physically through the spies (Num. 13:18; 32:8), but were told that they would "not see the land" (Num. 14:23; 32:11; Dt. 1:35). Again, as in the Lord's teaching, 'seeing the land' is put for 'entering' into it. Knowing facts about the future Kingdom doesn't mean we will enter it. But really 'seeing' the things of the Gospel of the Kingdom will by its very nature change us into people who will enter it. For we will be living the essence of the Kingdom life right now. Israel through the spies went to 'see' the land (Num. 13:18), but could not *enter* it because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:19). They didn't 'see' it in the sense of perceiving what God's Kingdom was all about. They only saw the physicality of the land; and this wasn't enough to enter it. The synoptics' formula that he who believes the Gospel and is baptized will be saved is matched by John in Jn. 6:40: "every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day". Believing the Gospel of the Kingdom is matched by seeing / perceiving the Son. This is the basis.

3:4 *Nicodemus said to him: How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?*- When Nicodemus asked "How can a man be born [again]...?", he wasn't being facetious. He was asking a genuine question, which we've all had in one form or another. Can a person really totally change? Aren't the influences of our past life, our humanity, simply too great to break totally? Aren't there human ties that bind, bind so closely that they can never be completely thrown off? "Truly truly I say unto you", the Lord replied, 'Yes'. There is a doctrine of a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), whereby we really can be made new people. This is a ladder to reach to the stars. We can overcome sin, bad habits and thought patterns. We may well think that we can't; the way was set, the die cast, the destiny mapped out, the genes determined; our background, upbringing, life path was as it was, and so we are as we are. But we *can* be made new. Sin need no longer have dominion over us, as Paul says in Romans 6; or as early Genesis put it, "you shall rule over [sin]" (Gen. 4:7).

The extent of grace is reflected in the Lord's teaching about being born again. A person neither begets nor bears himself; but the Lord says that this must happen. The born again person has to receive a new origin- evidently something we can't give ourselves. The new birth is therefore only possible through an acceptance of grace. Thus in Jn. 1:12,13 a parallel is drawn between "all who receive him" and those "who were born... of God". Going even further, 1 Jn. 5:1 and 1 Jn. 4:8 [noting the tenses and context] suggest that faith and love are the evidence of this new birth rather than the cause of it.

Dodd in *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* shows how constantly John is referring to Philo- e.g. Philo denied any possibility of spiritual rebirth, whereas John (Jn. 3:3-5) stresses how needful and possible it is in Christ. The very abstract views of Philo are challenged when John comments that the *logos* has become flesh- real and actual, handled and seen, in the person of the Lord Jesus. Clearly those to whom John was preaching were influenced by Philo and he seeks to address their issues. Philo claimed that the *logos* was an Angel- whereas John effectively denies this by saying that the *logos* became a real and actual human being. Those Christians who claim Jesus was an Angel- and they range from Jehovah's Witnesses to those who claim Jesus appeared as an Old Testament Angel- should all stand corrected by John's argument against Philo. In chapter 11 of his book, Dodd makes the observation that there was a tension between Jewish monotheism, and the many gods of



Greek mythology. He shows how these ideas were reconciled by bringing the gods into some kind of family relationship with each- thus Hermes and Apollo became sons of Zeus, and all were seen as emanations of the one God. This is highly significant for any study of how the Trinity came into existence- the stage was set for the idea of a small family of gods to develop, all supposedly emanations of one God. See on Jn. 5:39.

3:5 *Jesus answered: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!*- Tit. 3:5 clearly alludes here: "He saved us by the washing [laver] of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit". The gift of the Spirit associated with baptism is vitally necessary; water alone will not save. At baptism we are born of (or by) water-and-spirit (the Greek implies one act, combining water and spirit). See on 1 Cor. 12:13. As the prologue states, birth is not of ourselves; we were born not of the will of the flesh but of God (1:13). It is Christ, not the actual baptizer, who brings a person to new birth and actually does the moral washing of a person from their sins when they are baptized. Consider these simple parallels within John's Gospel:

<b>John 3:5</b>	<b>John 13:8</b>
Unless	If
One is born of water and Spirit	I do not wash you
He cannot enter into the Kingdom	You have no part in me

Not only does this reflect the crucial importance of baptism; it indicates that it is the Lord Jesus who does the moral washing of a person when they are baptized. Once we accept that, then *who* performs baptisms becomes irrelevant. And all the way through, we see His grace; our spiritual life and existence has its source in His activity and not our own.

3:6 *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*- I have consistently noted that the ideas of the prologue are developed throughout John's Gospel. Here, the allusion is again to 1:13. Those in the new creation are born not of the will of the flesh but "of God", or as is stated here, "of the Spirit", seeing that "God is Spirit" (4:22). We had no say in our coming into existence, neither physically nor spiritually. It is for us to use the grace of life, both natural and spiritual, to the best of our ability. But the initiation of that life was not from us, it was of the Spirit. We did not come to the new creation through our own Bible study or good living. It was all of the Spirit. The idea here in :6 is that like produces like; he that is born of the Spirit is spirit. And yet this is true only potentially; the Corinthians received the Spirit but were later "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1).

3:7 *Do not marvel at what I said to you: You must be born anew*- Nicodemus considered himself spiritually mature, hence the appeal for him not to marvel that he must be born again. The idea that we must fundamentally change and be changed, become someone we were not previously, allow our innermost person to be radically reborn... is not really what established, middle aged, middle class people want to hear. And so the Lord had to urge Nicodemus: "Do not marvel...".

3:8 *The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is every one that is born of the Spirit-* Nicodemus was from the mindset that we are masters of our own spiritual destiny; by dint of academic, syllable by syllable Bible study, poring over the ancient texts, we can forge our own path towards the Kingdom. But the Lord had told him that we must be born of the Spirit and not of the will of man; to be born of something implies process beyond our direct, conscious control and volition. What is born of the Spirit is spirit; for like begets like. If we are to be spiritual people and thus see the Kingdom, we are to allow to operate a process greater than ourselves, preceding the time of our conscious choices. Those born of the Spirit sense this; remember that in Hebrew, "wind" and "spirit" are the same word. Here, "wind" translates the same Greek word translated "spirit" in the same verse. As the wind comes from somewhere and goes somewhere, so the Spirit works to bring about our spiritual birth.

Those born of the Spirit cannot clearly define from where or how they came about, at least not in secular terms. If we ask ourselves how it is that at this moment, we believe... the answers are so nuanced that we cannot but avoid the impression that on a secular, material level, it is indeed all somewhat mysterious. In the first century, a person was understood in connection with who their parents and ancestors were. Hence some Biblical characters are referred to as the son of X who was the son of Y who was the son of Z. Plato summed it up when he said that good people were good "because they sprang from good fathers". This is where the genealogies of Jesus would've been so hard to handle for some- because Matthew stresses how the Lord had whores and Gentiles in His genealogy. And it's also where the New Testament doctrine of the new birth and the new family in Christ were radical- for it was your family and ethnic origin which were of paramount importance in defining a person within society. John's Gospel especially emphasises the great desire to know from whence Jesus came (Jn. 3:8; 6:41,42; 7:27,28; 8:14; 9:29)- and the lack of any solid, concrete answer. To say that God was quite literally His Father was just too much for most people to handle. And here we are being told that every one born of the Spirit is the same.

But birth of the Spirit depends upon 'hearing the sound' of the wind / spirit. This phrase 'hear the sound' is literally 'to understand the voice'. The same words are found in :29 of how John heard the Lord's voice; those who "hear the voice" of God's son shall live (5:25,28); His sheep "hear His voice" (10:3,16,27); those "of the truth hear My voice" (18:37); the Lord knocks, but He enters in to those who "hear My voice" (Rev. 3:20). Birth of the Spirit is not therefore completely arbitrary; there must be a hearing of the Lord's voice in His word. But even then, there is the mystery of grace attached to quite where the call came from, and to where we are being led. Just as the wind of the Spirit can be felt by its effects, but not concretely seen and defined.

Perhaps the idea is that Nicodemus heard the sound, recognized that this man was from God; but could not tell / discern further. The position of the Jews was that "we cannot tell" (Mt. 21:27 s.w.) the authority of John the Baptist and his message about Jesus as Messiah. The same phrase "cannot tell" was used by John in rebuking the Jews for not being able to tell or know the Messiah in their midst (1:26 "Whom you know not"); the Jews at the wedding could not tell from whence the new wine came (2:9 s.w.); and the Lord has just used the term in :3 about 'not seeing' the Kingdom of God unless we are born again. This all encourages us to read "You hear the sound but cannot tell..." as meaning 'Yes, Nicodemus, you recognize My miracles, but you are not allowing yourself to perceive from whence I am and to where I go'- and He came from God and went to God. Nicodemus didn't want to recognize the

intangible, the spiritual; to surrender the issues of the past and future to the movement of the Spirit, to grace.

3:9 *Nicodemus answered and said to him: How can these things be?*- The academic Old Testament scholar, the theologian, struggled to accept that the Spirit could operate like this. It was the struggle of head against heart, of visible against invisible, of secular against spiritual, of law against grace.

3:10 *Jesus answered and said to him: Are you the teacher of Israel and yet do not understand these things?*- "The teacher" could imply he held some specific office of theological teaching. The Lord seems to have expected Nicodemus to have figured out the Old Testament's teaching about the new birth (presumably from Ps. 51:10; Is. 44:3; Ez. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Ecc. 11:5). And the Lord castigates Nicodemus for not having figured it out. The very high standards which He demanded of His followers would only have had meaning if it was evident that He was Himself a real human who all the same was sinless. This was [and is] why the words of Jesus had a compelling, inspirational power towards obedience; for He Himself lived out those words in human flesh. The Lord of all grace was and is amazingly demanding in some ways. And He has every right to be.

Or it could be that the Lord is saying that if Nicodemus had studied Scripture as God intends, then he would have perceived that all is of grace and God's initiative, rather than of academic study.

3:11 *Truly, truly, I say to you: We speak that which we know and testify of that which we have seen; and you do not welcome our witness*- Note how the Lord changes pronouns: "I say to you, We speak...". He clearly identifies the preaching of His followers with His own witness. We are the branches, we make up the vine, we make up the Lord Jesus. Thus He spoke of "we..." to mean 'I...' here, such was the unity He felt between Himself and His men who witnessed for Him. He asked Saul "Why persecutest thou *me*?" (Acts 9:4), again identifying Himself with His people. But this leads us to wonder whether John is not also speaking here; for the Gospel records are transcripts of the original teaching of the Gospel by, e.g., John and his team. The only other time we encounter the term "our witness" is again in John's writings, describing his own witness as "our witness" in 3 Jn. 12. The "you" who are addressed as not receiving the witness would connect with those Jews referenced in the prologue, who saw the light but remained in the darkness through not accepting it. In this case, John is here addressing that category, the "you [who] do not welcome / receive our witness", in the hope of converting even them. But primarily of course, the reference is to Nicodemus. He accepted that Jesus of Nazareth was clearly "from God" because of the miracles, but he did not really accept the witness of the Gospel- for it asked too much of him. And here we have a direct attack upon all nominal, surface level Christianity that refuses to openly come out for the One who lived and died for them. Quiet, private admission that He was "of God" is not enough; and this is a theme in John's Gospel. In his context, the tendency was to inwardly accept the truths of Jesus as God's prophet, but remain within the synagogue system acting as if they were Jews and not Christians.

3:12 *If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*- What were these earthly things that Nicodemus did not believe? In the

same as Paul at times 'says things in human terms', so the Lord had likened the new birth to the earthly analogy of insemination, pregnancy and birth. Nicodemus failed to believe that; and so there was no point in telling him heavenly things. He needed to be born from above, from Heaven (:5); but there was no point telling him about the things of Heaven if he refused to believe and grasp the simple requirement for new birth, expressed as it had been in earthly language. The Lord is saying in more abstract terms what Paul had in view when he writes to his converts of how he cannot write to them of the meat because they can't even grasp the milk.

But I suggested on :11 that these words of the Lord may also be applicable to John personally in his preaching of the Gospel. He chooses to record the more heavenly, spiritual sayings of the Lord, whereas the synoptics record His more direct, earthly statements. These words would therefore be true of John too, as the Lord's representative. He had told his audience earthly things, explained the Gospel history just as [e.g.] Mark had done, in straightforward language. And they had not believed. So there was little chance they were going to now believe His presentation of the more Heavenly words of the Lord.

3:13 *No one has ascended into heaven, but he that descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who is in heaven-* Moses' ascents of the mountain were seen as representing an ascension to Heaven; but he had not ascended up to the "heavenly things" of which Christ spoke. Consider the spiritual loneliness of rising to heights no other man has reached, as far as Heaven is above earth. John the Baptist recognised this (Jn. 3:31).

This man Jesus standing before them was saying [in figurative terms] that He was in Heaven, had been in Heaven, had ascended there. Surely His abrupt shift of tenses and places is to suggest the Yahweh Name being manifested in Him. The language of 'coming down' is classically used in the OT in the context of Yahweh manifestation in theophany; yet it often occurs in Acts in the context of the preaching of the Gospel, as if our witness is a manifestation of the Name (Acts 8:5; 10:21; 12:19; 14:25; 18:22; 25:6).

John's Gospel especially makes many references to the idea of Christ's judgment being right now. Why is this? John was clearly written sometime after the other Gospels. The early community of believers were expecting the Lord's return at any moment; but by the time John wrote, it was apparent that He hadn't returned as soon as they had hoped for. Perhaps his point was that much of what we are expecting at the second coming is in essence going on right now. The very 'coming' of Jesus was judgment (Jn. 3:13; 6:62; 16:28). Those who refuse to believe have already been condemned (Jn. 3:17-21). Whilst the other Gospels stress that we will receive eternal life at the second coming (Mk. 10:30; Mt. 18:8,9), John stresses that the essence of the life eternal is our present experience; we have passed from death to life (Jn. 5:24). We will be made children of God at the last day (Lk. 6:35; 20:36); but the essence of being God's children has begun now, when we are born again (Jn. 1:12). Yet John brings out his continuity with the other Gospels by speaking of both future and present condemnation (Jn. 12:48 cp. 3:18; 9:39); of future eternal life and present eternal life (Jn. 12:25 cp. 3:36; 5:24); and future resurrection and present 'resurrection' to new life (Jn. 6:39,40,54 cp. 5:21,24).

The context of John 3 is the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus. This passages highlights the difference between flesh and spirit, human understanding and spiritual perception, literal

birth and the birth "from above" (Jn. 3:3,5). All this suggests that we are to understand 'Heaven' and (by implication) 'earth' in a figurative manner. The Lord Jesus speaks as if He has already ascended into Heaven- yet He spoke these words during His ministry. In any case, He speaks of how "the Son of man" will do these things, and not 'God the Son', as would be required by Trinitarian theology. To suggest that Jesus as Son of Man literally ascended to Heaven and descended to earth during His ministry is surely literalism's last gasp. There are many allusions to Moses throughout John's record, as if both the Lord Jesus and John were seeking to impress upon the audience that the Lord Jesus was indeed the Messianic "prophet like unto" Moses predicted in Dt. 18:15,18. Jewish writings of the time [e.g. *Wisdom of Solomon*] spoke of Moses' ascent of Sinai as an ascension into Heaven, descending to Israel with the Law (more references to this effect in Ben Witherington, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) p. 100). This language is being picked up and applied to the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus has just spoken of how believers in Him are to be "born from above" and "born of the Spirit" (Jn. 3:3,5). However, the same Greek words for "born" and "Spirit" are found in Mt. 1:20 and Lk. 1:35- in description of the virgin birth of Jesus. He was the ultimate example of one "born of the Spirit". And yet John's Gospel applies the language of the virgin birth to believers. We have another example in Jn. 1:13- the believers "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"- i.e., they were born "of the Spirit". My suggestion is that the Lord Jesus is saying in Jn. 3:13 that of course, He is the only one fully born of the Spirit, the only one in Heavenly places; but the preceding context makes clear that He is willing to count believers in Him as fully sharing His status. Further, we need no longer complain that His virgin birth makes Him have some unfair advantages in the battle against sin which we don't have. The spiritual rebirth experienced by all those truly born again by God's word, His "seed" (1 Pet. 1:23), is such that we in some way are given all the inclinations towards righteousness which the Lord Jesus had by virtue of His birth.

"Even the Son of Man who is in Heaven" may be John's comment rather than the Lord's actual words. Any serious student of John's Gospel will have come across this problem of deciding what are John's inserted comments, and what are the actual words of Jesus (e.g. 3:13-17). The problem arises because the written style of John is so similar, indeed identical, to the style of language Christ used. The conclusion from this feature is that *the mind of John was so swamped with the words and style of the Lord that his own speaking and writing became after the pattern of his Master*. And he is our pattern in this. Not only are his comments within his Gospel exactly in harmony with the Lord's style, but also the style and phrasing of his own epistle reflects that of the Lord (e.g. compare Jn. 15:11; 16:24; 17:13 with 1 Jn. 1:4; 2 Jn. 12). Perhaps he *so* absorbed the mind of the Master that he was used to write the most spiritual account of the Lord's life. In a different way, Peter also absorbed the Lord's words to the point that they influenced his way of speaking and writing (his letters are full of conscious and unconscious allusions back to the Lord's words). He seems to have noted some of the Lord's catch phrases, and made them his own (as an Englishman may say "I guess..." after prolonged contact with an American). Thus "of a surety / truth" was one of the Lord's catch phrases (Lk. 9:27; 12:44; 21:3; Jn. 1:47; 6:55; 8:31; 17:8), repeated by Peter in Acts 12:11.

3:14 *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted*

*up*- Perhaps these were the "heavenly things" which the Lord had intimated He wanted to tell Nicodemus of in :12.

It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the *serpent* represented Christ in this case. It was as it were a dead serpent; the Lord had put to death the power of sin within Himself. Moses "lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews "lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (8:28). Moses drew attention to the serpent and its power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses "lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ). The altar "Jehovah-Nissi" connected Yahweh personally with the pole / standard / ensign of Israel (Ex. 17:15). Yet *nissi* is the Hebrew word used for the pole on which the brass serpent was lifted up, and for the standard pole which would lift up Christ. Somehow Yahweh Himself was essentially connected with the cross of Christ. "There is no God else beside; a just God and a Saviour (Jesus)... look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Is. 45:21,22) is evident allusion to the snake on the pole to which all Israel were bidden look and be saved. And yet that saving symbol of the crucified Jesus is in fact God Himself held up to all men. The Hebrew word *nasa* translated "forgive" is also translated 'bear' as in 'bearing / carrying iniquity'. When God forgave, He bore / carried sin; and the idea of carrying sin is obviously brought into visual, graphic meaning in the literal carrying of the cross by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, the Hebrew word *nes*, translated "pole" in the record of the bronze snake being lifted up on a "pole", is the noun for which *nasa* is the verb. The essence of cross carrying had therefore been performed by God for millennia, every time He forgave human sin. It's understandable, therefore, that He had a special manifestation in the final sufferings and death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

Jn. 3:13,14 link the Lord's ascension to Heaven, and His 'lifting up' on the cross. They were all part of the same, saving process. Likewise the atonement is a function of His death and resurrection combined; it was only the empty tomb that gave the cross any power at all. "Lifted up" is literally to exalt; His lifting up by His enemies was in their eyes His final disgrace, to die the death of the cross; but to spiritual eyes, it was His greatest exaltation. There are many similar things in life today which from a secular viewpoint may be a man's nadir, but which from a heavenly perspective are his greatest exaltation. The process of death itself is often an example.

The same *must* which led Him to His passion (see on Mk. 14:49; Lk. 2:49) is the very same compulsion which "behoves" us to preach that passion which we have witnessed and benefited from. In His ministry, He had taught that we *must* be born again, and in the same discourse spoke of how He *must* be lifted up in crucifixion (Jn. 3:7,14). His cross, His will to die in the way He did, must be our inspiration. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and *we ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16).

3:13,14 follow straight on from the discourse about being born again. John very much saw the new birth of the believer as a coming out of the Lord's pierced side; this was what enabled the new birth [see under 1:1 and 1:13]. 2 Cor. 5:17 likewise speaks of the new creation in the context of expounding the Lord's death. "Lifted up" translates a Greek word usually translated "exalt", and is used about the Lord's exaltation after His resurrection (Acts 2:33; 5:31). Although "no man hath *ascended up* to heaven" uses a different word, the idea is

just the same. The word is usually used by John to describe the Lord's 'going up' to Jerusalem to keep and finally fulfil the Passover (2:13; 5:1; 7:8,10,14; 11:55; 12:20). John's comment that only the Lord Jesus has "ascended up to heaven" may therefore be a reference to both His crucifixion and ascension. His 'coming down' may have a hint of how John records His body being 'taken down' from the cross.

3:15 *That whoever believes may in him have eternal life*- Or, "Whoever believed in Him". 'Belief in Him' therefore specifically refers to looking upon the cross in understanding, and believing it, just as Israel had to look to the serpent to be saved from the death which was already in their blood stream. In John, 'seeing' is 'believing'. 'He' was and is His cross. There we see the epitome of Him. Jesus "by himself purged our sins" (Heb. 1:3) and yet it was by His cross and His blood that sin was purged. But He Himself was epitomized in His blood / cross. And so to believe in Him is to believe in Him crucified (Jn. 3:15,16). In the context, Nicodemus had claimed to kind of believe in Jesus in that he recognized the miracles must be of God. But the Lord is saying this is not enough; to believe in Him is to believe in Him as the crucified saviour from our personal sins and death sentence within our blood stream. God's so loving the world was in the giving of His son to die. His sending His Son into the world was specifically through the cross [see on Jn. 1:14- this is another development of the prologue]. One wonders whether we gaze enough upon the cross.

Clearly enough, the bronze serpent lifted up on the "standard" was a symbol of Christ crucified. But time and again throughout Isaiah, we read that a "standard" or ensign will be "lifted up" in order to gather people together to it (Is. 5:26; 13:2; 11:12; 18:3; 62:10). This was the idea of an ensign lifted up. Thus our common response to the cross of Christ should be to gather together unto Him there. And we need to take note that several of those Isaiah passages are speaking about what shall happen in the last days, when divided Israel will unite on the basis of their acceptance of the crucified Jesus.

3:14-21 One of the most powerful links between the cross and the judgment is to be found in Jn. 3:14-21 (which seems to be John's commentary rather than the words of Jesus Himself). Parallels are drawn between:

- The snake lifted up on the pole (=the crucifixion), teaching that whoever believes in the crucified Christ should live
- God so loving the world (language elsewhere specifically applied to the crucifixion: Rom. 5:8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:10,11)
- God giving His Son (on the cross, Rom. 5:15; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:24), that whoever believes in Him should live
- God sending His Son to save the world (1 Jn. 4:10; Gal. 4:4 cp. Jn. 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32; 17:1)
- Light coming into the world (at His death, the darkness was ended).

All these phrases can refer to the life and person of the Lord; but sometimes they are specifically applied to the cross. And further, they are prefaced here in Jn. 3 by a reference to the Lord as the snake lifted up on the pole. The essence of the Lord, indeed the essence of God Himself, was openly displayed in its most crystallised form in the cross. There was the epitome of love, of every component of God's glory, revealed to the eyes of men. There above all, the light of God's love and glory came into the world. In this context John's

comment continues: "This is the condemnation / judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest". If we understand "the light" as pre-eminently the cross, we see further evidence that there indeed was and is the judgment of this world. The Lord described His impending death as "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31); and here He says that the judgment of this world is that He is the light of the world and men shy away from Him. The link between the light of the world and the snake being lifted up on the pole would have been more evident to Hebrew readers and thinkers than it is to us. The "pole" on which the snake was lifted up was a standard, a pole on which often a lamp would be lifted up: "a beacon upon the top of a mountain... an *ensign* (s.w.) on an hill" (Is. 30:17). The 'light' would have been understood as a burning light rather than, e.g., the sun. The light of which the Lord spoke would have been understood as a torch, lifted up on a standard. The same Greek word is used in describing how the jailor asked for a "light", i.e. a blazing torch, in order to inspect the darkened prison (Acts 16:29). Speaking in the context of the snake lifted up on a pole, Jesus would have been inviting His audience to see Him crucified as the light of their lives. And this would explain why Isaiah seems to parallel the nations coming to the ensign / standard / pole of Christ, and them coming to the Him as light of the world (Is. 5:26; 11:10,12; 18:3; 39:9; 49:22; 62:10 cp. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). Lk. 1:78,79 foretold how the Lord would be a lamp to those in darkness- and this had a strange fulfilment in His death. His example there on the cross was a light amidst the darkness that descended on the world. In the light of His cross, true self-examination is possible. Significantly perhaps, the Greek word for "light" occurs in Lk. 22:56, where Peter sits by the "fire" and was exposed. It was as if Peter was acting out a parable of how the "light" of association with the suffering Christ makes our deeds manifest. The day of "light" is both the crucifixion, and the last day of judgment, when all our deeds will be made manifest before the light (Lk. 12:3). By coming to the cross and allowing it to influence our self-examination, we come to judgment in advance.

3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life-* The having of eternal life in John usually refers to something right now. The context is how stricken Israel looked upon the serpent and were given life; but he who looks in faith upon the lifted up Lord Jesus shall receive *eternal* life. In its present sense, this means that through the Spirit we can begin to live now the life we shall eternally experience in God's Kingdom. But that life is based upon our comprehending in faith the crucified Lord Jesus. He there becomes the practical inspiration for the new life. For 'seeing' Him there means we can no longer be passive; every aspect of daily living and thinking is affected.

"God *so* loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" implies that the love of God for the world was channelled through the work of Christ. Note the import of the word "*so*" - not 'so much', but 'so, in this way...'. There are many connections between the love of God and the death of Christ, and it is easy to overlook them. For example, "God loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins... hereby ('in this') we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 4:10; 3:16). The love of God is "*in* Christ Jesus". Likewise, the love of Christ is so often linked with His death. Christ "Loved us, and washed us from our sins" (Rev. 1:5). He gave His life so that the world might have life (Jn. 6:51); and yet He gave His life for *us*. My conclusion is that the love of Christ was paraded for the whole world, especially the Jewish world, just as the serpent was available for all Israel. But only those who look to Him there in faith shall receive the life eternal. We thereby become



"the world", we who *to God*, from His perspective, constitute "the world" with which He deals. "The world" in John's Gospel often means the Jewish world. The Lord died for *their* salvation fundamentally (Gal. 4:5), and we only have access to this by becoming spiritual Israel through baptism. See on 1 Jn. 2:15.

3:17 *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through him-* It was absolutely possible that all Israel could have been saved. It was through their rejection of this plan that they condemned themselves. God's intention in giving His Son was that the Jewish world might be saved, in the first instance. For that is the common referent of "the world" in John. But if we wish to apply "the world" to "the whole world", we must grapple with the question: Why, then, the masses of humanity who never heard the name of Jesus? My comment would then be that it was potentially possible for the whole world to hear, it was God's wish and intention; but it was the dysfunction of His church, and His refusal to intervene to force us another way, His commitment to honouring our freewill, which left those masses without the saving knowledge of Jesus. And the tragedy continues to this day.

3:18 *He that believes in him is not condemned. He that does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God-* Condemnation was not God's aim (:17); condemnation is therefore always self-condemnation. Whenever we encounter the message of salvation in Him, we face our judgment; and some even now are "condemned already" by their rejection of salvation in Him.

For we who believe, it is in this sense that in prospect we can be assured that we are saved by being in Christ. We can therefore live as "the sons of God, without rebuke... blameless" (Phil. 2:15) in God's sight (being so in the eyes of the world is almost impossible for a true believer!), in the same way as at the judgment we will be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable". It must be significant that the language of forgiveness in the New Testament constantly alludes to judgment: justification, appeal, counsel for the defence, advocate, accusation etc. are common ideas, especially in the Greek. The point of this may be to teach that the experience of forgiveness now does stand related to the judgment which we will receive at Christ's return. Thus if we are convicted of sin now, but aided by Christ as our advocate and therefore justified, we will have the same experience at the judgment seat.

3:19 *And this is the ground of condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light- for their works were evil-* Another reference to the prologue. But now "the light" is defined further as the lifted up Son of Man; perhaps the connection is in the way that a "light" was usually a torch, a fire lifted up, just as the serpent on the pole was lifted up. John is therefore speaking after the crucifixion; even after that, the Jews preferred darkness rather than to accept the crucified Jesus as light of their lives. Accepting Him there meant the new life, and an exposure of their works as evil. This is why people refuse the message of Jesus as light of their world- because morally it demands too much of them. Yet they excuse it as not getting the idea, misunderstanding, having genuine intellectual doubts. But here the Biblical reason is given, probing as it does to depths of the subconscious that are not knowable by the person themselves. The reason for not accepting the light is that men love darkness because their works are evil and they don't wish to have them exposed.

However, although these words are true of John's witness after the Lord's death, they are just as appropriate to the Lord Jesus, who was speaking them *before* His death to Nicodemus who had come to Him by night. Why by night? Because he feared openly demonstrating his faith. He would not come out in the light, because his works were evil.

The light coming into the world is parallel with God's son coming into the world in the cross [see on Jn. 1:5,9]. Men "came to that sight" and turned away from it (Lk. 23:48). Our natures likewise resist us concentrating upon the cross. Something in us makes our minds wander at the breaking of bread. There our deeds are manifested. Thus the breaking of bread naturally brings forth self-examination as we focus upon and reconstruct His death. There are our deeds reprov'd, and also made manifest. In murdering the Son of God, Israel showed how they hated the light; the same word is used in describing how "they hated me without a cause" (Jn. 15:25). John develops the idea in 1 Jn. 2:9,11, in teaching that to hate our brother is to walk in darkness; whereas if we come to the light of God's glory as shown in the cross, we will love our brother. The cross is the ultimate motivator to love our brethren; this was one of the reasons why the Lord died as He did (Jn. 17:26). The light of the cross is the light of all men in God's world (1:4). The Lord later associates His being the light of the world with following Him; and 'following him' is invariably associated with taking up the cross and following Him. To follow the light is to follow Christ crucified (8:12). He there is to be the practical focus of our lives. Recall how the prologue states that His light is to be our life, we are to live life in the light of Him; and more specifically, in the light of the fact He died for us.

*3:20 For every one that does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, in case his works should be reprov'd-* If men love darkness, they are not therefore passive nor indifferent to the light. They hate it. John uses the same word four times in his first letter, warning that those who claim to believe but hate their brother are still in darkness. The division is not, therefore, simply between those who claim to believe and those who do not. If we hate our brother, we hate the Lord Jesus whom he represents; we hate the light, we are not led by the light of Him crucified. For if we are so led, hatred of our brother will simply not happen. And this is how to overcome feelings of hatred against others; not to steel will ourselves not to feel like that, but to positively focus upon the crucified Lord as light of our lives.

The Greek phrase "come to" has been used in the context for how Nicodemus had "come to Jesus" by night (:2; stressed again in 7:50). But the Lord seems to be saying that he had not truly come to Him. And He locates the deep subconscious reason as a fear that his works should be reprov'd. And this for all time is the reason why people will not come to Him completely, regardless of all the excuses they make. On the surface, "all men came to" Jesus (3:26); but He later comments: "But you will not come to me, that you might have life" (5:40). The feeding of the multitude likewise features multitudes 'coming to Him', and the Lord using the same phrase in explaining that if they truly came to Him, they would never again hunger and would certainly be eternally saved (6:5,35,37,44,45,65). There is a major play on the idea of 'coming to' Jesus. The warning is against surface level coming to Him, as if trooping out to church; and coming in truth, in which case we shall be utterly assured of our salvation. And our coming to the Lord will be matched by His coming to us, right now in this life, through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts. The same phrase is again used of this wondrous experience, where the Lord meets with man in man's own heart (14:18,23,28; 16:7).

Whenever God's Truth is presented to a man, the raw nerve of his conscience will somehow be touched. He is in God's image, and knows somehow he should respond to this. He may react by flinching away, covering up his weakness; He will not come to the light, lest his deeds are reproved. Or he may realise that he has been touched, and respond in humility. So often the introduction of the Gospel is treated by people with indifference: 'Oh, another leaflet', a woman may jovially respond when she's handed one of our tracts. But when she realises it's about Jesus... then, things will change. 'Oh, I see...' she may say, and her body language will change. She has been touched on the raw nerve. She may get angry because of this, or quickly change the subject- or let her conscience be touched.

3:21 *But he that does the truth comes to the light, that his works may be revealed, that they have been done in God-* Remember however that John's Gospel is a transcript of his preaching the Gospel to people who had lived both before and after the Lord's death. Here he may be explaining why some in Israel accepted the light and others didn't. "The truth" is a phrase used about the covenant promises to the fathers- "the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham which You promised to our fathers" (Mic. 7:20). Those who grasped the real implications of that covenant 'did the truth' and were looking for the light. I suggest this is the idea here, rather than the impression that people who did good works would find in the Lord Jesus a justification of themselves. The Greek is however difficult here, and one manuscript reads "that the work which is between God and him may be known".

But these words are also true for our later generations. John later defines 'doing the truth' as walking in the light (1 Jn. 1:6). A healthy conscience provides some foretaste of the final judgment. He who does truth comes to the light, "that his deeds may be made *manifest*" (Jn. 3:21), the reproof of a healthy conscience makes our failings *manifest* (Eph. 5:13) as they will be made *manifest* at the future judgment (Lk. 8:17; 1 Cor. 3:13; 4:5; 1 Tim. 5:25). This is why Solomon when reflecting on the human seats of judgment so wished that God would *now* make men manifest to themselves, make them realize the animal depravity of their natures, because there would be a *future* judgment of every purpose and work (Ecc. 3:16-18). If we love darkness and refuse to come to the light that our deeds may be manifest (Jn. 3:20), then we will be returned to the darkness in the last day. Therefore willing self-examination and self-correction now, a true response to God's word, a realistic coming to the light- this means we will not be thrown into the darkness in the end. But the question of course occurs: do we *really* let God's word influence our behaviour to the extent that we *really* change? Or are we just drifting through the Christian, church-going life...? The children of God and those of the devil are now made manifest (1 Jn. 2:19; 3:10), even in the eyes of other believers (1 Cor. 11:19). His judgments are now made manifest (Rom. 1:19) in that we know His word, His judgments; in advance of how they *will* be made manifest in the future judgment (Rev. 15:4). We must all be made manifest before the judgment seat, but we are made manifest unto God (s.w.) even now (2 Cor. 5:10,11).

There's a clear connection here with how Nicodemus came out into the light after the crucifixion. Nicodemus had come to the Lord by night, scared to make the total commitment of coming out into the open. But the purpose of the cross was so that we might be separated out from this present evil world (Gal. 1:4). To remain in the world, to stay in the crowd that faced the cross rather than walk through the no man's land between, this is a denial of the Lord's death for us. The Lord's discourse that night three years ago had emphasized the need for every believer to come out into the light, not hide under the cover of darkness as

Nicodemus was doing: "Men loved darkness... for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be discovered. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest" (Jn. 3:19-21). This must be read in the context of the fact that this discourse was spoken to Nicodemus when he came to Jesus secretly, at night. It took three years and the personal experience of the cross to make Nicodemus realize the truth of all this.

*3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judea; and there he stayed with them and baptized-* He did not baptize, His disciples did (4:2). We see here the idea developed that the Lord's witnesses are Him, in essence. And the same connection between Him and ourselves is especially seen and felt in the work of witnessing for Him.

*3:23 And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there; and people came to be baptized-* This is clear evidence that John was baptizing by immersion, seeing he chose a place with "much water". It appears this was a fairly remote place; as the Lord went to the top of a mountain to teach, so John seems to have required some effort to be shown by his listeners.

*3:24 For John had not then been thrown into prison-* This information is added perhaps to give the impression that right up until his arrest, John was teaching and baptizing.

*3:25 Then there arose a dispute between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purification-* Presumably because both the Lord and John were baptizing at the same time. 'Whose baptism is valid?' would have been the question. Full Christian baptism of the kind commanded in the great commission was into the Lord's death and resurrection, and the whole symbolism of burial and resurrection with Him required that it could only happen after He had died and risen. So the baptisms performed before that were not full Christian baptisms, but rather statements of repentance and a desire to receive cleansing / purification. If Israel had indeed repented then the path would have been prepared and the Lord could have come in glory. But many of those baptized turned around and crucified their Saviour.

*3:26 And they came to John, and said to him: Rabbi, he that was with you on the other side of the Jordan, to whom you have testified, behold, the same baptizes, and all men come to him-* I suggested on :25 that the baptisms of the Lord and John were essentially the same. We get the impression that there were some loyalists to John the Baptist who were alarmed that the Lord was achieving more baptisms than he was. I noted earlier that John's Gospel was partly directed at those who clung to loyalty to John the Baptist even after his death. John's total disinterest in a personal following is therefore emphasized in John's Gospel.

3:27- see on Lk. 1:14.

*John answered and said: A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven-* The particular thing 'received' here was the Lord's apparent success in preaching. Those who came to the Lord were given to Him by God. John the Baptist understood what is later made explicit in John's Gospel; that nobody can come to the Son unless they are called by the Father (14:6).

3:28- see on Mt. 3:7.

*You yourselves can testify that I said: I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him-* It was only at the Lord's baptism that John the Baptist realized that Jesus of Nazareth, his relative, was in fact the Christ. But now, John is clearly stating that this Jesus is the Christ and they ought to follow Him instead. The Gospel of John is therefore making the point that those disciples of John who were still loyal to him rather than the Lord were out of step with John's own clear words.

*3:29 He that has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, that stands by and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. In this my joy is made full-* This is supreme Christ-centeredness in witness. His joy was made full to see the Lord, the groom, united with His bride- that group of uncertain, little understanding folks who were coming out to profess repentance of their sins. John's words remained with the Lord; for He later speaks of how His joy is fulfilled in the disciples, and their joy is fulfilled in Him (15:11; 17:13). The idea was not lost on John himself, who later writes to his converts that "my joy" is that they walk in truth, focused on the Lord Jesus (3 Jn. 4). All gathering of a personal following is here utterly precluded. Our work is to bring people to the Lord Jesus; and the mutual fulfilment of their joy in Him, and His in them, is to be the fulfilment of our joy. Hence Paul can reason that his eternal joy will be to see his converts eternally united with the Lord.

Although John preached the excellence of Christ, he didn't even consider himself to be part of the mystic bride of Christ; for he likens himself to only the groom, watching the happiness of the couple, but not having a part in it himself (Jn. 3:29). See on Jn. 1:10.

3:30- see on Eph. 3:8.

*He must increase but I must decrease-* John is surely alluding to the LXX of Is. 9:7: "Of the increase of his kingdom and peace there shall be no end, sitting upon the throne of David". John naturally hoped that Israel would indeed accept the Lord Jesus, and thus the glory could come to Zion over the road John the Baptist had prepared. This was not to be, although ultimately the eternal increase of His Kingdom shall indeed come upon this earth. And the prospect of that Kingdom should lead us to proclaim with thankfulness that "I must decrease". The things of His Kingdom and Name, which we profess faith in through accepting the Gospel, shall then be all and in all. Whilst we as persons shall eternally exist in our own unique form, the "I", the unpleasant ego, shall be no more. John was deeply mindful of his weaknesses and perhaps he had this ego in view.

3:31- see on Mt. 3:7.

*He that comes from above is above all. He that is of the earth is of the earth, and of the earth he speaks. He that comes from heaven is above all-* As noted on :30, John felt his own diminution in the face of the eternal Kingdom, and before the Lord Jesus. The higher we perceive the Lord Jesus, the less problem we will have with ego, the more attainable will be the idea of truly selfless service. Nicodemus and the Jews didn't understand earthly things,

and so they would not understand heavenly things (:12). This is a tacit admission that they did not [at that point] accept John's message, the earthly voice as opposed to the heavenly. See on :34.

3:32 *What he has seen and heard, of that he testifies; and no one receives his witness-* "We" testify what "we" have seen and heard (:11); and John later writes that "we", he and his fellow disciples, testified to their converts what they had seen and heard (s.w. 1 Jn. 1:1,3). "No one" may mean 'very few'; the majority preferred the darkness. Or it could be that :32 is the recorded speech of John the Baptist, lamenting that although many had been baptized, not one of his disciples was accepting the testimony of what he had seen and heard at the Lord's baptism- the statement that Jesus of Nazareth was Messiah and Son of God. But John picks up these words later in 1 Jn. to show that in fact all was not lost, as John had felt in his depression. For John and the disciples had received his testimony, and passed it on to their converts. In this case, John the Baptist would be a true Elijah-type prophet, for he too felt that he alone was faithful, when there in fact another 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Indeed, the next verse :33 is John the Gospel writer's comment to the effect that actually, some did receive his witness.

3:33 *He that has received his witness has certified that God is true-* See on :32. John in his depression thought that nobody had received his passing on of the vision he beheld at the Lord's baptism, connecting Jesus of Nazareth with Messiah and Son of God. But John the Gospel writer now adds that some had received John the Baptist's witness; indeed, John was one of them (1 Jn. 1:1,3). "Truth" is a concept associated with the promises to the fathers (Mic. 7:20). By accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the seed / Messiah promised to Abraham and David, the believer has certified God's truth, the truth of His promises of salvation. By accepting those words of God (:34) to be truly of God and fulfilled in Christ, we set or affix our seal to them- we undertake to have them as binding upon us in daily life. Accepting the proposition that the Bible is inspired is therefore not a merely academic thing, assenting to a true proposition. It has to affect our lives. And note the humility of God here- that human beings can affix the seal of validation to the truth of God's word. This works out in the way in which lives of obedience to God's word are actually an affixed seal and testament to the truth of those words. Thus it becomes our lives which are the greatest proof of Biblical inspiration and the truth of God's word of promise. We each have a personal seal, as it were, with our own personal characteristics on it; and we set to our seal the fact that God is Truth, that He is the God of our covenant ("Truth" is a word associated throughout the OT with God's covenant relationship with men).

3:34 *For he whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give him the Spirit by measure-* John was given the Spirit to speak as he did, but by specific measures. The Lord had the Spirit generally and constantly, not just measured out for some specific works. John sees a direct connection between the Lord's words and the Spirit. His words were directly inspired; and the Lord Himself states that His words are Spirit in 6:63. The "For he whom God has sent..." links back to the statement in :31 that John speaks of the earth, but the Lord from Heaven. The Lord's being "from Heaven" refers therefore to the fact that He had been given God's Spirit without measure in order to speak from Heaven, from God. There is no reference to any descent of some pre-existent Jesus from Heaven to earth. That is to miss the context and force a crude literalism on the clearly more abstract language being used here.

3:35 *The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand-* We have just read that God so loved the world that He gave His Son (:16). That love for the world was focused through His love of the Son. The "all things" are those spoken of in the prologue- the all things of the new creation, of persons who believe into Him. We as believers are in His hand. Mt. 11:27 contains this thought too, when the Lord explains that the Father's giving all things to Him means that men can only know the Father if the Son reveals Him to them. The "all things" again refers to believers. John 10 expresses similar ideas; we are as the Lord's sheep safe in His hand and cannot be snatched away. This leads on to the assurance that we have right now the eternal life (:36).

3:36- see on Eph. 2:3.

*He that believes on the Son has eternal life; but he that does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him-* When we read of "eternal life" being granted to us now, we are reading about "the life belonging to the age", i.e. the Kingdom of God in the future. The idea is that we can live the life which we will eternally live- right here and now. We can experience the quality of that life now. And if we don't... we don't have the guarantee of eternity in the Kingdom. For in spiritual terms, in terms of essential spiritual experience, there will be a seamless transition between the spiritual life we now enjoy, and that which we will experience in the future Kingdom. The location of that eternity will be on earth; and yes, there must be death, resurrection, judgment and immortalisation of our body. But those more 'physical' realities don't figure so deeply in the message which John is putting across in his record of 'the Gospel'. Notice how in Jn. 3:36, 'having everlasting life' is paralleled with 'seeing life'; to perceive and live what God's Kingdom life is all about, is in a sense to 'have' it.

For those who refuse to obey the Gospel, having heard it, then God's wrath will come and remain upon them right now, until judgment day. The idea is not that God is angry with all men and that wrath abides on everyone who is outside the Lord Jesus. These words are alluded to several times later in the New Testament, about the wrath to come upon the Jews, the "children of disobedience", in that they heard the Gospel and rejected it by killing God's Son (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 3:5; 9:22; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6).

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John-* When some want to see spiritual work in competitive terms, it's better to just not play that game at all, and move away or onwards. Making and baptizing disciples is the language of the great commission (Mt. 28:19). We are to follow the Lord's example in our own outreach; not merely baptizing but making men disciples, independent learners of Him.

4:2 *Although Jesus himself did not baptize but his disciples-* As noted on 3:22, the Lord is described as doing the baptisms, and indeed the Pharisees perceived it that way too (:1). Especially in the doing of His work of witness, we are counted as Him. We recall that at this stage the disciples still believed in ghosts, demons and the associated wrong ideas of immortal souls and disembodied existence. But still they baptized people. The Lord hardly made the bar very high, right from the start of His ministry.

4:3 *He left Judea and departed again into Galilee-* It could be that as today, numbers of converts and baptisms led to jealousy which soon morphed into violent opposition, and the Lord therefore withdrew from the Jerusalem area.

4:4 *It was necessary for him to pass through Samaria-* This is significant, as this was not from geographical necessity. The Lord was in the Jordan valley (Jn. 3:22) and could easily have taken the valley road north through Bethshan into Galilee, avoiding Samaria entirely. See on Lk. 2:49. Pious Jews avoided travelling through Samaria; the Lord was demonstrating that He was not interested in the lines of separation drawn by the pious. The necessity however may have been because of some plot against Him arising from jealousy over the baptisms (see on :3), and so He took the route which He knew the Pharisees would not take for fear of defilement by the Samaritans. It is yet another window onto His humanity that He faced things like geographical and logistical necessity.

4:5 *Sychar, near to the parcel of ground which Jacob gave his son Joseph-* This place was rich in Jewish history; it was the parcel of ground purchased by Jacob, where Joseph's bones were buried (Josh. 24:32), and where Jacob had built an altar (Gen. 33:18-20), called 'The mighty one, the God of Israel'. Jacob had also conquered territory there with his own sword and bow, fighting the people of the land. Abraham had been there (Gen. 12:6), and Shechem ['Sychar'] was one of the oldest towns in Israelite history. But at the time of the Lord Jesus, it was inhabited by the despised Samaritans. It's rather like a town square with a war memorial and traditional British architecture in the United Kingdom- which is now inhabited by Moslem immigrants, with the Anglican church now turned into a Mosque. And one of the local women with a clearly immoral



background- was one of the Lord's star converts. And she in turn converts the local menfolk to Christ. Just as traditional white churches in the West would view the conversion of asylum seekers and recent darker skinned immigrants with suspicion and disgust, so we can imagine people responding to the Lord's conversion of this woman.

*4:6 Jacob's well was also there. Jesus, being tired from his journey, sat tired by the well. It was about the sixth hour-* Incident after incident in the mortal life of Jesus had echoes of the crucifixion to come. Consider how He met the woman at the well "at the sixth hour" (Gk.), He was thirsty, a woman got Him something to drink and encouraged Him in His work (Jn. 4:6 cp. 19:14,28). No wonder He spoke of His meeting with her as a finishing of the Father's work, which is the very language of the cross. He lived out the essence of the cross in that incident, just as we do, day by day.

The Lord's humanity is clearly indicated here. The sixth hour by Jewish time was midday; if Roman time, it was around 6 PM, when women went to get water. But the woman being separated rather from society may have come at midday, on her own.

*4:7 A woman of Samaria came to draw water, and Jesus said to her: Give me a drink-* Jewish men, especially religious leaders, were not supposed to speak with women publicly- let alone with Samaritan women. Therefore we see here the Lord's open attitude and intentional breaking of such human taboos and barriers. The well was deep and the Lord had no rope or bucket; presumably the women brought their own equipment with them to the well. We see here His need; He had little strength, having walked all night, and He also lacked a rope and / or bucket to get water from the well. He in no way was "very God of very Gods".

*4:8 His disciples had gone into the city to buy food-* This doesn't necessarily mean that the Lord was left there alone. The disciples were likely more than "the twelve" [there were at least also Matthias and Joseph Justus present at this time, Acts 1:24-26]; and there were likely the ministering women too. Would they all really have gone into town to buy food and left the Lord exhausted and alone by a well? Surely some would have remained with Him. But there is also the possibility that the Lord sought time and space alone in prayer (as in Mk. 1:35; Lk. 6:12; 9:28). It could be that He told them all to go into the town, whilst He prayed alone, by the well. The Samaritan woman's appearance was therefore a direct answer to His prayers, which perhaps had focused upon the salvation of the Gentile Samaritans.

*4:9 The Samaritan woman replied to him: How is it that you, being a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? (For Jews have no dealings with*

*Samaritans*)- The Lord's clothing and accent gave Him away as a Jew rather than a Samaritan. All through this record we see every evidence of His total humanity.

The woman of John 4 grew in her appreciation of Jesus, quickly. She addressed the Lord as: a Jew (4:9); "sir" (4:11); greater than Jacob (4:12); a prophet (4:19); the Christ (4:42); saviour of the world (4:42). M.R. Vincent (*Word Studies In The NT* Vol. 1 p. 113) has observed that Christ is progressively addressed as "Lord" as the NT record progresses; as if the community's perception of Him increased over time.

*Being a Jew*- The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9).

4:10 *Jesus answered and said to her: If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that said to you: Give me a drink, you would have asked of him and he would have given you living water*- The Lord's "living water", i.e. spring water, was offered in return for her well water. Surely this contrasts with Moses meeting his Gentile wife by a well; a relationship in which he gave her very little, and which was an indicator of a spiritual weak cycle in his life. The Samaritan woman immediately recognised Jesus as Jewish, just as Zipporah thought that Moses was an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19)- which is another comforting type of Christ's humanity.

"The gift of God" is clearly to be understood in John's thinking as the gift of the Spirit. The same phrase is used about it in Acts 8:20; 11:17; Rom. 5:15; Eph. 3:7. The living water is explained later as the same gift of the Spirit: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water. He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified" (7:37-39). But that gift of the Spirit would only be given after the Lord's glorification. He was not therefore offering the woman anything immediately; He had in view what could be given her once His work on earth was completed. He could give her the living water right then in the same sense as He could give eternal life immediately; the promise was as good as the receiving, so certain was His word of promise. I noted in commentary on Acts that the gift of the Spirit is presented as an evidence that Gentiles also have equal access to the Father seeing they received the same gift. Hence the significance of this promise to a Gentile that she could receive this gift which would meet the spiritual thirst which the Lord correctly perceived in her.

We live in *newness* of life. The life in Christ is not a stagnant pond, but rather living water, spring water, bubbling fresh from the spring. And this is what we give out to others- for "he that believeth in me, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of springing water" for others (Jn. 4:10; 7:38). We can experience the life of Christ right now. His life is now made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11), insofar as we seek to live our lives governed by the golden rule: 'What would Jesus do...?'

4:11 *The woman said to him: Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. From where then have you that living water?*- The well presumably required users to bring their own bucket or even rope. She had power over this exhausted Jew. But "living water" was known as the language of the Messianic age, and as a Samaritan, this woman would not have been unaware of it. I suggest that she is responding to the Lord's figurative language on the same level. How could this exhausted, very human Jew give this Messianic water- the well was deep, and spiritually speaking, it was very hard for Him to get it for her, surely... for after all... *He* surely was not the Messiah. His lack of a bucket to get the literal water was reflected in His obvious [to her] lack of ability to give the Messianic gift.

4:12 *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his cattle?*- She is alluding to Jewish ideas of how Messiah would be greater than Jacob but not greater than Abraham or David. Not only was this man not Messiah, but Jacob was "our [Samaritan] father", she had a right to drink of this well, so she reasoned, because she [unlike Jesus the Jew] as a Samaritan was the legitimate descendant of Jacob. But the Lord didn't rise to her provocations; just as we need to ignore the petty aggression, subtexts and barbs of others in order to bring them to the greater truth. So much religious and doctrinal controversy is hampered by this desire to correct the mistaken other on peripheral issues, and the essential issues are thereby overlooked and not engaged with.

4:13 *Jesus answered and said to her: Every one that drinks of this water shall thirst again*- The Lord doesn't argue with her over her take on descent from Jacob, even though she was wrong about it. He lost that battle to win the war. Even if the water in that well was hers and not His, it could not ultimately quench the human thirst for salvation. It is that thirst which our witness should address; we are perhaps "the salt of the earth" in that salt provokes thirst.

4:14 *But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst. The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water, springing up to eternal life*- The human thirst for the Spirit would be met

by the gift of the Spirit *within* our hearts. The water given would be the life eternal- the kind of life we shall eternally live. The reference is not to miraculous gifts, but to the ongoing gift of the Spirit within.

“With joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Is. 12:3) is applied by the Lord to the present experience of the believer in Him (Jn. 4:14; 7:38). But Isaiah 12 continues to explain how the joy of that experience will lead to men saying: “The Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation [as He was for Israel at the Red Sea, cp. our baptism experience]... Praise the Lord, proclaim his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted”. The exaltation of the Yahweh Name, the wonder of it, the sheer height of who Yahweh is, these things and our personal part in them is an unending imperative to witness these things world-wide. Men did not confess Jesus to others, despite nominally believing in Him, because they did not love the concept of the glory of God (Jn. 12:43 RV). To perceive His glory, the wonder of it all, leads to inevitable witness to others.

It was from the smitten rock that springing water came out. There is an endless inspiration in the cross, an endless source of that spirit of new life. And the influence of the cross cannot be passive; we will also give out living water, we will become as the smitten rock, and through our share in His crucifixion we will give out to others that same new and eternal life. But in the context of the Samaritan woman, the rock at that time was not yet smitten, the living waters of the Spirit not yet given as the Lord was not yet glorified.

Repeatedly, the Lord Jesus carefully worded His teaching in order to use the same words about Himself as about His disciples. He was the lamb of God; and He sent them forth as lambs amongst wolves; He was “the light of the world”, and He stated that they too must be likewise. As He was the source of living water to us, so we are to be to others (Jn. 4:10,14). The Samaritan woman could be the source of living water to others, as indeed she was. John grasped this, by using even some of the language of the virgin birth about the birth of all God’s children. It’s as if even the Lord’s Divine begetting shouldn’t be seen as too huge a barrier between us and Himself. The wonder of the virgin birth is something which elicits the “Wow!” mentality; but the miracle continues into *our* lives.

4:15 *The woman said to him: Sir, give me this water, that I do not thirst ever again, nor come all the way here to get water-* I have earlier suggested that the woman perceived the Lord was using figurative language. And she now comes to believe that the exhausted Jew by 'her' well can actually give her this water. It was quite a trek from the town to the well; spiritually, she wanted an end to the apparently endless journey to quench spiritual thirst. In our terms, an end to the reading of endless

self-help books, hanging out on various 'spiritual' forums online; but actually have the Spirit within us.

*Whoever* drinks of the water of life will have *within* them a spring that also gives eternal life (Jn. 4:15). The purpose of a spring is to give water to men. The way the woman immediately led others to Him is proof enough of this. Experiencing the Lord's words and salvation *inevitably* leads to us doing likewise to others, springing from somewhere deep within. This was in fact one of the first things God promised Abraham when He first instituted the new covenant: "I will bless you (i.e. with forgiveness and salvation in the Kingdom)... and *you* shalt be a blessing", in that we his seed in Christ would bring this same blessing to men of all nations by our witness (Gen. 12:2,3). When the Lord offered salvation to the woman at the well, He spoke of how it would be a spring of life going out from her. She wanted it, but apparently just for herself. Therefore when she asked to be given such a spring, the Lord replied by asking her to bring her husband to hear His words (Jn. 4:15,16). Surely He was saying: 'If you want this great salvation for yourself, you've got to be willing to share it with others, no matter how embarrassing this may be for you'. In a similar figure, the Bible begins with the tree of the lives [Heb.], and concludes with men eating of the tree and there appearing a forest of trees-of-life.

4:16 *Jesus said to her: Go, call your husband and come back here-* See on :15. Receipt of the spring of the Spirit is related to our desire to want to reach out and share spiritually with others. It also requires repentance; and she needed to repent. The Lord wanted her right away to be a source of Spirit to others, hence He asked her to return to Him with her "husband". Although the Spirit was not yet given, He realized that in prospect it could still be granted in some form because He was certain that He would indeed fulfil His mission and be "glorified" so that the living water of the Spirit could be poured out.

4:17 *The woman answered and said to him: I have no husband. Jesus said to her: You said well that you have no husband-* We note the Lord's positivity. Bear in mind that in their languages, "man" and "husband" are the same word. He could have said 'Wrong. You are living with a man. Don't lie to Me. Fess up and admit it, and then we can go further'. But He turned it around positively. He commends her for saying she has no man in the sense of a husband. The Lord picks up her deceptive comment positively, agreeing that her latest relationship isn't really a man / husband as God intends. I find His positive attitude here surpassing.

4:18 *For you have had five husbands; and he whom you now have is not your husband. This you have said truthfully-* See on :17. What was apparently an untrue, or less than fully truthful comment is turned around

positively by the Lord, to demonstrate His style of imputing righteousness. The woman was evidently a sinner; and the Lord made it clear that He knew all about her five men. But He didn't max out on that fact; His response to knowing it was basically: 'You're thirsty. I've got the water you need'. He saw her spiritual need, more than her moral problem; and He knew the answer. When she replied that she had no husband, He could have responded: 'You liar! A half truth is a lie!'. But He didn't. He said, so positively, gently and delicately, 'What you have said is quite true. You had five men you have lived with. The one you now have isn't your husband. So, yes, you said the truth' (Jn. 4:16-18). He could have crushed her. But He didn't. And we who 'have the truth' must take a lesson from this.

4:19 *The woman said to him: Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet-* Now she is sure that this exhausted, dehydrated Jew is more than a random guy sitting by a well, cadging a drink off a Gentile. Yet having been convicted by Him of a sinful life, even though He did it in the kindest possible way, she prefers to wiggle out of those personal issues by getting into theology. We know from Acts 8 that people from Samaria formed a significant part of the earliest Christian community. Yet all converts are prone to return to their former beliefs in some ways at some times. The Samaritan view of Messiah was likewise that he would be the re-incarnation of a prophet, specifically Moses (Jn. 4:19,25). It therefore seems likely that the idea of a pre-existent Christ / Messiah developed as a result of the early Jewish and Samaritan converts returning to their previous conceptions of Messiah. For these were less taxing to their faith than the radical idea that an illiterate Jewish teenager called Marryam in some dumb Galileean village actually conceived a baby direct from God Almighty. Uninspired documents such as the *Preaching Of Peter* and the *Gospel Of The Hebrews* also make the false connection between Jesus and a re-incarnated Moses, Elijah etc. Clearly enough, the idea of a pre-existent, incarnated Jesus had its roots in paganism and apostate Judaism.

4:20 *Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship-* Sin is serious. This is one of the most recurrent themes in the Bible. Yet with the characteristic blindness of human nature, it is one which fails to register with us as it should. 'Just' one sin in Eden led to death- and so much more than death. Time and again people missed the Lord's attempt to convict people of their sin. When He tells the Samaritan woman of the five men she'd had in her life, she responds by ribbing Him about whether God should be worshipped on Gerazim or in Jerusalem. She tried to move off the delicate issue of her morality into theological argument and strife about conflicting traditions (Jn. 4:18-20).

4:21 *Jesus said to her: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming, when*

*neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father-* The Lord had promised the gift of the Spirit *within*. This made all arguments about sacred space utterly irrelevant and at best obsolete. We sense His eager hopefulness for response when He said to the woman: "Believe me, woman..." (Jn. 4:21 GNB). Even though she was confrontational, bitter against Jewish people, and perhaps [as it has been argued by some] pushing a feminist agenda in an inappropriate way... the Lord sought for *faith* in her above correcting her attitude about theological things.

4:22 *You worship that which you do not know. We worship what we know. For salvation is from the Jews-* The Lord went along with her as far as He could, but as in our witness to folks, there comes a time when we have to put our foot down. Salvation was "from the Jews" in that the Messianic saviour would be from them. And the identity of the Messiah was the issue here. The Lord doesn't take away from the Samaritans the fact they worshipped; but they worshipped in ignorance without accepting Messiah as being a Jew rather than one of their re-incarnated prophets (see on :19). There is a very similar situation in Acts 17:23, where Paul declares to people the God whom they had worshipped in ignorance through sacrificing to "the unknown God". The "we" cannot refer to Jews generally; for they did not know the Father nor His Son (8:19,27). He meant "we" as in Himself and the disciples who were now regrouping around Him. "We worship *what*" we know could as well be translated "*who* we know". Acceptable worship of the Father was predicated upon acceptance of Himself as Messiah, the salvation of and from the Jews.

4:23 *But the hour comes and now is, when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such worshipers are who the Father seeks-* The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 16:32 Gk.; 17:1; 19:27). Yet in a sense the essence of His death was ongoing throughout His life; the 'hour' was to come, and yet was. Then, through the cross, true worship of the Father in spirit and in truth was enabled, when the veil of the temple was torn down, and the system of Mosaic worship ended. I have noted above that the Spirit was only to be given when the Son was glorified; but that hour was then and was also to come; therefore in a sense the Spirit could be given even then.

The 'true' worship of the Father doesn't imply necessarily a 'false' worship prior to it; it is the 'true' in contrast to the shadow that had existed before it (cp. the true vine, the true manna). But the true worship was to be in the Spirit, in the heart, the place where the fountain of living water could be placed.

There are many examples of where God and man are portrayed as being in some kind of mutual relationship. Consider Jn. 4:23: "The Father seeks

such to worship Him". The Hebrew / Greek idea of 'seeking' God implied to worship Him. Understanding that, albeit through the mask of translation, we see that the Father is seeking seekers. We seek Him, He seeks us; and thus we meet. Men were found by Jesus, just as they were seeking to find Him (Jn. 1:39,43); there is an electric moment when the Lord and man meet. He seeks for us, and we seek for Him; and we find each other.

*4:24 God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth-*

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (Jn. 4:23) was spoken by the Lord early in His ministry. Even at that stage ["and now is..."], there were some worshipping in spirit and in truth. If the Lord is referring to the disciples, and if the "truth" in Jn. 4:24 is to be understood in theological / doctrinal terms, then "the truth" which they at that time possessed was very far less than what we might think today. The disciples at that time had many misbeliefs and misunderstandings; they believed in demons, were unclear about important aspects of the Lord's work, death and resurrection, and believed in ghosts. But they worshipped in spirit and in truth. However, I suspect that "spirit and in truth" doesn't refer to 'A spiritual attitude *plus* theological purity' (which none of us have anyway). That was how I once read the phrase. But "truth" would seem to me to refer more to truthfulness, and to reality as opposed to shadow- e.g. Jesus as the true light, the true bread refers not to His intellectual purity but to the way in which He was the fulfilment of the things of "the true tabernacle" as Hebrews puts it, and thus His truth / reality stood over against the shadows. In the context, the Lord is making a point to the Samaritan woman about where geographically God's house and place of worship should be- Zion or Gerizim. And as He often does, the Lord takes the question onto another level. 'The place of worship doesn't matter, the worship must be in spirit and in truth', i.e. the presence of God in the temple was to be ended, the Mosaic worship system with its need for geographical place and focus was about to end, and worship was to be internal, in the heart. And some, the Lord noticed, had already perceived that. So the context of Jn. 4:24 wasn't about the need for doctrinal / theological / intellectual truth. In Jn. 4:18 the Lord commends the woman because she "spoke truthfully / truly" about her marital state. As the Father was seeking "spirit and truth" worshippers, it was apparent to the disciples that the Lord Jesus was "seeking" this woman for God (Jn. 4:27). Her honesty meant she was beginning to worship in truth. And so He goes on to encourage her to worship God in spirit and truth[fullness]; her humble recognition of failure was the "truth" required for worship. But she needed to also accept the Spirit. She had the mind of David, who worshipped with 'truth in the inward parts' after recognizing his sin with



Bathsheba. Notice how David says that God 'desires truth in the inward parts' (Ps. 51:6), and the Lord seems to be alluding to that when He says that God desires worship in spirit [inward parts] and truth. The context of sexual failure is the same for both the Samaritan woman, and David. If my reading of the allusions to David and Ps. 51 is correct, then the Lord wasn't talking at all about "truth" in the sense of pure theology. Rather was He referring to the "truth" of confession of sin and worship with a humble heart. It is the desperately repentant person who will fall down and worship God (Mt. 18:26 s.w.); this is the "spirit and truth" worshipper. And such a spirit is ultimately "the truth" which we are to finally arrive at.

The Jews and Samaritans had the idea that all they needed to do was to occasionally visit a place of worship in order to have a relationship with Him. The Lord, as His manner was, cut right across this by saying that as God is Spirit, so the true worshippers would worship Him in Spirit. If we believe that God is Spirit, if all He does and says constantly expresses His Spirit, then our lives likewise must be of non-stop worship, not through going occasionally into a temple or ecclesial meeting, but in living a spirit of life that worships Him in every situation (Jn. 4:20-24).

### **"God is a Spirit"**

God's spirit is His power or breath by which His essential self, His being and character, is revealed to man through the actions which that spirit achieves. Thus "God is spirit", as Jn. 4:24 should be properly translated (see R.S.V., N.I.V.), because His spirit reflects His personality.

God is described as being many things, e.g.

- "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29)
  - "God is light" (1 Jn. 1:5)
  - "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8)
  - "The word (Greek *logos* - plan, purpose, idea) was God" (Jn. 1:1).
- Thus "God is" His characteristics. It is clearly wrong to argue that the abstract quality of love is 'God', just because we read that "God is love". We may call someone 'kindness itself', but this does not mean that they are without physical existence - it is their manner of literal existence which reveals kindness to us.

The spirit being God's power, we frequently read of God sending or directing His spirit to achieve things in harmony with His will and character. Examples of this are numerous, showing the distinction between God and His spirit.

- "He (God) that put His Holy Spirit within him" (Is. 63:11)
- "I (God) will put My spirit upon him (Jesus)" (Mt. 12:18)
- "The Father give(s) the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 11:13)
- "The Spirit descending from heaven" (Jn. 1:32)

- "I (God) will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17).  
Indeed, the frequent references to "the spirit of God" should be proof enough that the spirit is not God personally. These differences between God and His spirit are another difficulty for those who believe that God is a 'trinity' in which God the Father is equated with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Very importantly, a non-personal God makes a nonsense of prayer - to the point where prayer is a dialogue between our consciousness and a concept of God which just exists in our own mind. We are continually reminded that we pray to God who is in heaven (Ecc. 5:2; Mt. 6:9; 5:16; 1 Kings 8:30), and that Jesus is now at God's right hand there, to offer up our prayers (1 Pet. 3:22; Heb. 9:24). If God is not personal, such passages are made meaningless. But once God is understood as a real, loving Father, prayer to Him becomes a very real, tangible thing - actually talking to another being who we believe is very willing and able to respond.

4:25 *The woman said to him: I know that the Messiah is coming (he that is called Christ). When he comes, he will declare to us all things-* The Lord had just declared to her all about her previous immoral life. So her statement here may not be scepticism, but rather daring to join the dots and make the connection that this tired, dehydrated Jew sitting before her was in fact Messiah.

4:26 *Jesus said to her: I that speak to you am he-* This is one of the clearest statements the Lord ever makes as to His self-identity. And even here, I suggest He is confirming as correct the woman's hunches about Him as being Messiah (see on :25).

4:27 *And upon this scene came his disciples, and they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman. Yet no one said: What are you seeking? Or, Why do you speak with her?-Seek for response in people.* As the disciples came upon the Lord talking to the woman by the well, it looked as if He were *seeking* something (Jn. 4:27). But they didn't ask what- for it was obvious. His body language reflected how He was *seeking* her salvation. He seeks the lost until He finds them, even now (Mt. 18:12; Lk. 15:8); as He looked up into the branches of the sycamore tree seeking Zacchaeus, He was epitomising how He came (and comes) to seek and save *all* the lost (Lk. 19:5,10). Our preaching to others isn't a cold-hearted witness, or a theological debate; it is a *seeking* of glory to the Father; we exhort one another, *considering* how we may provoke to love (Heb. 10:24).

The Rabbis taught that a man should not salute a woman in a public place. For Jesus to talk to the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn.4) was therefore an indication of his studied disregard of local tradition

concerning women when it clashed with spiritual principles. The incident was "a strange innovation on Rabbinic custom and dignity". The Talmud taught: "Six things are a disgrace to a disciple of the wise: He should not...converse with a woman in the street" (Babylonian Talmud: Berakoth "Benedictions" 43b). A woman could only be alone with two men, never with one, and this was within a town; outside a town, she had to be in the presence of three men (Babylonian Talmud: Kiddushin "Betrothals" 81a). But the Lord spoke to her alone. A woman could even be divorced for speaking to a man. "What conduct transgresses Jewish custom? If she...speaks with any man" (Mishnah: Ketuboth "Marriage Deeds" 7:6). There can be no doubt that the Lord didn't accept the prevailing view of women. The Lord's conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman are recorded in an intentional parallel in John 3 and 4. The man doesn't get it, he fails to perceive the double entendre in the Lord's words, and struggles with their deeper meaning. The Samaritan woman gets it straight away, and even responds to the Lord with the same kind of language.

*4:28 So the woman left her waterpot and went away into the city, and said to the people-* She had once been rather proud that she had something to draw with, and the Lord didn't. Leaving her waterpot was a statement that now she had found the living water which quenched thirst, and she no longer needed the natural water. She specifically "said to the men" (as AV). Were these "the men" of her former life? Why go to men in particular? The same word is used in :29 about the "man" she had found who she thinks is the Christ. She went to those with whom she had sinned.

*4:29 Come, see a man who told me all things that I have ever done. Can this be the Christ?-* She tells the men with whom she had sinned (:28) that she has found a man who told her all about their sins. There were no secrets anymore; one man at least knew the entire story. And she believes she may well have found the Messiah. He let Himself be encouraged by her response to Him, even though her comment "Could this be the Messiah?" (Jn. 4:29) implies she was still uncertain. Raymond Brown has commented: "The Greek question with *meti* implies an unlikelihood" (*The Gospel According To John*, Vol. 1, p. 173). But we see throughout this incident how faith in Him as Messiah passes through stages- and of course John is appealing in his Gospel for others to likewise come to this faith to follow the path of this woman. She now understands Messiah as most importantly one who realizes our sins and can deal with them- rather than as some conquering hero. And this again was a necessary issue to emphasize in preaching in John's context.

*4:30 They went out of the city and came to him-* There was something in the frank witness of this sinful woman which was compelling. Just as

biography is always interesting to us fellow humans, so confession of sin and faith it has been dealt with in Christ is the most compelling witness. 'Coming to Christ' is very much the language of conversion.

4:31 *In the meantime the disciples pleaded with him, saying: Rabbi, eat-* The disciples are presented here as focused on the material rather than the spiritual and symbolic. And it is John himself writing or speaking the Gospel message in this way, like the woman, admitting his own weakness in order to bring others to the Lord.

4:32 *But he said to them: I have food to eat that you do not know-* Dehydrated at the well, very hungry, the response of the Samaritan woman revived His spirits to the point that the disciples assumed He must have been given a meal (Jn. 4:32,33). He goes on to say that working with a woman like that is His "meat" or food, the 'doing of the will of him that sent Me and to accomplish His work' (4:34 RV). Yet the will of God and accomplishing of His work was evidently the cross (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:9,10). In preaching to that woman and converting her, the Lord was living out the essence of the crucifixion that awaited Him. Preaching work isn't glamorous. It is a living out of the cross.

4:33 *The disciples queried each other: Has anyone brought him something to eat?-* As noted on :31, the male Jewish disciples are presented as lacking the spiritual perception of this female Gentile. The disciples in their own preaching of the Gospel, of which John's Gospel is a transcript, were admitting their own petty literalism. And urging others to not be as they had been.

4:34 *Jesus said to them: My food is to do the will of Him that sent me and to accomplish His work-* See on :32. After the Lord converted the Samaritan woman at the well, He commented to His disciples that such work was His food- "to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34). But soon afterwards He claimed that "the works which the Father has given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me" (Jn. 5:36). It's tempting to think that the "works" He spoke of were His miracles- but the linkage with Jn. 4:34 suggests that they were also references to the change He achieved within people. These transformed people were His witness- and the Samaritan woman is a classic example. For when He had done the Father's work in her, she rushed off to witness to the world. In Jn. 6:28,29 the Lord seems to consciously steer us away from understanding His "works" as merely the miracles of e.g. feeding and physical healing. In response to the question "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" He responds: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent".

The Lord saw His preaching work as a carrying of the cross. He spoke of

how His witness to the Samaritan woman was a 'finishing of the Father's work' (Jn. 4:34). The 'finishing' was clearly only accomplished upon the cross, when He cried "It is finished", and He "fulfilled" or [s.w.] "finished" the Scriptures (Jn. 19:28). Thus in His life, He lived out the essence of His future cross by witnessing to others. Like Paul, we need to grasp what this means for us in practice. Crucifixion was a public, painful, sacrificial act; and true effort in witness will be the same. And this is exactly why Paul can speak of "the preaching of the cross", the preaching which *is* the cross (Gk.). In His preaching to the woman at the well, the Lord saw Himself as 'finishing God's work' (Jn. 4:32,34). And yet John evidently intends us to connect this incident with the Lord's final cry from the cross which he records: "It is finished!". Only on the cross was the work finished; but by pushing aside His own hunger, tiredness and desire for solitude in order to convert that woman, the Lord even then was 'finishing the Father's work', in that in essence He was living out the spirit of crucifixion. And so with us; the life of ongoing crucifixion demands that we consciously push ourselves in the service of others. The finishing of the Father's work was accomplished in the cross- hence the final cry of triumph, "It is finished!" (19:30). But this meat was not appreciated by them in His lifetime. The work of sharing in Christ's cross should be our meat and drink, to the eclipsing of the pressing nature of material things. For this was the context in which the Lord spoke; His men were pressing Him to attend to His humanity, whereas His mind was filled, even in tiredness and dehydration, with the living out of the cross unto the end. As He was exhausted and dehydrated by the well, so He was on the cross. He saw that "meat" in the conversion of the Samaritan woman. He saw the connection between His cross and the conversion of that woman; thus "the meat... the will... [God's] work" was the cross, and yet it was also the conversion of the woman. The cross is essentially the converter of men and women, and thereby our crucifixion-lives are likewise the power of conversion.

4:35 *Do you not say: There are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white, ready to harvest-* If they lifted up their eyes, they would see a file of Gentile men headed by a fallen woman coming towards them. And this was the whiteness of the harvest. Grain turns from green to yellow to white. Those people who were apparently expressing an initial interest were seen by the Lord as ready for harvest. Be believed the process of conversion could happen that quickly. And His disciples, from that day to this, struggle to believe it. They want to first see some course of instruction and a socializing of converts into their community. However it must be also noted that harvest in Palestine typically began after Passover; so the Lord may be hinting that it was after His death that the harvesting would begin. But then on the other hand, He has said that His "hour" of death was right then, it was both coming and yet "now is" (see on :23). The way of the Spirit involves working outside of time as we

know it; as the essence of the hour of the cross was then, so the moment of sowing was also that of harvesting, the Spirit was not yet given because the Lord was not glorified, yet it could still be given; and so eternal life could be given now to people who remain still mortal.

The Gospel writers were preaching the words of the Gospels in response to their Lord's command to go preach. Yet Jn. 4:35,38 records them recognizing that they didn't appreciate how great the harvest was, and indeed the harvest was spoilt because of the weakness of the disciples. For the whiteness of harvest rather than it being yellow might hint that it was overdue for harvest. The Lord Himself was of the persuasion that people are more interested than His brethren may think. "You say 'Four months from sowing to harvest: the time is not yet'... [But I say that] the fields are already white for reaping. Already the reaper is taking his pay" (Jn. 4:35). Four months was the time reckoned proverbially for the sown seed to come to harvest in Judea. It seems that the disciples thought there had to be a gap between sowing and reaping, whereas the Lord is saying that people were more ready for harvest than His preachers thought. The Kingdom prophecies speak of a time when the sower shall overtake the reaper, i.e. there is immediate fruition of the crop planted. And so it was in the Lord's spiritual Kingdom; the seed had fruit immediately. And it can be the same with us- our insistence that there has to be a respectable gap between sowing the Gospel and reaping the harvest isn't a concept upheld by the Lord. There's more of a harvest out there than we think. And perhaps the relatively poor response to the preaching of Jesus in AD30-33 was because His disciples didn't do their part?

*4:36 He that reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit to everlasting life; that he that sows and he that reaps may rejoice together-* The reapers were the disciples (:38). If they reaped, they would receive wages, and the fruit of the converts they gathered would be that those converts received eternal life. Not just at the last day, but in the sense John's Gospel speaks of- receiving the gift of life after the pattern of the Lord's life, right now. The "wages" surely suggests that work with the likes of the Samaritan woman has its blessings in this life, as well as having eternal consequence.

The experience of preaching is in itself a foretaste of the future world-wide Kingdom. The harvest is both at the end of the age, according to the parables of Mt. 13, but also is ongoing right now (Jn. 4:36) as we gather in the harvest of converts. The Lord in Jn. 4:35,36 took this figure far further, by saying that the harvest is such that the interval between sowing and harvesting is in some sense collapsed for those who engage in preaching. The reaper was already collecting his wages; the harvest was already there, even though it was four months away (Jn. 4:35). This clearly alludes to the promises that in the Messianic Kingdom there would

also be no interval between sowing and harvest, so abundant would be the harvest (Lev. 26:5; Am. 9:13). And hence, we are impelled to spread the foretaste of the Kingdom world-wide by our witness right now.

The final judgment will be of our works, not because works justify us, but because our use of the freedom we have had and exercised in our lives is the basis of the future reward we will be given. Salvation itself is not on the basis of our works (Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Tit. 3:5); indeed, the *free gift* of salvation by pure grace is contrasted with the *wages* paid by sin (Rom. 4:4; 6:23). And yet at the judgment, the preacher receives *wages* for what he did (Jn. 4:36), the labourers receive *hire* (s.w. wages) for their work in the vineyard (Mt. 20:8; 1 Cor. 3:8). There is a *reward* (s.w. wages) for those who rise to the level of loving the totally unresponsive (Mt. 5:46), or preaching in situations quite against their natural inclination (1 Cor. 9:18). *Salvation* itself isn't given on this basis of works; but the nature of our eternal existence in the Kingdom will be a reflection of our use of the gift of freedom in this life. In that sense the judgment will be of our works. There are many passages which teach that our salvation will be related to the extent to which we have held forth the word both to the world and to the household (Prov. 11:3; 24:11,12; Dan. 12:3; Mk. 8:38; Lk. 12:8; Rom. 10:9,10 cp. Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 1:20; 1 Pet. 4:6 Gk.). Those who reap the harvest of the Gospel will be rewarded with salvation (Jn. 4:36). Such work *isn't* just an option for those who want to be enthusiastic about it.

4:37 *For herein is the saying true: One sows and another reaps-* This is perhaps John's equivalent to the parable of the sower in the synoptics. The Lord is the sower. The Lord likened His preachers to men reaping the harvest. The implication is that He had done His work with the woman, and they were to now work with the crowd of Gentile men she was bringing to Him. He speaks of how they fulfilled the proverb that one sows and another reaps (Jn. 4:37,38). Yet this 'proverb' has no direct Biblical source. What we *do* find in the Old Testament is the repeated idea that if someone sows but another reaps, this is a sign that they are suffering God's judgment for their sins (Dt. 20:6; 28:30; Job 31:8; Mic. 6:15). But the Lord turns around the 'proverb' concerning Israel's condemnation; He makes it apply to the way that the preacher / reaper who doesn't sow is the one who harvests others in converting them to Him. Surely His implication was that His preacher-reapers were those who had known condemnation for their sins, but on that basis were His humbled harvesters in the mission field.

4:38 *I sent you to harvest that upon which you have not laboured; others have laboured, and you are taking over their labour-* Harvesting what one has not worked for is the language of Israel receiving the promised land

(Josh. 24:13). The Kingdom blessings were to be understood spiritually-harvesting people for the Lord for whom they had done none of the hard, preparatory ground work. "Laboured" is used only elsewhere in John in :6 about how the Lord sat at the well "wearied" or 'laboured'; He had laboured, although He graciously includes others in His work, and He invited the disciples to now go reap the harvest for which they had not laboured. Perhaps the others who had laboured is some reference to an outreach toward Samaritans made by John the Baptist and his disciples. The language of taking over their labour would be appropriate to how the Lord's disciples were to build upon the earlier spade work done by John's ministry. Or perhaps the other labourers referred to the Samaritan woman and her initial group of converts; the idea would then be that the disciples ought to return to the area and secure a great harvest as a result of their witness. But such was their slowness to perceive the Lord's openness to Samaritan Gentiles that the disciples did not do this in time. To see themselves as taking over the labour of despised Samaritans was too much for them; their prejudices had been too great. And perhaps John records this in order to demonstrate the weakness of himself and his team, a lament over the potential they had let go.

*4:39 And from that city many of the Samaritans believed in him because of the word of the woman, who testified: He told me all things that I have ever done-* The Samaritan woman at the well had a sense of shame and deep self-knowledge over her, as she realised that Christ knew her every sin. It was with a humble sheepishness that she confessed: "I have no husband", because she was living in sin. She was converted by that well. Immediately she "left her waterpot, and went her way into the city (the record inviting us to watch her from a distance), and saith to the *men* (significantly), Come, see a man... is not this the Christ?" (Jn. 4:17,28,29). There was a wondrous mixture of enthusiasm and shyness in those words: "Come, see a man...". It is a feature of many new converts that their early preaching has a similar blend. It is stressed that men believed because of the way the woman told them "He told me all that ever I did" (Jn. 4:39). He had recounted her past sins to her (4:18,19). And she now, in matchless humility, goes and tells her former life to her associates, using the very words of description which the Lord had used. He convicted her of her sins, and this conviction resulted in her unashamed witness.

We see how belief is predicated at times upon the word of a third party other than the Lord. We can bring people to faith, and also stumble them in their walk.

*4:40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they pleaded with him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days-* Coming to Jesus in John's Gospel means to believe in Him. They wanted Him to "stay" or "abide"



with them, a common theme in John of the Lord abiding in the hearts of believers. They are set up as model converts, in whom the Lord 'abode' after conversion. As John's Gospel later explains, this is achieved by Him through His Spirit, which means that He is present as really as if He were physically present with us. His abiding by the Spirit is a sign of acceptance, and His abiding with them at a time when a Jew like Peter could not go inside the home of a Gentile was surely a public indication of His acceptance of Gentiles. Peter and others who so objected to such fellowship after His resurrection were clearly forgetting, wilfully, the implication of such incidents.

4:41 *And many more believed because of his word-* Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by God's word; it's as if these Gentile converts are being set up as role models for all who should thereafter believe. Their belief was as valid as those who believed for the sake of the woman's testimony, that she had met a man who knew all of her sins, and was thereby, by implication, able to deal with them. This large scale conversion is significant because there is no hint that any miracle was done in order to provoke faith. It was conversion on the basis of the Lord's power to know human personal history and to forgive. It becomes even more programmatic for all who would afterwards believe.

4:42- see on Jn. 20:31.

*And they said to the woman: Now we believe, not because of your speaking; for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world-* They realized that the true Messiah was not Saviour solely of Israel, but of the *kosmos*, which John has defined in the prologue as the new world of persons who believe in Him. Acts 5:31 defines His 'salvation' in terms of Him giving both repentance and forgiveness to people; and this is exactly what the Lord had done to the woman and other Samaritans. He had given provoked in her repentance, and empowered her forgiveness. This is all the work of the Spirit.

4:43 *And after two days he left for Galilee-* Perhaps He wanted to give the disciples a break from attention, and so He went somewhere where He thought they would not have much acceptance nor attention (:44). But in the same way as during His working life the Lord could have made technical mistakes in His manual work, so here, things didn't turn out as He had perhaps intended. In John's Gospel more than the others we see the Lord's deep humanity, mixed with the highest terms of praise for Him.

4:44 *Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honour in his own country-* As noted on :43, the Lord assumed He would not be welcomed there and He could have some quality time teaching the disciples in their native environment. The common proverb was repeated or testified to

with approval by the Lord. But things turned out not as He had expected (:45)- another window onto His humanity, as is the description of Galilee as "His own country". See on :48.

4:45 *So when he came into Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all the things that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast. For they also had gone up to the feast-* As noted on :43 and :44, this welcome was perhaps not what the Lord had expected. Their belief however was because they had seen miracles at the feast (2:23); unlike the Samaritans, of whom we have just read, who believed without having seen miracles.

4:46 *He came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum-* The Lord's return to Cana was perhaps as a follow up to His witness there previously. Perhaps He sought to try again with Nicodemus, whom I suggested on 2:1 was there. His attempt to follow up with individuals, despite the large scale of His ministry, is a reflection of the huge value the Lord attached to the individual.

4:47 *When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to him and pleaded that he would come to Capernaum and heal his son. For his son was at the point of death-* To make that 20-mile journey over mountainous terrain displayed quite some faith. Perhaps this nobleman was one of those who had encountered the Lord at the feast in Jerusalem (:45). The fact he came personally rather than send messengers or servants again indicates a genuine personal faith. The Greek is literally "come down to Capernaum", which reflects the topography (as 2:12); all encouraging confirmations that we are reading a genuine account rather than one fabricated for personal reasons.

4:48 *Jesus replied to him: Except you see signs and wonders, you will in no way believe-* The Lord criticized the people for their refusal to believe apart from by seeing signs and wonders. In line with this, the Lord attacks Nicodemus' belief on the basis of the miracles, saying that instead, a man must be born again if he wishes to see the Kingdom (Jn. 3:2,3). But later He says that the disciples were being given miraculous signs greater than even healing to help them believe (Jn. 11:15); He bids people believe because they saw signs, even if they were unimpressed by Him personally (Jn. 5:20; 10:37; 14:11). Clearly enough, the Lord was desperate for people to believe, to come to some sort of faith- even if the basis of that faith wasn't what He ideally wished. And it's possible that His initial high demand for people to believe not because they saw miracles was relaxed as His ministry proceeded; for the statements that faith was not to be based upon His miracles is found in Jn. 3 and 4, whereas the invitations to believe because of His miracles is to be found later in John.

This challenges the attitude that sets a bar of faith and understanding over which people must first leap before we work with them.

I noted on :43 and :44 that the Lord had expected little response in Galilee, and yet there was response. In this we have a window onto His utter humanity. Likewise, perhaps in this comment that faith would only come from *seeing* miracles; for the nobleman did not see the miracle, but believed.

4:49 *The nobleman said to him: Sir, come before my child dies-* The man thought that the Lord's physical presence was required for the miracle. His faith was therefore incomplete, but all the same, the Lord worked with Him. And just as He does today with us, sought to stretch the faith of the man.

4:50 *Jesus said to him: Go your way. Your son lives. The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way-* The man of course could have disbelieved; yet the Lord had done the miracle anyway. So the Lord was as it were desperately hopeful that his challenge to the development of the man's faith would work- and it did. And yet his faith was still immature; for although it is stated that the nobleman believed the Lord's words, it was only once his son was healed that he *really* believed (Jn. 4:50 cp. 54).

4:51 *And as he was going home, his servants met him, saying that his son lived-* They would have known that he had gone to Cana to seek the Lord Jesus and healing from Him. They were so thrilled that they began the 20 mile journey to meet Him. They met their master as he "was going down" (AV)- i.e. as he was coming down the final slope toward Capernaum. We wonder why they had delayed coming to him; perhaps they wanted to be sure the child had really recovered. All this has the circumstantial ring of truth to it which permeates the inspired records.

4:52 *So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. They replied to him: Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him-* If "the seventh hour" means 1 p.m. [assuming counting time from sunrise- although there are various possibilities; Roman time would have been 7 p.m.], then the man would have walked or travelled home through the night, arriving the next day, so that the servants spoke of "Yesterday". Travelling overnight was a risky undertaking as Galilee was full of road thieves. But he was so eager to see the result of faith. "Began to get better" is also an indication of incomplete faith; he imagined that the Lord's healing word would have only gradual effect, whereas the child had perhaps died and been resurrected at that time ["your son lives"]. In any case, the fever abruptly "left him" at a specific time and not as part of any gradual process of feeling better, as the nobleman with his limited faith had imagined.

4:53 *The father knew that that was the hour when Jesus had said to him: Your son lives. And so he and his household believed-* As noted on :50, the man's initial belief had not been strong; but now it became stronger. Or it could be that he had set himself the condition to the effect that if his son was really healed, then he would believe; and that condition was met. Christ saw that man's low level of faith, and took him where he was, with the result that he soon rose up to a higher level. The Lord must have reflected on the wide differences between the various levels of faith and commitment He encountered. Jairus besought Him to lay His hands on his daughter (Mk. 5:23); whilst the Centurion's attitude was "say the word only" (Lk. 7:6). His faith was undoubtedly on a higher level (Lk. 7:9), but still the Lord accepted the lower level of Jairus and worked with it. He was manifesting His Father in this. Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him.

The idea of whole households "believing" is common in the New Testament; the early church was largely a network of household churches.

4:54 *This was the second sign that Jesus did, when he had gone from Judea to Galilee-* There is a question as to whether this is the same miracle of the centurion's servant being healed in Capernaum which we have in Mt. 8:5 and Lk. 7:2. I would argue that they are similar, but different:

- (1) Here a 'king's man' pleads for his son; there a centurion for his servant.
- (2) Here he pleads in person; there the Jewish elders plead for him.
- (3) Here the father is probably a Jew; there the centurion is certainly a Gentile.
- (4) Here the healing words are spoken at Cana; there at Capernaum.
- (5) Here the malady is fever; there paralysis.
- (6) Here the father wishes Jesus to come; there the centurion begs him not to come.
- (7) Here Christ does not go; there apparently he does.

The similarity I suggest is that the faith of the Gentile centurion is presented as far stronger than that of the spiritually immature Jewish nobleman. The similarities suggest that perhaps that Gentile had heard of the healing of the nobleman's child, and was motivated by it to complete faith, just as we are motivated by accounts of faith rewarded in others' lives to ourselves have even stronger faith than in the cases we heard about.



## CHAPTER 5

5:1 *After these things there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem-* So often John describes what the Old Testament repeatedly calls "the feasts of the Lord" as "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked Yahweh's religion and turned it into their own, just as so many do today.

5:2 *Now there is in Jerusalem-* It's worth noting the evidence that the entire New Testament was written before AD70:

- If any of the Gospels were written after AD70, their total silence as to that cataclysmic event is strange. The synoptics all record a prophecy of the events of AD70, and yet there is no reference by any of them to its fulfilment; whereas the Gospel writers aren't slow to comment on the way the Lord's words came true. Mt. 24:20 speaks of those events as being in the future- "Pray that it may not be winter when you have to make your escape". Surely there'd have been some reference to the fulfilment of the Olivet prophecy, if the records were written after AD70? Jn. 5:2 speaks as if Jerusalem and the temple area were still standing when John was written: "Now there *is* at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool". The record of the Jews' proud comment in Jn. 2:20 that Herod's temple had taken 46 years to build includes no hint nor even presentiment that it had now been destroyed.

- Paul on any chronology died before AD70, so his letters were all before that. We need to marvel at the evident growth in spirituality and understanding which is reflected within Paul's letters, and realize that he grew *very* quickly.

- Hebrews speaks of the temple and sacrifice system in the present tense, as if it were still operating (note Heb. 10:2,11,18). The 40 years of Israel's disobedience in the wilderness are held up as a warning to an Israel approaching 40 years of disobedience after the death of Jesus (Heb. 3:7- 4:11). "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4) sounds like Nero's persecution hadn't started.

- The letters of Peter warn that a huge calamity is to come upon the Jewish churches, couched in terms of the Olivet prophecy. Thus they were written before AD70. 2 Peter also speaks as if Paul is still alive at the time.

- Acts stops at the point where Paul is living in his own house in Rome quite comfortably, and spreading the Gospel (Acts 28:30). And yet we know from 2 Tim. 4 that ultimately he died in Rome, presumably after being released and doing more work for the Lord. The obvious conclusion is that Acts was written before Paul died. Acts also implies that Jews were living at peace with Rome (Acts 24:2; 25:1-5; 15:13- 26:32)- a situation which didn't apply after AD70.

*By the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches-* The five porches could refer to the five books of Moses, the Torah, which failed to provide healing. "Bethesda" is obviously significant in meaning, because attention is called to the Hebrew name. The Hebrew

is literally *beth* [house] *chesed*, the Hebrew word usually translated "mercy" and about the nearest the Old Testament comes to speaking of "grace". But beneath the five porches of the Mosaic law, the Torah, there was no grace or mercy being found by those who sat beneath them. They hoped for it, but Israel did not find that which he looked for. "Bethesda" may well have been a kind of institution providing very basic care for the incurables and handicapped whose families would not care for them. Hence *beth*, "house", can mean both a house as well as a family. It really was a picture of stricken humanity, whom legalism couldn't help. Yet before them was the pool or "bath", as Adam Clarke suggests the Greek should be rendered. Immediately we make the association with baptism. There are Old Testament prophecies of how in the Messianic Kingdom, healing water would come forth from Jerusalem (Joel 3:18 etc.). The Lord was going to demonstrate that in His gift of the water of life, the essence of the future Kingdom was to be experienced right now. The sheep gate was on the east of the temple (Neh. 3:1,32; 12:39), from where Messiah was to enter in the day of His Kingdom (Zech. 14:4).

*5:3 In these lay a crowd of those who were sick, blind, lame, paralysed, waiting for the moving of the water-* The "sick" or "impotent" are those without power. The same word is used of how whilst we were all "without strength, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). They were waiting, just as Israel ought to have been waiting for Messiah. But the law was itself "impotent" (s.w. "sick"), unable to cure or change the human moral condition (Heb. 7:18 s.w.). The same word for "moving" is used of how the Jewish religion could not "move" the heavy burdens of legalism and human guilt before God (Mt. 23:4).

*5:4 For an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and disturbed the water. Whoever was first to step into the pool, after the waters were disturbed, was healed of whatever disease he had-* The Bible records things at times from how they appear to men at the time; hence the language of demon possession and exorcism, even though the real existence of demons is denied in the Bible. Here we have another example. The Lord's miracle of healing the lame man at the pool was to show the folly of the Jewish myth that at Passover time an angel touched the water of the Bethesda pool, imparting healing properties to it. This myth is recorded without direct denial of its truth; the record of Christ's miracle is the exposure of its falsehood. Another example would be the Jewish myth that the High Priest's Passover address was a direct speaking forth of God's words; this wrong idea isn't specifically corrected, but it is worked through by God – in that Caiaphas' Passover words just before the crucifixion came strangely true, thus condemning Caiaphas and justifying the Lord Jesus as Israel's Saviour (Jn. 11:51).

5:5 *One man there had been ill for thirty-eight years-* The paralysed man had waited by the pool 38 years, waiting for someone to cure him. There was no cure in those 38 years- only in the word of Christ (John 5:5). Israel were actually in the wilderness for 38 years; the similarity implies Moses' leadership could not bring salvation, only the word of Christ.

5:6- see on Mt. 20:32.

*When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing he had been there a long time, he said to him: Would you be made whole?-* The Lord asks these basic questions in order to elicit in a person what is their greatest, dominant desire. Thus He asked a blind man what he wanted; He made as if He would have gone further on the walk to Emmaus, and appeared as if He would walk past the drowning disciples on the lake. He knows of course the answers ahead of time but He wishes to elicit in us an articulation of what is our dominant desire. The Lord is the same yesterday as today; He likewise brings us to realize what are our dominant desires. All sick people would say they wish to be cured, but actually for some it is not their dominant desire- especially after 38 years. He asked the question exactly because He knew the man had "been there a long time". Human nature develops coping mechanisms to the extent that our natural conservatism can mean that we do not actually have change as a dominant desire. And the Lord sought to elicit such desire in the man; perhaps He cured that man rather than the other long term residents of Bethesda because He knew that he alone really wanted to change.

5:7 *The sick man answered him: Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed. As I approach someone else steps in front of me-* The man was totally focused on the myth. He felt his salvation could only be achieved by his own works and strength, of which he didn't have enough; and he didn't have the right friends, who could put him into the pool. He was looking for a helper, who would be with him all the time and would be ready to get him into the pool whenever the Angel supposedly came. He was looking for a saviour; not just for the coming of an Angel. Perhaps it was this dominant desire which the Lord was attracted to and felt he could work with.

5:8 *Jesus said to him: Arise, take up your bed and walk-* The nature of the healing in this case was a test of the man's respect of the Lord's spoken word. He could have argued back that no, he needed help to get into the pool when the Angel came. But he was looking for a personal Saviour and was willing to accept His word, and make the first movement to try to "arise". The command to take up his bed was also a psychologically intentional statement; the man would have walked off holding his mat in his hand, a powerful visual image that would have



remained in the memories of many. And he would have had to dispose of it somewhere, another psychological underlining to him of the reality that he was really cured. We see here the same sensitivity in the Lord which He still shows in His dealings with people today.

*5:9 And straightway the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day-* The immediacy of the Lord's cures has been noted on 4:52. Claims of healing typically required a period of time; but the Lord's miracles were total and instant rather than requiring periods of time to take effect. The man's obedience to the command to take up his mat and walk is noted; for as noted on :8, it was his obedience to the Lord's spoken word which was so significant.

*5:10 So the Jews said to him who had been cured: It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed-* The actual law of Moses did not condemn people for carrying their mat after being healed, but the Jews had come to assume that their fences around the Law were in fact the Law itself. And that is the problem with fences around laws; they come to be perceived as the law itself. Faced with the evident power of the Spirit, the legalist must either capitulate or madly insist upon the consequences which arise from infringement of the letter of their own laws. And we see such anger today elicited from legalistic minds when the Spirit is clearly operative. Baptize 50 people, and the legalistic mind will be angry rather than rejoicing that Christ is preached, insisting upon the consequences of breaking their own by-laws which they have in their own minds turned into God's laws. Fences around laws invite men to play God, and indeed they do so. As noted on :1, such people have hijacked God's law and way and turned it into their own.

*5:11 But he answered them: He that made me whole, the same said to me: Take up your bed and walk-* The man correctly reasoned that One who operated by the power of the Spirit was clearly above all human by-laws and religious regulations of mere men. The Lord had designed the nature of the cure to depend upon obedience to His word, which of itself required the man to break the Jewish regulations about not carrying a mat on the Sabbath. The Lord had intentionally provoked this conflict, because He saw that it was necessary in the ultimate spiritual path of this man. And He does the same with us, carefully tailoring experiences and conflicts in order that our faith might grow.

*5:12 They asked him: Who is the man that said to you: Take up your bed and walk?-* Their focus was not on the miracle, which they also considered "work", but on the specific command to carry a mat on the Sabbath. They

surely knew who it was- only Jesus of Nazareth did this kind of thing. They were looking for legal evidence from this man.

*5:13 But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place-* The Lord could have course orchestrated this miracle in any way He chose. But He did it in this way, leaving Himself anonymous, so that the man would be earnestly asking himself every moment: "Who is this man?". And that of course is the question which John's Gospel puts to his audience. For the man to truthfully answer the Jews' questions with "I don't know, He slipped away in the crowd..." would have likewise made the Jews ask themselves the same question, and reflect that Jesus of Nazareth was no standard miracle worker, but of an altogether higher order.

*5:14 Afterwards, Jesus found him in the temple and said to him: Look, you are made whole. Sin no more, lest a worse thing befall you-* The man had sought to express his gratitude by going to the temple, perhaps wondering whether he ought to offer a sacrifice for his cleansing. But the Lord was sensitive to the fact that ritual obedience to law can lead us away from the imperative which must be keenly felt- to sin no more. We can infer that his condition was a result of sin and his tendency was now to return to the sinful life.

The Lord told him: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing (than those years of sitting by the pool) come upon you" (Jn. 5:14). That "worse thing" was rejection at the judgment- which, it could be inferred, would be like earnestly desiring salvation but not finding it. For that will be the fate of the rejected at the last day. None will be shrugging their shoulders, indifferent to the eternity they have missed.

*5:15 The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole-* As noted on :12 and :13, the Lord structured the miracle so that the whole style of it made it clear that it had been Him. So he was telling the Jews what they knew already in their consciences.

*5:16 And for this cause the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath-* Some manuscripts add "and sought to kill him" (AV). They were seizing upon the Mosaic commands to kill the Sabbath breaker (Ex. 31:15; 35:2). This is the blind anger of those who think their religious organization is the only one God recognizes, and cannot cope with someone operating successfully outside of it. The same mindset is still seen today within Christian groups. "He did these things" translates an imperfect tense in the Greek which suggests the Lord habitually did miracles on the Sabbath. He was certainly seeking to provoke the Sabbath issue with the Jews, because here most clearly, they had hijacked God's laws and made their own fences around them equivalent to Divine law, thus playing God.

5:17- see on 2 Cor. 4:6.

*But Jesus answered them: My Father works even until now and therefore I also work-* The cosmos hasn't been created, wound up by God as it were on clockwork, and left ticking by an absent creator. There are many Bible verses which teach that God is actively, consciously outgiving of His Spirit in the myriad things going on in the natural creation, every nanosecond He is sensitive to the needed input from Him- and He gives it. Therefore we are never far from Him. The Lord Jesus defended working for His Father on the Sabbath because God was also at work on the Sabbath.

That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

5:18 *For this cause the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath law, but he called God his own Father, making himself seem like God-* The Jews only had authority to ask the Romans to carry out a death sentence if it involved desecration of the temple; but their rage was such that they countenanced extra-judicial murder, as witnessed by Saul murdering Christians. It was a long stretch to say that claiming Divine Sonship was claiming to be God personally, and the Lord brings out their error in chapter 10. This is especially so as the Old Testament calls men "gods" and the term "God" was applied by the Jews to Moses. It is tragic indeed that standard Christianity through the false doctrine of the Trinity has made the same logical error. We must note that the Greek translated "seem like" means just that; it does not mean 'directly equal to' (it is translated "agreed together", Mk. 14:56,59). The same phrase is found in Phil. 2:6 where perhaps in allusion to this incident, Paul states that the Lord did not consider such 'equality with God' a thing to be even grasped at.

5:19 *Jesus therefore answered and said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: The Son can do nothing of himself but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever works He does, these the Son does in like manner-* The statement that He can do nothing of Himself is an answer to their mistaken idea that He was making Himself in some way equal to God (:18). "The works... The Son can do nothing of himself" recalls Moses' words: "All these works... I have not done them of my own mind" (Num. 16:28). The Lord was claiming to be as Moses, and a prophet greater than Moses; but not God.

This passage gives a window into the Lord's self-perception here. He says that whatever He sees the Father / abba / daddy do, He does "in like manner". It is the language of a young child mimicking their father. And He speaks of Himself as an adult behaving just like this. There was a child-likeness about Him in this sense. And the disciples seem to have noticed this- for no less than four times in Acts (Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30) they refer to Jesus as the "holy child" of God. Their image of Jesus had something in it which reflected that child-likeness about Him which still stuck in their memories. And may we too "ceaseless... Abba, father, cry". The haunting melody of that hymn well expresses the utter wonder of it all, as we too struggle to find our true Father. The spirit / attitude of the Son of God should be ours, in that we like Him cry "Abba, father" (Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:15). His spirit / attitude to the Father should be ours; He stressed that His Father is our Father (Jn. 20:17). Jesus acted and 'was' for all the world as if He had had His natural Father with Him from the start of His life. This was how close the Father became to Jesus; the extent to which He successfully 'found' Him; to the point that the 'mere' invisibility of that Father was not a major issue or barrier in their relationship. And so it should be for us, in the life of believing in that which is unseen, and in them who are invisible to us.

5:20 *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all things that Himself does; and greater works than these will He show him, that you may marvel-* As noted in commentary on chapter 4, the Lord did not consider that seeing miracles was a solid basis for faith. "Marvel" has connotations of disbelief; the more miracles which would be done, the "greater works" which the Lord would do through the apostles (14:12), would not so much create faith as lead them to marvel in incomprehension. The connection with the "greater works" to be done by the apostles is clear (14:12); they were empowered to do what the Lord had been shown needed to be done by the Father.

In Jn. 5:19,20 we read that the Son does (*poieo*) what He sees the Father doing, and the Father shows Him (*deiknumi*) all (*panta*) that He does. This is referring to Ex. 25:9 LXX, where Moses makes (*poieo*) the Tabernacle according all (*panta*) that God shows him (*deiknuo*). The reference of Jn. 5:19,20 is therefore to the Lord working with His Father in the building up of us the tabernacle... and *all* things God planned for us were revealed to the Son even in His mortality. What great wealth of understanding was there within His mind, within those brain cells... and how tragic that the head and body that bore them was betrayed and ignored and spat upon and tortured by men...

There is here what C.H. Dodd has called 'the parable of the apprentice': "A son...does only what he sees his father doing: what father does, son does; for a father loves his son and shows him all his trade". Now just imagine what that meant for the Lord Jesus, growing up with Joseph, who

appeared to be His father, learning Joseph's trade. Yet He knew that His true Father was God, and He was eagerly learning *His* trade.

*5:21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom he will-* The present tenses mean that the Son now gives life, and this is a development of the ideas of the prologue. The life given is the life of the Spirit, the power to live the kind of life the Lord Jesus lived. The same word is found in 6:63: "It is the Spirit that quickens"; so the Son "gives life" [s.w. "quickens"] through giving of His Spirit, the ability to live and think as He did and does. This promise is at the core of Christianity, of being like Christ. It is for all time. The Lord gave His life for us on the cross, but He gives His life to us in an ongoing sense. It is the Spirit of Christ in us now which shall quicken or make alive our mortal bodies in the process of resurrection to life at the last day (s.w. Rom. 8:11, see note there). He is a "quickening spirit" now as He shall be in granting the resurrection to life at the last day (1 Cor. 15:45).

Abiding in the word of Christ, His words abiding in us, abiding in love, abiding in the Father and Son (1 Jn. 4:16) are all parallel ideas. Jesus Himself 'quickens' or breathes life into us (Jn. 5:21)- but His Spirit does this, in that His words 'are spirit' (Jn. 6:63). Again we see how His personal presence, His life and Spirit, are breathed into us through His words being in us. In the mundane monotony of daily life, doing essentially the same job, travelling to work the same route, the alarm clock going off the same time each morning... there can be breathed into us a unique new life through having His words ever abiding within us. And this 'quickening' in daily life now is the foretaste of the 'quickening' which we will literally experience at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:22- 'made alive' is the same Greek word translated 'quicken' in Jn. 5:21; 6:63). If the Spirit of Jesus now dwells in us, then that same Spirit shall immortalize our mortal bodies into immortality at the Lord's return (see on Rom. 8:11). In this sense, receiving and living the Lord's Spirit now is receiving life, the kind of life we shall eternally live- "eternal life". The Son giving life now is therefore related seamlessly to how the Father shall give life at the resurrection to life at the last day.

*5:22 For neither does the Father judge anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son-* Even the most basic reading of the New Testament will reveal that the Greek *krino* (usually translated "judge") is used in more than one way. The same is true of the idea of 'judgment' in many languages. Thus in English, "judgment" refers both to the process of deciding / judging a case, and also to the final judgment of condemnation. We read that the Father judges no one (Jn. 5:22); but (evidently in another sense), He does judge (Jn. 8:50). Christ did not come to judge (Jn. 8:15), but in another way He did (Jn. 5:30; 8:16,26). Paul tells the Corinthians to judge nothing, and then scolds them for not

judging each other (1 Cor. 4:5 cp. 6:1-3). *Krino* (to "judge") can simply mean to make a decision, or think something through (Acts 20:16; 26:8; 27:11; 1 Cor. 2:2; 7:37; 2 Cor. 2:1; Tit. 3:12). And because of this, we are encouraged to "judge" situations according to God's word and principles; thus 'judging' can mean forming an opinion based on correct interpretation of the word (Jn. 7:24; 1 Cor. 10:15; 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:14). Therefore, judging or opinion forming on any other basis is 'judging after the flesh', and this is wrong (Lk. 12:57; Jn. 8:15); judging rightly is part of our basis of acceptability with the Lord Jesus (Lk. 7:43). It is a shameful thing if we can't judge our brethren (1 Cor. 5:12). "Judge not" must be understood in this context.

In the context here, the Lord is warning the Jews who were seeking to kill Him that all judgment is actually His, and not theirs. He is their judge, and shall be their judge at the last day. His very presence amongst men was His judgment of them; the same word is used in 3:19 in stating that the judgment of the Jewish world was simply because the light of Christ had come into it.

*5:23 That all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that does not honour the Son does not honour the Father that sent him-* The honour of the Son is on the basis of the fact that He is our judge (:22). The true glory to God was to be through the lonely rejection of the cross. He who quietly honours / glorifies the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49) in the life of self-crucifixion will be honoured / glorified by the Father quietly in this life, and openly in the age to come (Jn. 12:26); such is the mutuality between a man and his God. See on Rev. 7:9.

To love God and Christ is to love our neighbour as ourselves. This is because of the intense unity of God's Name. Because our brethren and sisters share God's Name, as we do, we must love them as ourselves, who also bear that same Name. And if we love the Father, we must love the Son, who bears His Name, with a similar love. The letters of John state this explicitly. If we love God, we *must* love our brother; and if we love the Father, we *must* love the Son. This is why we must honour the Son as we honour the Father (Jn. 5:23); such is the unifying power of God's Name. So the Father, Son and church are inextricably connected. Baptism into the name of Christ is therefore baptism into the Name of the Father, and associates us with the "one Spirit" (Mt. 28:19; Eph. 4:4). In the same way as we cannot choose to live in isolation from the Father and Son, so we cannot separate ourselves from others who bear the same Name. The Scribe well understood all this: "There is one God... and to love him... and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (Mk. 12:32,33). Those whole offerings represented the whole body of Israel (Lev. 4:7-15). The Scribe

understood that those offerings taught that all Israel were unified together on account of their bearing the same Name of Yahweh.

5:24- see on Jn. 3:13; 1 Jn. 3:14.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that hears my word and believes Him that sent me has eternal life, and comes not into condemnation, but has passed out of death into life-* In the immediate context, the hearing of the word alludes to the way the healed impotent man had heard the Lord's word and believed; see on :8. The same word for passing over from death to life is used when John writes to those who had been converted as a result of hearing his Gospel. He says that they know they have passed over from death to life because they live in love (1 Jn. 3:14). Hearing the Lord's word, living in the Spirit, which means living in love, as He loved, living with the spirit of life which He had and has... are all the same thing. "My word" is effectively "my life", His Spirit of life, as established in the prologue. Remember too that John is writing in Hebrew thought to Jewish people. Hebrews are those who have 'passed over', as Abraham their father did geographically so long ago. But the definition of the new Israel, the new Hebrews, are those who have passed over from the darkness of Judaism to live in the light of Christ. If we are walking in the light, with His Spirit, then we shall not be condemned. That judgment [s.w. "condemnation"] is for those who see but reject the light and prefer to remain in darkness.

*5:25 Truly, truly, I say to you: The hour comes and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live-* As explained above, if we have the spirit of Christ, we are living the eternal life. In that sense the resurrection has happened to us; but the physical transformation of our body from mortal to immortal is yet to happen, at the resurrection to life at the last day. And so He says that that hour comes and yet now is. Just as they shall come forth to life at the sound of the Lord's literal voice at His coming, so we come to spiritual life now as a result of hearing His word / voice. "Hearing" here implies more than literal hearing, but hearing with belief, just as 'seeing' in John means seeing and believing.

But the Lord's "hour" in John also has reference to His death. The judgment quality of the crucifixion is reflected by the way in which the Lord speaks of both the cross and the day of future judgment as "the hour" (Jn. 5:25-29). When the Lord taught that "the hour" is both to come and "now is", He surely meant us to understand that in His crucifixion, properly perceived, there is the judgment of this world, the end of this age for us who believe in Him, the cutting off of sin. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench by Pilate, as if He is the authentic judge, is further confirmation that in His Passion, the

Lord was truly Judge of this world.

The hour that was coming and yet was refers to the Lord's death. There, the voice of the Son of God was made clear. We have shown elsewhere how the Lord's blood is personified as a voice crying out. Those who truly hear that voice will be raised to life. The way the graves opened at His death was surely a foretaste of this. See on Jn. 16:25.

5:26 *For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given the Son life in himself-* This seems to mean that because spiritual life is so inherent in the Son, He therefore has the ability to give that life or spirit to others. We cannot really give our lives to others in any literal sense because we do not have life inherent within ourselves, it is a gift. But the Father and Son have the life which is themselves, and can gift that to others.

5:27- see on Mk. 2:10.

*And He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is a Son of Man-* His humanity is His ability to judge us. We will then realize the extent to which He succeeded in every point where we realize we failed, despite being strapped with our same nature. And thus we will respect Him yet the more for His perfection of character, and for the wonder of the salvation that is thereby in Him. We cannot judge because although we too are 'sons of men', we have sinned. Any such judgment would be hypocritical. But the Lord can judge, because He had human nature, being the archetypical "son of man", and yet never sinned.

Even in His life, the Father committed all judgment unto the Son (:22). The Lord can therefore talk in some arresting present tenses: "Verily, verily, I say unto you [as judge], He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation". According to our response to His word, so we have now our judgment. He goes on to speak of how the believer will again hear His voice, at His return: "The hour is coming, and [also] now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live". Our response to His word now is a mirror of our response to His word then. Hence the hour is yet future, and yet now is. 'The Son right now has the authority to execute judgment on the basis of response to His word. He will do this at the last day; and yet even as He spoke, He judged as He heard' [paraphrase of Jn. 5:27-30]. Because He *is* the Son of man, He even then had the power of judgment given to Him (Jn. 5:27). These present tenses would be meaningless unless the Lord was even then exercising His role as judge. When He says that He doesn't judge / condemn men (Jn. 3:17-21), surely He is saying that *He* won't so much judge men as they will judge themselves by their attitude to Him. His concentration was and is on saving men. The condemnation is that men loved darkness, and prefer the darkness of rejection to the light of Christ. Likewise Jn. 12:47,48: "If any man hear my words, and believe not, I



judge him not: for I came not to [so much as to] judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me... hath one that judgeth him: the word [his response to the word, supplying the ellipsis] that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day".

*5:28 Marvel not at this! For the hour comes, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice-* The Lord repeatedly tells the cynical and unbelieving Jews of His day *not* to marvel / wonder, but to *believe*. Perhaps we're intended to read in an ellipsis to these passages: '[Don't only] marvel / wonder [but *believe*]'. John later used the same phrase himself in 1 Jn. 3:13- he was so influenced by reflecting upon the words of the Lord Jesus that His words became John's words. Our language and thought processes should be likewise changed as we come to have Christ in us, and His spirit becomes ours.

"The tombs" translates a Greek term rooted in the idea of remembrance; 'memorial tombs' or 'cenotaph' would be no bad translation. The "all" in view are therefore those within the 'memory' of God, the believers. This is established by the context, which has spoken of how all who now receive the life of the Spirit shall also rise to life in the last day. We who have heard His voice now shall again hear it at the resurrection. It is that word of command which is therefore presented here as the basis for resurrection to life, just as Lazarus is later depicted as coming out of the tomb at the sound of the Lord's voice, as a worked example of what the Lord means here.

*5:29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation-* The 'coming forth' is another connection with the resurrection of Lazarus, who was bidden "Come forth!" by the voice of the Lord Jesus. He was a worked example ahead of time of the Lord's teaching here. Although "life" and "condemnation" are ministered in this life according to a person's response to encounter with the Lord Jesus, their final outworking and moment will be at the resurrection of the last day. That is when immortality begins in a bodily, material sense.

*5:30 I can of myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is righteous, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me-* This is another reflection of the Lord's humanity. Our will is not yet coincidental with God's; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the finally unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer.

The Lord was and is 'seeking' the Father's will not in the sense that He is unsure of it, but in the Hebrew sense of 'seeking', i.e. respect and worship. The Lord's thinking or spirit is that of the Father. Therefore God's will is His will, and this is reflected in the way the Lord judges. Yet we bear in mind that God's will is for human salvation, that none be lost but all the called should be saved (6:39; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). And that same will is in the Son, who will judge according to this "will".

Am. 7:8 describes Israel's condemnation as a plumb line, a measurement and assessor, being applied to them. Here the figure of weighing up evidence is made to mean condemnation; so immediate is God's judgment. He needs no time to draw a conclusion; being outside of time, He can see a situation and make the judgment immediately, and implicit within the information gathering process. The Lord Jesus likewise judged as soon as He heard (Jn. 5:30). His very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (Jn. 9:39).

5:31 *If I testify of myself, my witness is not true-* Having presented Himself as the ultimate judge, the Lord now changes the metaphor to say that He is a witness in His own trial. He requires witnesses to testify about Him. So He is now recognizing that He stands under the judgmental eyes of the Jews, and is presenting His witnesses in His defence.

5:32 *It is another that testifies of me; and I know that the witness which He testifies of me is true-* Codex Beza reads "You know...". The Jews had set themselves up as the Lord's judges. He calls God as a witness in His case (7:28; 8:26). The whole picture of the Father as a witness, the Son in the dock, and the Jews as judges... is all rather bizarre. Who were they to judge God and choose to reject His testimony to His own Son, when in fact they knew ["You know...", Codex Beza] in their consciences that God's witness was true. But this was what the Jews were doing. But in fact anyone who rejects the Lord Jesus as their judge when they encounter Him... is in fact judging Him, and thereby treating God as a witness whose testimony they can reject. The encounter with Jesus, the light of the world, can only really result in total surrender to Him and His cause. Any rejection of Him is to play God, to set oneself up as judge of God, and to remain in the darkness with only condemnation awaiting.

5:33 *You asked John the Baptist, and he has testified to the truth-* The 'asking' is presented by the Lord in the context of legal metaphor. They had as it were summoned John the Baptist to give testimony; not perhaps literally, but in that these Jews now judging the Lord were those who had gone out into the wilderness to hear John, and had asked who he was- and been directed by him to the Lord Jesus.

5:34 *Not that the testimony that I receive is from man; but I say these things so that you may be saved-* This is perhaps saying the same as Paul's references to 'speaking after the manner of men', putting things in human terms in order to persuade those who still thought as men (Rom. 6:19; Gal. 3:15). The testimony of John the Baptist wasn't relevant testimony when God Himself is called as a witness. But because the Lord wished even the salvation of these wicked, bitter, jealous men who even judged God Almighty... He put things in human terms. He reminded them therefore of the testimony of John the Baptist. The Lord wanted men to accept His Father's witness; but He was prepared to let them accept John's human witness, and actually this lower level of perception by them, preferring to believe the words of a mere man, would still be allowed by the Lord to lead them to salvation.

And we might well note that a great number of priests and Pharisees did in fact later get baptized; so the Lord's desire for their salvation did in fact pay off. We should learn from that never, ever to write off anyone as a hopeless case for the Gospel.

The Lord said that He didn't receive witness from men; but, because He so wanted men to be saved, He directed them to the witness of John the Baptist. This in essence is the same as the way in which some people believed the testimony of the Samaritan woman, but others said they only believed once they heard Jesus Himself, as they discounted the testimony of men / women (Jn. 4:42). And so in our day, the ideal witness is that of the Father and Son themselves directly through their word. And yet there are others who are persuaded not by that so much as by the testimony of others who have believed. This may be a lower level compared to the Lord's ideal position of not allowing the testimony of mere men; and yet He makes this concession, for the sake of His burning desire for human salvation.

5:35 - see on Mt. 3:11.

*He was the lamp that burns and shines, and you were willing to rejoice for a period in his light-* John's message was hard hitting, critical of his audience, and demanding radical repentance. And masses of people rejoiced in it. They liked the hard line, and were joyfully proud that they had apparently responded to it. But they had not come to total commitment to the Lord Jesus, so their apparent repentance was merely a psychological experience of no lasting value. There is true repentance, and surface level repentance. We must perceive the allusion here to the prologue. John "was not the light" in the sense that he was not Jesus personally (Jn. 1:8 RV); but he was in another sense "a burning and shining light" (Jn. 5:35) in that he like us was "the light of the world" on account of his connection with Jesus. We too are to be the light of the

world insofar as we are in Christ, who is the light of the world. Yet it could be said that the Jews rejoiced in the light of John the Baptist, but would not come to the true light, of the Lord Jesus.

"You were willing to rejoice for a period" sounds like John's version of the parable of the sower, where the seed is sown but some enthusiastically respond "with joy" only for a while and then fall away (Mt. 13:20). The sower parable therefore had an immediate reference to the lack of lasting response to John's ministry.

5:36- see on Jn. 4:34.

*But the witness which I have is greater than that of John. For the works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, testify that the Father has sent me-* As noted above, the Jews sat in judgment on the Lord, and He calls as witness for the defence the Father's empowerment of His miracles. To ignore that testimony or judge it as not significant to the case of Christ was to judge God. Those works came to the final 'accomplishment' of the cross, when "it is finished". And His death there was the final testament to God's love, the light shining in darkness.

"The work that the Father gave me to finish... testifies" (Jn. 5:36 NIV); and thus when "it [was] finished" in the death of the cross, the full testimony / witness of God was spoken and made. When He was lifted up in crucifixion, the beholding Jews knew that His words were truly those of the Father; they saw in the cross God's word spoken through Christ, they saw there the epitome of all the words the Lord spoke throughout His ministry (Jn. 8:28). The Lord's blood was thus a spoken testimony to all men (1 Tim. 2:6 AVmg.).

5:37 *And the Father that sent me, He has testified of me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape-* They, sitting as judges of the Lord Jesus, had refused to hear His testimony about His Son. God's testimony to his Son was in the works or miracles (:36). But although like Nicodemus the Jews had no choice but to accept they had been done, they refused to accept the testimony made by them. Hearing God's voice and seeing His shape allude to Moses; and the Jews would of course agree that Moses was supreme in Judaism, and indeed they had not heard God's voice or seen the outline of His personal shape [another argument for the existence of God in a corporeal form]. But the Lord's idea was that those who had heard His voice and 'seen' / perceived Him, had witnessed a theophany far greater than what Moses saw- the allusions are to the prologue again, where the similarities with Moses are outlined.

It could be of course that the Lord is speaking here by way of glaring contrast: Moses earnestly desired to see God's shape, to view Him, to

completely understand Him. This was denied him- but not Jesus. The similarity and yet difference between Moses and Jesus is really brought out here. And again, Moses is shown to be representative of sinful Israel; as he lifted up the serpent, so they would lift up Christ; as he failed to see the Father's "shape", so they did too.

5:38 *And you do not have His word dwelling in you, for you do not believe the one whom He has sent-* They searched the Scriptures (:39) but the word did not abide in them. The idea of 'abiding' is frequently associated with the abiding of the life, spirit and word of Jesus in the hearts of those who believe in Him. So I would read this as saying that because they did not believe in the sent One, therefore God's word, His seed, His Spirit, His life, did not abide in them; rather than reading it as meaning that if the Old Testament word of Moses abode in them, then they would believe in the sent One. I read it as suggested because the promise of the 'abiding' is clearly presented in John as a consequence which follows and not precedes believing in Christ.

5:39 *You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me-* This is so tragically true of so many Protestant groups today. Bible study is not necessarily the way to coming to the Lord Jesus. In fact, it was their academic approach to the Bible which actually stopped them coming to Him (:40). Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *Me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

We must see in that Man who had fingernails, hair, who needed to shave, who sneezed and blinked, the very Son of God; the Man who should dominate our thinking and being. And we must grasp the wonder of the fact that from the larynx of a Palestinian Jew came the words of Almighty God. All that was true of natural Israel becomes a warning for us, Israel after the spirit. The tension between the following of Jesus and merely studying the pages of the Bible for academic truth is brought out in the Lord's encounter with the Jews in Jn. 5:39: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: [but] ye will not come to *me* that ye might have life". Surely the Lord is using irony here: as if to say, 'Go on searching through the scrolls, thinking as you do that finding true exposition will bring you eternal life. But you must come to *me*, the word-made-flesh, the living and eternal life, if you wish to find it'.

C.H. Dodd throughout chapter 3 of his classic *The Interpretation Of The Fourth Gospel* gives ample reason to believe his thesis that John's Gospel was written [partly] in order to deconstruct the popular teachings of Philo in the first century- and there are therefore many allusions to his writings. Thus John records how in vain the Jews searched the Scriptures,

because in them they thought they had eternal life (Jn. 5:39)- when this is the very thing that Philo claimed to do. This approach helps us understand why, for example, the prologue to John is written in the way it is, full of allusion to Jewish ideas about the *logos*. How John writes is only confusing to us because we're not reading his inspired words against the immediate background in which they were written- which included the very popular false teachings of Philo about the *logos*. Thus Philo claimed that God had two sons, sent the younger into the world, and the elder, the *logos*, remained "by Him"- whereas John's prologue shows that the *logos* was an abstract idea, which was sent into the world in the form of God's one and only Son, the Lord Jesus. See on Jn. 3:3.

The Lord was unlike any other Rabbi- He wasn't a verse-by-verse expositor of the Old Testament, neither did He like to argue case law. He told parables to exemplify and clarify His message- not in order to explain an Old Testament verse, as the Rabbis tended to. He drew lessons from nature in a way the Rabbis simply couldn't do. Rabbi Jakob, a first century Rabbi, stated: "He who walks along the road repeating the Law and interrupts his repetition and says: How lovely this tree is! How lovely this field is! To him it will be reckoned as if he had misused his life" (The Mishnah, *Pirque Abot* 3.7b). By contrast, the Lord stopped and looked at the flowers of the field and drew His teaching from them. The Rabbinic way was to write and study endless *midrashim* on Bible verses, a kind of verse-by-verse exposition. The Lord's approach was more holistic and natural. The word *Midrash* comes from *darash*, to search, and perhaps the Lord had this style of 'Bible study' in mind when He said: "Ye search [i.e. midrash] the scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... [but] ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life" (Jn. 5:39). Neither the Lord nor myself are against careful Bible study. But the Lord was warning against the attitude that eternal life comes from midrashing the Scriptures, writing dry analytical commentary, labouring under the misapprehension that this somehow will give life. Eternal life comes from knowing the life of Jesus, for His nature and quality of life is the life that we will eternally live, by His grace.

They didn't *feel* the wonder of inspiration in their attitude to Bible study- even though they would have devoutly upheld the position that the Bible texts were inspired. And here we have a lesson for ourselves. The Lord brought this out in Jn. 5:39, in saying that "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life... and ye will not come to *me*, that ye may have life" (RV). Their Bible study did not lead them to Him. And is just as possible that we too can be Bible-centred and not Christ-centred. For to academically study a document and perceive its connections and intellectual purity does not require the living, transforming, demanding relationship which knowing Jesus does. See on Acts 13:27.

The Lord told the Jews to "search the scriptures" so that they would have the word of God and the love of God abiding in them (Jn. 5:38-42). They academically knew "the scriptures", but the voice of God, the presence of God, and the love of God this reveals, was simply hidden from them. They weren't *really* studying. But the Saviour also upbraided His very own men for their lack of true Biblical perception: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken" (Lk. 24:25). Note that He did not upbraid them for not understanding His own clear prophecies concerning His passion; instead He rebukes them for not grasping the OT teaching about His death and resurrection. Yet if we try to prove from the OT alone that Messiah would die and resurrect, we are largely forced to reason from types. Even Isaiah 53 is only a prophecy of Christ insofar as Hezekiah (to whom it primarily refers) was a type of Christ. Stephen in Acts 7 resorts to typology to prove his points about the Messiahship of Jesus. The point is, the Lord expected those simple fishermen to have worked these things out, to have heard the voice of God in those OT types. And He upbraided them because they failed to do so.

5:40 *But you will not come to me, so that you may have life-* The Jews searched the scriptures, thinking that by their Bible study alone they would receive eternal life. But they never came to Christ that they might know the eternal life that is in Him (Jn. 5:39,40). They thought "eternal life" was in a book, a reward for correct intellectual discernment and exposition, rather than in the man Christ Jesus. And for all our Biblicism, we need to examine ourselves in this regard. For like Peter, we must be Christ-centred more than purely Bible-centred; we must see Him "in all the Scriptures", knowing that the whole word of God's revelation was made flesh in Him.

The gift of life, the life and living of Jesus, His Spirit, was not predicated upon academic Bible study. We could not ask for a clearer argument against the argument that God's Spirit is only active today through the so-called "Spirit-word". The "life" or Spirit given to those who "come to me" is a gift; and the Jews were in fact hindered from receiving it by their excessive Biblicism.

5:41 *I receive not glory from men-* We are commanded to honour or give glory to the Son (:23). So the Lord is not against being honoured. So He may be lamenting here that He is not receiving honour from those men, they were not believing in Him but rather judging Him. Of course, He may have meant as GNB "I am not looking for human praise", i.e., as much as looking for their belief in the Father's offer of salvation. Or maybe the Lord's point was that He received glory from the Father (2 Pet. 1:17), from God Himself, and so any human testimony to Him was of little value (Jn. 5:34). In this case the Lord is alluding again to their standing in judgment upon Him and requiring witnesses to testify.

5:42 *But I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts-* Understanding "the love of God" as the love we have for God opens up several passages. The Jews didn't have the love of God inside them, i.e. love for God, because they didn't have His spirit. Love is the ultimate fruit of the Spirit; there was no love in their hearts because they had no Spirit. All they had was an academic, slavish devotion to academic Bible study. But they had no heart, no Spirit and so no love for God. No wonder their Bible study didn't lead them to grasp the most fundamental theme of the Old Testament- that the Messiah was to be God's Son. But their lack of "love of God" doesn't mean God didn't love them. They *are* beloved for the father's sakes; as a Father always loves His wayward son. But they didn't have love of God in their souls. Paul's prayer that God would direct hearts "into the love of God" (2 Thess. 3:5) surely means that He would influence their consciousness to be more filled with an upsurging love of God, rather than meaning that God would bring them into a position where He loved their hearts.

5:43 *I come in my Father's Name, and you do not accept me. If another shall come in his own name, you will accept him-* This again connects to the prologue. The Jews did not accept / receive Him; but those who did receive Him, received the Spirit. This is the mutuality between the believer and the Lord; if we receive Him, we receive the gift of His Spirit. The Jews were more likely to receive another Messiah, because he would not ask them to receive the kind of all demanding spirit which the Lord breathed in to those who accepted Him. The Father had testified to His Son's claims by the miracles done; the Lord came in His Father's Name / authority (GNB) in the sense that the miracles showed that He was clearly of God, as Nicodemus accepted. A claimant with lesser credentials, who came only in his own name, was more likely to be accepted because there was less personally at stake.

5:44 *How can you believe, you who accept praise from each other, but do not seek the praise that comes from the only God?-* The 'belief' in view is surely belief in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God. Being in a self-regarding, self-congratulatory religious environment, even if it is nominally Christian, is not the way toward faith in the Lord Jesus. The Greek seems to carry the idea: 'Glory can only be given to God, whereas you want glory from each other, effectively making yourselves equal to God as you falsely accused me of. You cannot believe in God whilst you are playing God, wanting glory to yourselves rather than to Him'. It is such arrogance, petty pride and positioning in the eyes of others which stops millions if not billions from believing.

Because there is only one God, there is only one glory, one Name of God, one standard of spirituality, one judge, one justifier. Whilst men seek



glory and approbation and acceptance and justification from other men, they are denying the principle of one God. If there is only one God, we should seek His honour and justification, to the *total* exclusion of that of men. Hosea had revealed this truth earlier: "I am the Lord thy God... and thou shalt know no god but me: for there is no saviour beside me... neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee [i.e. thee alone] the fatherless findeth mercy" (Hos. 13:4; 14:3). Because God alone can give salvation and mercy, therefore there is no space for worshipping or seeking for the approbation of anything or anyone else; for the receipt of mercy and salvation are the only ultimate things worth seeking. There is only one God who can give them, and therefore we should seek for His acceptance alone.

5:45 *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one that accuses you, Moses, on whom you have set your hope-* They who were judging the Lord Jesus were now put into the dock. An Moses was called as witness against them. They were condemned by Moses' law. And God was the judge to whom they were accused. Their judgment of the Lord, requiring Him to call God and John the Baptist as witnesses, was effectively their playing God. For any such judgment is playing God. And such will have to face God Himself as judge.

5:46 *For if you believed Moses, you would believe me. For he wrote of me-* The allusion is to the way Israel were intended to believe Moses because of the "great work" of the Red Sea and Passover lamb deliverance (Ex. 14:31). God came to Israel personally in the thick cloud; the great theophany was so that Israel would believe Moses (Ex. 19:9). But they did not believe Moses; and Israel too were blind to the great theophany of God in Christ [see allusions to it in the prologue], and did not believe either Moses or Christ.

Disbelief of Moses and rejection of His writings as inspired (:47) was the cardinal sin according to Judaism. But the Lord accuses these men of it- men who spent their lives poring over the scrolls. Their rejection of the message of Moses meant they rejected Moses. They had wrongly assumed that devotion to the Bible assured them of acceptability with God. But to miss the message of Christ is to be left without God and effectively despising those writings. The essence of this conundrum is seen in many Christians to this day.

5:47 *But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe my words?-* This is John's equivalent to Lk. 16:31: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, even if one rises from the dead". The Lord's resurrection is here paralleled with "my words". The risen Lord was and is His word to men. And in the Jewish context, it would only be accepted if they had firstly believed Moses. Of course, they would have been indignant at the idea that they did not believe the writings of Moses; they held a doctrine of hyper-inspiration of the text of the Torah,

whereby every letter was inspired and seen as full of meaning. But such a reverent view of the Bible text can lead to Bibliolatry, rather than to faith in the Christ who is witnessed to throughout that text.

## CHAPTER 6

6:1 *After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias-* We get the sense of the Lord increasingly trying to retreat from attention. He had withdrawn from Judea to Galilee on the hunch that He would not be accepted in His home area; and was found wrong on that. Now, He goes to the other side of the sea, but the crowd follows Him. And then He goes up into a mountain (:3)- and sees a great crowd still coming to Him (:5). His patience and loving care for the masses is wonderful; when He really wanted a break from the attention.

6:2 *And a great crowd followed him, because they saw the signs which he performed on those that were sick-* As argued throughout chapter 5, the Lord's miracles were undeniably Divine and were as it were a legal testimony to His authenticity as God's Son in the court of public opinion. Even Nicodemus had recognized this. But from the way the Lord speaks later in the chapter, their motivation was for healing of sickness, for personal benefit rather than the bread of life.

6:3 *And Jesus went up into the mountain, and there he sat with his disciples-* This clearly echoes the description of the sermons on the mount and plain in Matthew and Luke. The message that He taught them all the hours it took for them to get hungry isn't recorded. But we can perhaps infer from the connections with Matthew and Luke that it was the same basic content- the manifesto of the Kingdom of God which was preached elsewhere.

6:4 *Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand-* As noted on 5:1, "the feast of the Lord" had been hijacked by the Jews, so that it had become instead *their* feast. This is the problem- when mere religion swamps and takes over real spirituality.

6:5 *Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes, and seeing that a great crowd came to him, said to Philip: Where are we to buy bread that these may eat?-* The "therefore" apparently connects with the coming of Passover (:4). He saw a parallel between the provision of food for that crowd, and the provision of the Paschal lamb, Himself, for Israel's salvation. We wonder why Philip particularly is given this test (:7). The Lord saw perhaps that there were specific issues with Philip that could be addressed and perfected by the whole experience. Or it could be that because Philip was from the immediate locality where they were, Bethsaida (1:44; 12:21). And so the Lord asked him where the local shops were.

It makes a good exercise to re-read the Gospels looking out for cases of where the Lord urged the disciples to not look at Him as somehow separate from themselves, an automatic Saviour from sin and problems. Thus when it was apparent that the huge, hungry crowd needed feeding,

the Lord asked the disciples where "we" could get food from to feed them (Jn. 6:5). In all the accounts of the miraculous feedings, we see the disciples assuming that Jesus would solve the situation- and they appear even irritated and offended when He implies that this is *our* joint problem, and *they* must tackle this seemingly impossible task with *their* faith. The mentality of the disciples at that time is that of so many Trinitarians- who assume that 'Jesus is the answer' in such a form that they are exempt from seeing His humanity as a challenge for them to live likewise. See on Mk. 11:20.

6:6 *And this he said to test him. For he knew what he would do-* So often the Lord's style with us is just the same. We are given testing situations and questions, purely for the development of our own faith and understanding. The phrase "knew what He would do" is similar to the idea that the Lord knew that He would die on the cross. And so again, the whole incident can be understood on at least two levels. The Lord knew He would make bread to meet their hunger; and He knew that He would on the cross be the bread of life to meet human hunger for salvation.

6:7- see on Jn. 14:8.

*Philip answered him: Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little-* We see here the dead literalism of Philip, and how faith sees in completely different terms to the detailed literalism of unbelief, which focuses on the dimensions of the problem rather than the possibility of solution. Energy so often goes into carefully calculating the difficulties, the height and nature of the mountain, rather than into faith that the whole situation can simply be moved.

Andrew's comment that they had five loaves and two fishes surely carried the undertone that '...and that's not even enough for us, let alone them- we're starving too, you know!'. The disciples wanted the crowd sent away, to those who sold food, so that they might buy for themselves (Mt. 14:15). As the Lord's extended commentary upon their reactions throughout John 6 indicates, these responses were human and selfish. And yet- and here is a fine insight into His grace and positive thinking about His men- He puts their very words and attitudes into the mouth of the wise virgins at the very moment of their acceptance at the day of judgment: "The wise answered [the foolish virgins] saying, Not so, lest there be not enough [s.w. "not sufficient", Jn. 6:7] for us and you; but got ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves" (Mt. 25:9). Clearly the Lord framed that parable in the very words, terms and attitudes of His selfish disciples. He counted even their weakness as positive, and thus showed His desire to accept them in the last day in spite of it. Another reading of the connection would be that the Lord foresaw how even in the final moment of acceptance into His Kingdom,

right on the very eve of judgment day, His people would still be as hopelessly limited in outlook and spiritually self-centred as the disciples were that day with the multitude. Whatever way we want to read this undoubted connection of ideas, we have a window into a grace so amazing it almost literally takes our breath away.

6:8 *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him-* Andrew was also from Bethsaida (1:44), so he may have known the boy personally. The villages were very small and everyone would have known each other. The focus of this incident is upon relatively unknown disciples, Philip and Andrew, instead of the usual Peter, James and John.

6:9 *There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two fishes; but what are these among so many?-* Barley loaves were the food of the very poor (Ez. 4:12; 13:19), costing a third the cost of wheat (Rev. 6:6); and the Greek means 'little fishes'. It was all the very lowest of human provision which was turned into so much. The food provided is later interpreted by the Lord as His own flesh and blood, sacrificed to meet human hunger. The poorest, roughest of food was used to represent the Lord's nature and origins. It was God's blessing upon this which led to the abundant spiritual filling of all those who hungered for Him and His word.

6:10 *Jesus said: Make the people sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand-* The command to recline at banquet ["sit down"] was to set up the similarity with the Messianic banquet, to which the Lord provided an open invitation to whoever wished to hear His word. Who could "sit down" at a feast was a major issue with the Jews; only those from whom there would be no guilt by association were invited to recline together. But the Lord operated no screening process, and goes on to compare this feast with the breaking of bread and the final Messianic banquet. From our side of things, we are not to screen, the invitation to the Lord's feast in this life and that to come is to be offered by us without screening. "Whosoever will" is to be welcome. The only other time John uses the verb "sit down / recline" is in describing the scene at the last supper (13:12).

The mention of grass is to highlight the fact that Passover was about to begin, for grass is mowed in Palestine in April. Or it could be that the grass refers to hay from the recent mowing. The point is that this feast was the Lord's equivalent of the Passover feast, and later in this chapter He predicates salvation upon participating in it.

6:11 *Jesus therefore took the loaves and having given thanks, he distributed them to those that were sitting down. Likewise also the fishes, as much as they could eat-* Other manuscripts as AV add: "Distributed them to the disciples and the disciples to those that were sitting...". Time and again, it becomes apparent that the Lord especially designed

incidents in His men's experience which they would learn from, and later be able to put to use when similar experiences occurred after He had ascended. This was essential to the training of the twelve disciples. Thus He made *them* distribute the food to the multitude (Jn. 6:11); yet after His ascension, we meet the same Greek word in Acts 4:35, describing how they were to distribute welfare to the multitude of the Lord's followers. The visual image suggested of the Lord holding the bread in His hands, blessing and giving to the disciples is so clearly recollective of the scene at the last supper. "As much as they could eat" is unique to John, and emphasizes the super abundance of the Lord's spiritual provision.

*6:12 And when they were filled, he said to his disciples: Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, so nothing goes to waste-* The language of 'filling' must be understood in John's Gospel as referring to filling with the Spirit. The Lord's body, His being, His Spirit, His life, His word, was to fill His people, mediated through the work of the disciples.

The gathering up is twice mentioned (:13). The same word is used of the gathering together of the Gentiles in one with the Jews (11:52). "Waste" is a word commonly used of the lost, of how the Lord wants none to perish. It is His will that none should perish, and that was the reason for His death (3:15,16 s.w.). The intention of His cross is therefore lived out in all our efforts to bring others to salvation, to keep them in the path, and not to "perish". All such efforts will have His special blessing and Spirit behind them. The Lord uses the same word in describing the food He had created as 'perishing' (:27; s.w. "goes to waste"). He is making the point that if the food was gathered then it would *not* perish. The allusion is clearly to the gathering of the manna, but the idea is that the food created represented something that would not perish, eternal life. The gathering in of the Gentiles is in view, but so is the simple fact that the broken ones, the fragments, are also to be saved. And the Lord has delegated that work of gathering them to us His disciples.

*6:13 So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten-* The twelve baskets clearly suggest the formation of a new Israel from the broken ones ["fragments"], through the work of the disciples. We recall how the Gentile woman wished to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the table of the Jewish Kingdom (Mk. 7:28). This again encourages us to see this ingathering of broken ones, that left over by the Jewish crowd, as symbolic of the ingathering of the Gentiles by the disciples taking the Gospel to the Gentile world- a commission they were terribly slow to perceive.

6:14- see on Jn. 12:42.

*When the people saw the sign which he did, they said: This is of a truth the prophet that comes into the world!-* The miracle of the loaves and

fishes made men see the similarity between the Lord and Moses, whom they perceived to have provided the manna (:32). Therefore they thought that Jesus must be the prophet like Moses, of whom Moses wrote. But the Lord goes on to explain that He was greater than Moses, because Moses' bread only gave them temporal life, whereas if a man ate of Him, he would live for ever; His words would give spiritual life which was part of that "eternal life" of the Father (6:49,50). The Jews thought that the prophet like Moses of Dt. 18:18 was a prophet equal or inferior to Moses. John's Gospel records how Christ was showing that the prophet would be greater than Moses. Martha understood that when she said that "the Christ... which should come into the world" (i.e. the prophet of Dt. 18:18) was "the Son of God", and therefore Jesus of Nazareth (11:27).

*6:15 So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew again to the mountain by himself-* "Take him by force" could even imply kidnapping, taking Him away to be their puppet in a revolution against Rome. The Lord clearly felt the need for intense personal prayer at this time; the temptation to attempt to become an immediate Messianic King was great for Him, and this was a recurrence of the wilderness temptation to that same effect. John doesn't record the wilderness temptations, but he records how the same temptations returned to Him throughout His ministry, in fulfilment of the Synoptic observation that the devil of temptation departed from Him only for a while, implying it returned later.

Prayer in one sense has to be a lonely experience. This is all surely why the Lord Himself is frequently pictured by the Gospel writers as making an effort to be alone in prayer to the Father (Mk. 1:35; 3:13; 9:2; Mt. 14:13,23; 17:1; Lk. 6:12; 9:28; 22:39,41). This is all some emphasis. Be it rising in the early hours to go out and find a lonely place to pray, or withdrawing a stone's throw from the disciples in Gethsemane to pray... He sought to be alone. Jn. 6:15 emphasizes this repeated feature of the Lord's life: "He departed again into a mountain himself alone". The fact He often ["again"] retreated alone like this is emphasized by three words which are effectively saying the same thing- departed, himself, alone. Much as we should participate in communal prayers or in the prayers of our partner or our children, there simply has to be the time for serious personal prayer in our lives. And I have to drive the point home: *Are you doing this?* Putting it in other terms- are you alone *enough?*

*6:16 And when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea-* Jn. 6:15-17 implies they got tired of waiting for the Lord Jesus to return from prayer, and so they pushed off home to Capernaum, leaving Him alone. Yet by grace He came after them on the lake, to their salvation.

*6:17 And they entered into a boat and were going over by sea to Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them-*

"Not yet" suggests, as hinted at in the synoptics, that He had promised to rejoin them. He wanted them to exercise their minds and assume that He would indeed keep His promise and come to them- but by walking on the water. His promise of returning to us likewise demands faith and a stretching of our paradigms. For the promise of the Comforter was that the Lord would indeed 'come to them', but through the indwelling of the Spirit. He was training them- trying to get them to consider the words 'I will come to you' as being capable of fulfilment in ways they could not previously imagine. He likewise works in educating us.

*6:18 And the sea was rising because of a great wind that blew-* The similarities with Jonah are apparent. The storm was to bring them to repentance, to make them appreciate their mission to the Gentiles which had been implicit in their gathering up the fragments dropped by Israel, and forming 12 baskets of a new Israel. But as with Jonah, they needed a near death experience in a storm to get them to perceive this.

*6:19 When therefore they had rowed about five or six kilometres, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were afraid-* They rowed rather than sailed because the wind was against them; and recall that in Hebrew thought, wind and the spirit are the same words. Their desire to run back home to Capernaum, away from this challenge to harvest the Gentiles, was resisted by the Spirit. Their fear of the approaching Lord Jesus was perhaps because they did subconsciously recognize Him, but feared a meeting with Him again, as they were fleeing from His work of grace towards the Gentiles.

*6:20 But he said to them: It is I! Be not afraid!-* It was not that they thought He was someone else, like a ghost. "They saw Jesus" (:19). So His assurance to them was that "It is I", the "I am" (Gk.), the One with the character and Name of God, who above all wanted their salvation. And there was no need to fear Him; He was their saviour. For salvation by grace is at the heart of the memorial Name "I am". "It is I" recalls many Old Testament passages where God declares Himself as Israel's saviour, the "I am", who also walks upon the waves of the sea and brings peace to the storm. The Lord was asking them to see in Him the human face of that saviour God, the manifestation of that Name in a human person; and to accept that for them it meant salvation, and they need not fear, even their own sins and rejection of the commission to the Gentiles.

*6:21 Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going-* John speaks in his Gospel of those who received Christ (Jn. 1:12,16; 3:32 etc.)- and it is in allusion to this that he speaks of how the disciples 'received Christ' into their ship whilst about to drown on Galilee. Their desperation as they faced death was understood by John as a symbol of the desperation of all those who truly receive Christ. But without perceiving our desperation,



can we properly 'receive' Him? The Lord did not stop them from their plan to return home; He made the boat arrive immediately at the land where they intended going, "to which they were going away" (Gk.). This is typical of His ways with men; we are not stopped from our path, but His intervention on the way is such that with Him now with us, we see the end point so differently.

*6:22 On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea noticed that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone-* Incident after incident shows the Lord doing something alone, and then the disciples somehow being presented as doing the same. Take the way He departed "himself alone" when the crowd wanted to make Him king; and then soon afterwards we read that the crowd perceived that the disciples had likewise departed 'themselves alone' [same Greek phrase and construction, Jn. 6:15,22]. The point is that the world is presented as perceiving the disciples in the same terms and way as they did Jesus, even when, in this case, Jesus was not physically with them. And we too are to be "in Him" in our work of witness for Him.

The incident was intended to teach that the Lord's presence could be achieved without His literal presence at all times. This was to prepare the audience for the amazing promise of the Comforter, that through the Spirit, the Lord could be present as really as He had been during His ministry.

*6:23 (Some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks)-* John was himself a fisherman and knew Tiberias boats from those of Capernaum. This is typical of the inspiration process; personal knowledge is worked with through the process of inspiration. They came searching for Him, noting He had not got into the single boat the disciples used. They then went to Capernaum and found Him there- the miracle of His walking on the water was left for them to figure out, for there is more subtly in the Divine than to trumpet His achievements in a primitive way. The wonderful things He does for us today likewise need to be meditated upon to be perceived.

*6:24 When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus-* They assumed He was still somewhere in the area, since He had not gone in the boat with the disciples. They thought that His physical presence was required for miracles and blessing; hence the Lord left them to meditate upon His crossing of the stormy sea and presence in Capernaum, where in physical terms He could not have become immediately present without the Spirit.

Their "seeking" of the Lord was on a purely surface level. Like Israel we can seek God daily, taking delight in approaching unto Him; and yet need the exhortation to urgently seek Him (Is. 55:6 cp. 58:2). We can appear to seek unto Him in prayer and attendance at our meetings, and yet not seek Him in the real sense at all. Likewise men came to Jesus physically, at quite some effort to themselves, and yet He tells them that they have not truly come to Him at all (Jn. 6:24 cp. 35-37). We can draw near with our mouth, honour Him with our lips, "but have removed [our] heart far from me" (Is. 29:13). Only those who call upon Him "in truth", with "unfeigned lips" will he heard (Ps. 145:18). Men repeatedly 'sought for' the Lord Jesus (Mk. 1:37; Jn. 6:26), but He told them to *truly* seek Him (Mt. 6:33; 7:7; Lk.12:31). "Strive to enter in [now] at the strait gate: for many [at judgment day] will seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Lk. 13:24). Our attitude to seeking the Lord now will be the attitude we have then. The emotion and reality of the judgment experience will not essentially change our attitude to the Lord. If we have "boldness" in prayer now (Heb. 4:16), then we will have "boldness in the day of judgment". How we feel to Him now is how we will then.

*6:25 And when they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him: Rabbi, when did you come here?*- Often we ask questions which disguise our essential question, which we are afraid to ask or verbalize. The real question was *how* He had come to Capernaum. But they covered this by enquiring *when*. In their hearts they must surely have sensed that He had also performed a miracle in terms of His presence. And He wished to stretch the thinking of His true followers on this point, leading them up to His paradigm breaking promise of the Comforter, His presence realized by the Spirit and without His physical presence. Their seeking and 'finding' Him was on a purely human level; see on :24.

*6:26 Jesus answered them and said: Truly, truly, I say to you: You seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled*- They did not see the signs in the sense that they did not perceive the intended teaching of the miracle. They were focused purely on the immediate benefit of food. John records the Lord's discourse to the end we might see or perceive the sign of the miracle. The allusion is to Ps. 74:9 LXX, where Israel did not 'see their signs' because there was no prophet amongst them. They didn't see the sign because they failed to really perceive Him as the ultimate prophet. They claimed to see Him as the prophet (:14), but not in reality. The whole record brings out the tension between surface level spirituality and true faith.

*6:27 Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set His seal of approval*- The people laboured in that they walked around the lake in the boiling midday sun in order to be with Christ and perhaps benefit from the physical food He might provide. He

tells them not to labour for the food which would perish, but for that which would endure for ever. The labouring of those people, trekking around that lake in the heat of the day, or crossing it by boat, should be the effort we put in to eating the manna of God's word- according to how the Lord. There was a theme of urgency in Israel's gathering of the manna; it had to be gathered before the sun was up, or it would be lost. Would that we could have that same sense of urgency as we read, realizing that the rising of the sun at the second coming of will put an end to our opportunity to feed and grow. If Israel didn't gather the manna, or if they left it to another day, it bred worms and stank. The active anger of God was to be expressed against those who didn't take the wonder of the manna seriously. So our gathering of the manna / word must be taken seriously; it's not a question of skim reading familiar words, or doing mental gymnastics with it in an intellectual world of our own.

The food which the Lord provided was His body and life, given above all upon the cross. He urges His hearers to labour to possess this, because this is the food that will abide in / into [Gk. *eis*] the life eternal (Jn. 6:27- AV 'endures unto' is a poor translation). The essence of having and 'eating' of the Lord's sacrifice now, is what eternal life is to be all about. Through the gift of the Spirit, the Lord was giving them His life, the eternal life. Absorbing Him, His sacrifice, the food which is Him, begins now... and in so doing, we are eating of the food / bread that will abide into the life eternal. He surely had in mind too the manna stored in the ark, which was eaten in the wilderness and yet abode / endured into Israel's life in the promised land. And that bread, of course, was symbolic of Him; it is the "hidden manna" which His followers will eat in the future Kingdom (Rev. 2:17). Eph. 1:17,18 puts it another way, by paralleling "the knowledge of [Christ]" with "knowing what is the hope of his calling... the riches of the glory of his inheritance". The blessed hope of our calling is not simply a life of bliss in ideal conditions, but more specifically it is the hope of 'knowing Christ' as person eternally, in all the glorious fullness of that experience.

*6:28 They replied to him: What must we do, that we may work the works of God?*- They ignored His challenge regarding accepting His life, by enquiring how they too could do miracles. This is the same wrong perspective which is characteristic of Pentecostalism: How can I do miracles?

The people had walked all around the lake to see Jesus and get some food from Him. They ask what they can *do* that they might work / labour [same Greek word] the works of God; and they are told that the real work / labour which God requires is to believe (Jn. 6:28). To truly believe, to the extent of being sure that we will surely have the eternal life promised, is the equivalent of walking around the lake. We like those crowds want to

concretely *do* something. The young man likewise had asked what good thing he must *do* in order to get eternal life (Mt. 19:16). But the real work is to *believe*. To really make that enormous mental effort to accept that what God has promised in Christ will surely come true for us. The proof that this is so is because Jesus really said these words, and "him hath God the Father sealed", i.e. shown His confirmation and acceptance of. So again we come down to the implications of real basics. Do we believe Jesus existed and said those words? Yes. Do we believe the Biblical record is true and inspired? Yes. Well, this Jesus who made these promises and statements about eternal life was "sealed" / validated by God. Do we believe this? Yes. So, what He said is utterly true. He will come and live within us, if we eat of Him, if we are open to Him.

*6:29 Jesus answered and said to them: This is the work of God- that you believe in him whom He has sent-* God's work is understood in the context here as miracles. The people wanted to know how they might perform God's works, miracles like making free bread. And as was ever His style, the Lord turns the words of the question another way. God's work is that we believe. Human belief is therefore His work- which we must allow to happen to us, rather than seeking to do works. It's rather like David asking to build God a house, and being told that instead, God would build him a house- if he and his children allowed the way of the Spirit to operate. But this response was totally missed by the crowd- they wanted another miracle (:30), clearly in the hope that again they might materially benefit from it.

*6:30 They replied to him: What then will you do for a sign, so that we may see and believe you? What work will you do?-* The Lord could have spoken words similar to Heb. 11:1 to them- He could have corrected them by saying that actually, faith is not related to what you can see. You cannot "see and believe" in the true sense of belief. But the Lord doesn't do that. He says that He in front of them is the bread of God, miraculously given. And their critical tone changes: "Lord, evermore give us this bread!" (:34). This surely is our pattern- not to necessarily correct every error when we see it, but to pick up something the other person has said and develop it, to bring them towards truth.

The sign or miracle they wanted was of yet more free bread, in order to compare with Moses who had given Israel manna. They had been given that sign- but they wanted it again, that they might benefit from it. They were missing the point that the Lord was greater than Moses.

*6:31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: He gave them bread out of heaven to eat-* The Lord's reply shows that the "he" they had in view was Moses. They wanted Him to again demonstrate that He was the prophet like Moses (Dt. 18:18). But He was greater than

Moses, and the manna He would give was of salvation, and not temporary food for the day.

The living word of God which speaks to us each personally. In this sense, we are constantly being invited to place ourselves in the position of those who played a part in the historical incidents which that word records. The Jews quoted to the Lord Jesus: "He gave *them* bread from heaven to eat", to which the Lord replied [after the teaching style of the rabbis to which they were accustomed] by changing and challenging a word in the quotation they made: "It is not Moses who gave *you* the bread". He wanted them to see that the account of bread being given to Israel in the wilderness was not just dry history. *They*, right there and then, were as it were receiving that same bread from Heaven. See on Mt. 22:31; Heb. 11:4.

*6:32 Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father; who now gives you the true bread out of heaven-* They were so focused upon Moses that they failed to appreciate the operation of God through Him by the Spirit. This is the typical failure of religious people- to focus upon the structure, the means to the end, rather than perceive the ultimate source and end, that which is before and behind and beyond the religious structure or individual they are so focused upon. And we can take that message to ourselves.

*6:33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world-*

These words, and others like them, are misused to support the wrong idea that Jesus existed in Heaven before his birth. Trinitarians take these words as literal in order to prove their point. However, if we are to take them literally, then this means that somehow Jesus literally came down as a person. Not only is the Bible totally silent about this, but the language of Jesus being conceived as a baby in Mary's womb is made meaningless. Jn. 6:60 describes the teaching about the manna as a saying "hard to take in" (Moffatt's Translation); i.e. we need to understand that it is figurative language being used. The Lord Jesus is explaining how the manna was a type of himself. The manna was sent from God in the sense that it was God who was responsible for creating it on the earth; it did not physically float down from the throne of God in Heaven. Thus the Lord's coming from Heaven is to be understood likewise; he was created on earth, by the Holy Spirit acting upon the womb of Mary (Lk.1:35).

The Lord Jesus says that "the bread that I will give is my flesh" (:51). Trinitarians claim that it was the 'God' part of Jesus which came down from Heaven. But the Lord says that it was his "flesh" which was the bread which came down from Heaven. Likewise He associates the bread

from Heaven with himself as the "Son of man" (Jn. 6:62), not 'God the Son'. In this same passage in Jn. 6 there is abundant evidence that He was not equal to God. "The living Father has sent me" (Jn. 6:57) shows that He and God do not share co-equality; and the fact that "I live by the Father" (Jn. 6:57) is hardly the 'co-eternity' of which Trinitarians speak.

It must be asked, When and how did Jesus 'come down' from Heaven? The Lord Jesus speaks of himself as "he which cometh down from heaven" (:33,50), as if it is an ongoing process. Speaking of God's gift of His Son, the Lord said "My Father is giving you the bread" from Heaven (v.32 Weymouth). At the time the Lord was speaking these words, he had already 'come down' in a certain sense, in that He had been sent by God. Because of this, He could also speak in the past tense: "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven" (:51). But he also speaks about 'coming down' as the bread from Heaven in the form of His death on the cross: "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v.51). So we have the Lord Jesus speaking here of having already come down from Heaven, being in the process of 'coming down', and still having to 'come down' in His death on the cross. This fact alone should prove that 'coming down' refers to God manifesting Himself, rather than only referring to the Lord's birth. This is conclusively proved by all the Old Testament references to God 'coming down' having just this same meaning. Thus God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, and 'came down' to save them through Moses. He has seen our bondage to sin, and has 'come down' or manifested Himself, by sending Jesus as the equivalent to Moses to lead us out of bondage.

### **A Devotional Appeal**

The Lord's language of coming down from Heaven can be understood from a very powerful devotional aspect. He reasons that because He had *come* down from Heaven, therefore, whoever *comes* to Him, He would never reject (Jn. 6:37,38). The connection is in the word "come". We 'come' to Jesus not by physically travelling towards Him, but in our mental attitudes. He likewise 'comes' to us, not by moving trillions of kilometres from Heaven to earth, but in His 'coming' down into our lives and experiences. If He has come so very far to meet us, and we come to Him... then surely we will meet and He will not turn away from us, exactly because He has 'come' so far to meet us. This theme continues throughout John's Gospel. "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62) is therefore not a reference to Him physically travelling off anywhere- He is saying that if people would not 'come' to Him in meeting, then He would withdraw the opportunity from them. He wouldn't stand waiting for them indefinitely. This explains the urgency behind His appeals to 'come' to Him. He had 'come down', and was waiting for people to 'come' to Him. He's come a huge distance, from the heavenly heights of His own spirituality, to meet with whores and gamblers, hobby level religionists, self-absorbed little

people... and if we truly come to Him, if we want to meet with Him, then of course He will never turn us away. For it was to meet with us that He 'came down'. This approach shows the fallacy of interpreting His 'coming down' to us and our 'coming' to Him in a literal sense.

And yet this Lord of all grace also sought to confirm men and women in the path they chose. He admitted that His comment about Himself being the manna which descended from Heaven was a "hard saying". And yet He goes straight on to say [perhaps with a slight smile playing at the corner of His lips] something even more enigmatic: "What and if you shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" (Jn. 6:62). Surely He is here choosing to give them yet another, even harder "saying"; and goes on to stress that His sayings, His words, are the way to life eternal (Jn. 6:63). For those who didn't want His words, He was confirming them in their darkness. And He did this by the mechanism of using an evidently "hard saying". Therefore to simplistically interpret the saying as meaning that the Lord had literally descended from Heaven through the sky just as literally as He would ascend there through the clouds... is in fact to quite miss the point- that this is a "hard saying". It's not intended to have a simplistic, literalistic interpretation.

Life was given to the world not only in the sense of eternal life. A way of life was shown to us, the only way of life- the life of the cross. It is a frequently found paradox in Scripture that life comes through death. The Lord's cross and resurrection are the prime example. However, it is not simply that His death opened the way to eternal life for us at His coming. It gives us spiritual life now, in that all that we do in our being and living should be motivated by the spirit of the cross. Each of the myriad daily decisions we take should be impacted by our knowledge of the cross. In this way, the cross gives life right now.

*6:34 They replied to him: Lord, always give us this bread-* "Always" or 'for ever' could mean that they simply wanted an eternal bread making machine to ease their material burden in their hand to mouth existence. But the sense of 'eternity' in their words leads us to wonder whether they were beginning to grasp His point. The Samaritan woman likewise starts off talking about literal water, and then comes to perceive that the Lord is offering an altogether different kind of water. It could be that the same shift in understanding, from the literal to the spiritual, is happening here too.

*6:35 Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. He that comes to me shall not hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst-* "The bread of life" was a Messianic term, and the Lord here makes one of His most direct claims to actually be Messiah. Several times the Lord stresses His personal identification with the manna / bread. But this was His flesh,

which He gave for the life of the world. The cross epitomised the man Jesus. Thus He could take the bread and deftly insist: "This is my body". There and then, He was to be identified with the slain body that hung upon the cross. In death, in life, this was and is and will be Him. But He was right then the bread of life. The essence of the cross was lived out in His daily life. And He was certain that He would be obedient to the final crisis of crucifixion, and would then and thereby become the ultimate "bread of life".

"He that comes to me shall never hunger" is a reference to men and women 'coming to' the cross to behold "that sight" of the cross, just as men came to the lifted up snake. But the Lord clearly has in mind how the believer in Him would be regularly fed, filled up with water so that "he that believes on me shall never thirst". The Spirit is given not just once, but in an ongoing sense we are filled up with it, if we are open to it. Only in a personal appropriation of the cross to ourselves can we find an inspiration that is utterly endless. No wonder the Lord insists we remember His cross at least weekly in the breaking of bread.

The Lord challenged us that if we truly eat His words, we'll never hunger or thirst; but 30 years or so later, He said that in the Kingdom, He will stop us hungering and thirsting (Rev. 7:16,17). He realizes that although we have it within our potential to live this kind of fulfilled spiritual life, in practice we will only get there in the Kingdom. The idea may be that we shall hunger and thirst for righteousness and spirituality now, but we are filled in this life by being incrementally filled up by the Spirit, as it is poured out in an ongoing sense. But the final ending of all such hunger is in the Kingdom, when we shall have Spirit nature, and our spiritual deficiency and need shall be no more.

6:36 *But I say to you: That you have seen me, and still you do not believe-* "Seeing" may be being used here as it is often in John- to refer to understanding. The Jews saw the Son coming to them and said "Come let us kill Him". They knew Him, and His relationship to the Father (7:28). But still they refused to believe. They wanted to be given the bread of life, Messiah, and He was standing before them. They had seen Him, and seen His creation of manna / bread, but still did not believe. Miracles do not produce lasting faith- that is one of the subtexts of John, especially relevant as he was preaching and ministering to converts in days when the miraculous gifts were disappearing.

6:37- see on Mk. 6:36.

*All that the Father gives me shall come to me, and him that comes to me I will in no way reject-* The language of 'coming to Jesus' is appropriate in the context to the Jews having made great efforts to come to Jesus,



walking around the lake or getting shipping in order to hopefully see another food miracle. The Lord is saying that those who truly came to Him in faith, as the Messianic bread of life, would in no way be rejected, never ever [the Greek is insistent upon this]. He will reject some at the last day, indeed Judaism generally would be cast out [s.w. "reject"] at that day (Lk. 13:28), and His death would cast out the prince of the Jewish world (12:31). But those who came to Him in faith He would not reject.

The Father has given all things of the new creation to the Son (3:35; 13:3), He gives the sheep to the Son (10:29; 17:11,24); the Lord was very aware of how the believers had been given to Him. In practice, this works out through how the Father gives individuals the ability to come to the Son (:65). The Father's gift is supremely the Spirit, the Comforter given by the Father (14:16); through this we come to the Son, and are finally given the ultimate gift of eternity. If we ask why one person comes to the Son and another doesn't, the answer is of course multi factorial, and includes issues of human freewill. But one element in the final algorithm of salvation is the gift / grace of God's calling. Paul uses this in Romans as a parade example of how salvation is of grace and not works.

The parable of the fig tree appears to show the Lord Jesus as more gracious and patient than His Father- the owner of the vineyard (God) tells the dresser (Jesus) to cut it down, but the dresser asks for another year's grace to be shown to the miserable fig tree, and then, he says, the owner [God] Himself would have to cut it down (Lk. 13:7-9). But in Jn. 6:37-39 we seem to have the Lord's recognition that the Father was more gracious to some than He would naturally be; for He says that He Himself will not cast any out, exactly because it was the Father's will that He should lose nothing but achieve a resurrection to life eternal for all given to Him. And the Lord observed, both here and elsewhere, that He was not going to do His own will, but rather the will of the Father (:38). And that will was to totally save all who wish. But that, by implication, was not necessarily the natural will of the Son. For He says in this context that He does not His will, but the Father's. Now this is exactly the sort of thing we would expect in a truly dynamic relationship- on some points the Father is more generous than the Son, and in other cases- vice versa. And yet Father and Son were, are and will be joined together in the same judgment and will, despite Father and Son having differing wills from one viewpoint. But this is the result of process, of differing perspectives coming together, of a mutuality we can scarcely enter into comprehending, of some sort of learning together, of a Son struggling to do the will of a superior Father rather than His own will, of conclusions jointly reached through experience, time and process- rather than an automatic, robot-like imposition of the Father's will and judgment upon the Son. And the awesome thing is, that the Lord invites us to know the

Father, in the same way as He knows the Father. His relationship with the Father is a pattern for ours too.

*6:38 For I came down from Heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me-* As noted on :37, the implication appears to be that the Father's will is to save, and so the Son will therefore not do His will, but the Father's- and never therefore reject any who come to Him in faith. This is huge assurance. The Father's will for our salvation is even stronger than that of His dear Son.

The Lord accomplished the will of God on the cross (see on Jn. 4:32-34). On the cross He came down from Heaven, there He manifested Yahweh in the greatest theophany of all time. The darkness over Him is to be read in the context of the OT theophanies which involved darkness at the time of the Lord's 'coming down'. But the Lord here speaks in the past tense. The essence of His cross was right then, before their eyes. In Him and His offer of free salvation, there was the assurance for all time to all men. He knew He would pass through the crucifixion experience, and that therefore the offer of life on account of His work was real right then and there.

6:39- see on Jn. 3:13.

*And this is the will of Him that sent me, that of all which He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day-* The Father's will for our salvation was perhaps stronger than the Lord's, for it is in this context that He says that He was doing not His will but the Father's (:38). But human dysfunction and love of materialism is such that even the strength of God's will can be resisted by us. For in 17:12 the Lord speaks as if He has succeeded in spiritually keeping all those given to him, except Judas: "I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition". We have been given by the Father to the Son, with the express will that we should not be lost, and the end point of His care would be our resurrection to life at the last day.

"Lose nothing" is the phrase which has just been used about the gathering of the fragments, that none be lost (:12). The Lord's will that not one be lost is manifest through our gathering of them. And He died so that none might perish (3:15,16). He 'loses' none of His people in that He give us right now the life, the eternal life, which shall never 'perish' [s.w.] or 'be lost' (10:28). Those who live that life now are assured of being raised up at the last day. The outcome of the last day is therefore no unknown question; if we are living the eternal life now, then we shall be immortalized in order to continue doing so. But it is the nature of the life lived, rather than immortality of itself, which is of the essence.

6:40 *For this is the will of my Father-* The will of the Father is a major theme in John, perhaps to counter erroneous notions about this term in the communities to whom John was preaching and pastoring. The connection is again back to the prologue, where we learn that all in the new creation are spiritually born by the Father's will (1:13). This will was His desire for our salvation, and it meant the Lord's death in order to bring it to reality (4:34). The will of God is for our salvation; if we ask anything according to that will, with the end of salvation in view, then we shall be heard (1 Jn. 5:14). Doing that will, living according to the eternal life, is living according to the will of God (1 Jn. 2:17).

*That every one that sees the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day-* This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake. God's will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine. The comment that "Every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him [shall] have eternal life" (Jn. 6:40) is another allusion to the serpent lifted up on the pole, where everyone who "looked upon the serpent of brass... lived" (Num. 21:9). The 'having eternal life' is different to being 'raised up at the last day'. We are given the gift of life now, through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts whereby we live and think as He did and does. That is the essence of the life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom; and so we shall be changed into immortality to enable that life to be eternally lived.

6:41 *The Jews therefore murmured concerning him, because he said: I am the bread which came down out of Heaven-* They understood the Heavenly bread as a reference to Messiah; and they doubted as to how a man they knew could in fact be Messiah. Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

6:42 *And they said: Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, I came down out of Heaven?-* As noted on :41, they perceived clearly enough that the Lord was claiming to be Messiah. The crowd knew Him, and Joseph and Mary. Galilee was small, both in population and geography. The folks who lived around the lake would have all known each other, and would have also known the carpenter from Nazareth. That He should now miraculously feed them, and claim to be Messiah and Son of God... was all so hard for them to

grasp. It is a window onto the Lord's artless perfection that He could live amongst them for so long, never sinning neither by omission nor commission, and yet not be perceived as anything more than the son of a carpenter.

6:43 *Jesus answered and said to them: Murmur not among yourselves-* The record of the disciples' murmuring in John 6 reflects how influenced they were by the Jews around them. "The Jews then murmured at him", and the Lord rebukes them: "Murmur not among yourselves". But then we read of how "Jesus knew in himself that his disciples were murmuring" (Jn. 6:40,43,61). And again, remember that these gospel records were written by the repentant disciples, and they were using the example of their own weakness in order to appeal to others. The disciples appeared to share Judaism's idea that Moses never sinned. When the Lord challenges them to find food for the crowd in the desert, they quote Moses' hasty words: "Whence shall I have flesh to give unto all this people?"; and note Moses almost mocks God by saying that all the fish of the sea wouldn't be enough to feed the people (Num. 11:13,22). Faced with the same need for bread and fish, the disciples justified their lack of faith by quoting Moses, apparently unwilling to accept that Moses' words at that time were not of faith. The way everything worked out, they doubtless learnt that Moses, like them, was of imperfect faith and spirituality.

6:44 *No one can come to me, except the Father that sent me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day-* See on :40- the drawing power is surely in the cross itself, for this is what draws all men unto the lifted up Christ (12:32 s.w.). There was and is a magnetism about Him there. And yet the Lord said this before His death, to people who had walked and sailed in order to 'come to Him'. Now He says that the real coming to Him requires the Father's drawing, or dragging, as the Greek means. Paul in Romans cites this idea of calling, of one called and another not, as a parade example of how salvation is by grace and not works. Yet the Father's work of drawing or dragging people to Himself is still effected through human agency. John uses the same word in describing how the disciples "drew" the net containing 153 fishes to shore (21:6,11), clearly symbolic of the great catch of the Gospel.

6:45- see on Mt. 12:18.

*It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught by God. Everyone therefore who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me-* The drawing of the Father is through hearing and learning from Him, about His Son. "The prophets" who spoke of how all shall be "taught by God" do so in the context of prophesying about the Messianic Kingdom on

earth (Is. 54:13; Jer. 31:34; Mic. 4:2). But the Lord applies these clearly future Messianic prophecies to the essential spiritual experience of the believer today; for we are now living the eternal life, the Kingdom life, the kind of life we shall then live.

The Lord Jesus often stressed that He was the only way to the Father; that only through knowing and seeing / perceiving Him can men come to know God. And yet in Jn. 6:45 He puts it the other way around: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me". And He says that only the Father can bring men to the Son (Jn. 6:44). Yet it is equally true that only the Son of God can lead men to God the Father. In this we see something exquisitely beautiful about these two persons, if I as a non-Trinitarian may use that word about the Father and Son. The more we know the Son, the more we come to know the Father; and the more we know the Father, the more we know the Son. This is how close they are to each other. And yet they are quite evidently distinctly different persons. But like any father and son, getting to know one leads us to know more of the other, which in turn reveals yet more to us about the other, which leads to more insight again into the other... and so the wondrous spiral of knowing the Father and Son continues. If Father and Son were one and the same person, the surpassing beauty of this is lost and spoilt and becomes impossible. The experience of any true Christian, one who has come to 'see' and know the Father and Son, will bear out this truth. Which is why correct understanding about their nature and relationship is vital to knowing them. The wonder of it all is that the Son didn't automatically reflect the Father to us, as if He were just a piece of theological machinery; He made a supreme effort to do so, culminating in the cross. He explains that He didn't do *His* will, but that of the Father; He didn't do the works *He* wanted to do, but those which the Father wanted. He had many things to say and judge of the Jewish world, He could have given them 'a piece of His mind', but instead He commented: "*But... I speak to the world those things which I have heard of [the Father]*" (Jn. 8:26). I submit that this sort of language is impossible to adequately understand within the Trinitarian paradigm. Yet the wonder of it all goes yet further. The Father is spoken of as 'getting to know' [note aorist tense] the Son, as the Son gets to know the Father; and the same verb form is used about the Good Shepherd 'getting to know' us His sheep. This wonderful, dynamic family relationship is what "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit", true walking and living with the Father and Son, is all about. It is into this family and wonderful nexus of relationships that Trinitarians apparently choose not to enter.

6:46 *Not that anyone has seen the Father, save he that is from God, he has seen the Father*- The Lord adds this as a foil or caveat to His teaching in :45 that the one who has learned of God comes to His Son. He means to say that total knowledge of Him is not possible, just as Moses could not

'see' the Father, neither can anyone claim to have fully 'seen' or perceived Him, except the Son. The point is to guard against the Jewish idea of justification by knowledge, as if 'learning' of the Father meant totally 'seeing' him. Such total, perfect knowledge is not necessary nor even attainable; what is of the essence is to allow ourselves to be drawn by the Father towards His Son.

The fact the Lord *had* seen God, as the One "from God", contrasts powerfully with how Moses could *not* see Him.

6:47 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes has eternal life*- The utter truthfulness of the Lord's promise to give us right now the life eternal is on the basis of the fact that He alone has "seen", completely perceived and understood, the Father (:46). The Father's will was totally about our salvation (:39,40). It was because the Son knew His Father's will that He could so solemnly protest that He was able and willingly eager to give eternal life to believers.

6:48 *I am the bread of life*- The emphasis is now placed upon "bread of life" rather than the Messianic term "bread of Heaven" because He wanted to explain how the believer has eternal life (:47). Bread must be eaten regularly; the idea is that we are regularly filled up with His life, His Spirit. But our spiritual life comes from eating Him. He is the source of life, rather than the entire text of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation including the Chronicles genealogies.

6:49 *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died*- Judaism had the idea that Moses created manna and this was the ultimate miracle. But the Lord's bread gave life, eternal life, rather than just temporarily making life more bearable on a daily basis. We must ask ourselves whether we are using Christianity in the same way- a temporary boost in the daily grind, rather than perceiving the wonder of the life offered both now and eternally.

6:50 *This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die*- The idea is not that a man eats once and never hungers again. The gift of the Spirit, of the Lord's life, is ongoing, but is predicated upon eating of Him.

The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life. He could take the bread and say that "this *is* my body which *is being given* [Gk.] for you"; He saw His sacrifice as already ongoing even before He left the upper room. The cross therefore

manifested the real Christ, the One who had been giving of Himself throughout His life.

As the manna was regularly eaten of, so the Lord's cross should be our daily inspiration and food. We must ask whether we personally and collectively have appreciated this. We obtain eternal life from the cross in the sense that we see there the definition of the true life; the life of crucifying self, slowly and painfully, for others; of enduring injustice and lack of appreciation to the very end, of holding on in the life of forgiveness and care for others in the face of their bitterest rejection... we see there the life we must lead, indeed the only true life. For all else is ultimately only death. And it is "eternal" in its quality more than in its length, in that this is the type of life which will be lived eternally in the Kingdom. It is in this sense that John later comments that eternal life is "in" Christ (1 Jn. 5:11,20 cp. 3:14,15).

*6:51 I am the living bread which came down out of Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever. Yes! The bread which I will give is my flesh – given for the life of the world-* John's Gospel points out how the Lord often changed tenses so strangely- to the extent that many have concluded that some of the strange combinations of tenses are a result of John's later editing. But it could be that the Lord used past, present and future tenses in close proximity in order to show His manifestation of the Name. He is the bread which was, is and will be on the cross. He came, is coming down, and will come (Jn. 6:50,51). The hour was coming and yet "now is" (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:31,32). These mixing of tenses must have seemed strange to the hearers, and they read strangely in the tense-conscious Greek language. About 50 times in John's Gospel we read the phrase "I am" as having been on the lips of Jesus. And it gets more and more frequent as He nears the cross, as if He was aware of an ongoing manifestation of the Name which reached its climax there.

Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming. The sacrificial animals are spoken of as "the bread of your God" (Lev. 21:6,8,21; 22:25; Ez. 44:7 etc.), pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to alluding to the manna, the Lord must have been consciously making this connection when He spoke about himself as the bread of God. The only time "the bread of God" could be eaten by the Israelite was at the peace offering. When in this context the Lord invites us to eat the bread of God, to eat His flesh and drink His blood (Jn. 6:51,52), He is looking back to the peace offering. But this is also an evident prophecy of the breaking of bread service. Many of the Jews just could not cope with what Christ was offering them when He said this. They turned back, physically and intellectually. They just could not

grapple with the idea that Christ was that peace offering sacrifice, and He was inviting them to sit down with God, as it were, and in fellowship with the Almighty, partake of the sacrificed body of His Son. But this is just what Christ is inviting each of us to do in the memorial meeting and in life generally lived in Him, to sit down in fellowship with Him, and eat of His bread. God really is here with us now. He is intensely watching us. He is intensely with us, He really is going to save us, if only we can have the faith to believe how much He loves us, how much He wants us to share His fellowship and know His presence.

The Lord taught the crowds to focus more on the gift of Him as a person and His sacrifice, than on the literal achievement of the Kingdom there and then. The Jews understood the coming of manna to be a sign that the Messianic Kingdom had come. Their writings are full of this idea:

- "You shall not find manna in this age, but you shall find it in the age that is coming" (Midrash Mekilta on Ex. 16:25)
- "As the first redeemer caused manna to descend...so will the latter redeemer cause manna to descend" (Midrash Rabbah on Ecc. 1:9)
- "[The manna] has been prepared for...the age to come" (Midrash Tanhuma, *Beshallah* 21:66).

Yet the Lord told them in Jn. 6 that the true manna was His flesh, which He was to give for the life of the world. Some have supposed from Josh. 5:10-12 cp. Ex. 16:35 that the manna fell for the first time on the eve of the Passover, thus adding even more poignancy to the Lord's equation of the manna with His death. Yet all this painstaking attempt to re-focus the crowds on the spiritual rather than the literal, salvation through His death rather than an immediate benefit for them, patient eating / sharing in His sufferings rather than eternity here and now...all this went so tragically unheeded. And it does to this day.

There are evident parallels between Paul's account of the breaking of bread, and the Lord's words about the giving of His body. There is no record of the great preaching commission in John, but he does in fact record it in more spiritual and indirect ways. And likewise there is no account of the breaking of bread, but in fact he has already recorded the essence of it in the discourse about the bread and wine of life in Jn. 6:

Jn. 6:51	1 Cor. 11:24
The bread which I will give	This
Is my flesh	Is my body
For the life of the world	Which is for you



Note in passing how 'we' are 'the world' to Jesus. And He likewise should be our world, as we are to Him. The word of interpretation which the Lord Jesus spoke over the emblems was a reflection of the way the head of the family explained the meaning of the Passover lamb and unleavened bread to the participants during the Passover meal. But before His death, during His life, the Lord Jesus as it were proclaimed this word of interpretation over His own body. The conclusion is clearly that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. This explains why so much stress is made upon His "blood" saving us, when crucifixion was in fact a relatively bloodless death. It wasn't as if the Lord was killed by His blood being poured out. But it was the life which the blood represented which was the essential basis of our redemption. And that life was lived out over 33 years, not just in the 6 hours of crucifixion. All this means that the spirit of the cross must be lived out in daily life; not merely in occasional acts of heroism, nor only in occasional acts of commitment or religious duty, such as attending ecclesial meetings. The cross was and is a life lived.

The link between the Lord's death and the true word / voice of God is made in Jn. 6:51 cp. 6:63: the words of the Lord give life, whereas also His flesh "which I will give for the life of the world" on the cross would also be the source of life. The giving of His flesh was in essence His word to man; the word made flesh. This phrase, we have suggested elsewhere, also refers to the Lord's death rather than His birth. See on Heb. 12:25.

The Lord died so that the world may have life (Jn. 6:51); but only those who eat His words and assimilate the true meaning of His cross will share this life; therefore "the world" refers to all who would believe. It is for them (us, by His grace), not even for those who respond but ultimately fall away, that the Lord gave His all. We are "the world" to Him. Let's not dilute the specialness of His love and the wonder of our calling to these things. We ought to be deeply, deeply moved by the fact that we have been called into God's world, into His sphere of vision. He even created the different types of meats "to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:3); they were made for us, not the world, and therefore we ought to give thanks for our food with this realization.

6:52 *The Jews therefore argued with each other, saying: How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*- The argument being "with each other" suggests that some of the crowd correctly understood the Lord's sense, whereas others still read Him on a literal level, recoiling at the idea of cannibalism, eating raw flesh, which was so disgusting to the Jewish mindset. I suggest the Lord intentionally framed His words in this way in order to provoke, in order to deepen the rift between those who insisted

on reading Him literally, and those who grasped the spiritual sense of His words. And that is perhaps an explanation of why there are so many 'difficult passages' in the Bible; those who want to read them literally, without spiritual discernment, end up thinking that His flesh literally came down from Heaven. Those who read with a spiritual sense have no problem grasping His intended meaning.

*6:53 Jesus replied to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves-* There is nothing else of meaning in human experience. His life, as shown in His death, is the only true and lasting sustenance for the believer. As noted on :52, the Lord chose images which He knew would provoke the divide between the literalists, the unspiritual, and those with spiritual discernment. To drink blood was deeply obnoxious to Jews. But unless they would see He referred to His life, and allow that life or spirit to displace their own, then they would have no life in themselves. The life He offers, like the gift of the Spirit, is "in" or 'within' the heart and mind.

*6:54 He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day-* The assimilation of His life and person is to take over our lives, so that our life is His. And His life is eternal, and therefore we shall be raised at the last day to continue living it.

There is also evident reference here to the breaking of bread. In our absorption of the bread and wine into our bodies, we symbolise our desire to appropriate His life and death into the very fabric of our lives. It is a symbol of our total commitment to living life as He did, and as it was epitomised in His time of dying. The breaking of bread is therefore not something which can be separated from the rest of our lives; it is a physical statement of how our whole lives are devoted to assimilating the spirit of this Man.

*6:55 For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink-* "The true" contrasts with that which is not the real thing but only masquerades as such; the contrast is with the Mosaic symbols which could not give life. And that Mosaic system was perhaps spoken of by the temporal gift of bread the Lord had given the crowds the day before.

*6:56 He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him-* This mutual 'abiding' is at the utter heart of what it means to be in Christ, a Christian. We assimilate His life into ours, especially appreciating that the cross was the epitome and intensest summation of that life. It may be expressed in physical symbol by the breaking of bread, but the essence is of mental life lived in a way that has absorbed Him into us. This requires conscious effort on our part. Habits like prayer, reflection, meditation, Bible reading become a vital part of our daily experience. But

allowing His life to be in us is responded to by Him abiding in us. He abides in us through the gift of His Spirit in our hearts, the Comforter, the anointing abiding within us (14:17; 1 Jn. 2:27; 3:24 "He abides in us by the Spirit which he has given us"; 4:13).

One of the common Aramaic Passover sayings at the time of Jesus was: "Behold this is the bread of affliction which our fathers did eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers, let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover". The Passover Haggadah of today includes virtually the same words. It is evident that the Lord Jesus several times in the course of His life alluded to these words. He spoke of how all who were hungry, who were heavy burdened, should "come" unto Him. And the bread which He gave would constantly satisfy. The conclusion surely is that He saw Himself even during His life as the slain Passover lamb. He lived out the essence of the cross in His life. Our carrying of His cross likewise speaks of life daily lived, rather than occasional heights of devotion or self-sacrifice.

*6:57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he that eats me, he also shall live because of me-* The Lord likens His relationship with the Father to our relationship with Him. The metaphor of eating suggests something regular and not simply a one time act. The Lord was regularly receiving the life or spirit of the Father as He progressed in daily relationship with Him, praying alone, meditating on His word. And we can have the same relationship with the Lord Jesus, receiving the same Spirit. The Father is "living" and not passive; His ongoing, outgiving relationship with His Son is to be reflected in our relationship with the Son.

*6:58 This is the bread which came down out of Heaven. Not as the fathers ate and died; he that eats this bread shall live forever-* "This is the bread" may have been spoken with the Lord pointing to Himself, or with some sign that He referred to Himself. Or He may have had in view the "life" of which He has just spoken in :57. The coming down out of Heaven is not to be taken literally, just as the manna didn't float down through the sky, but was of Divine origin. The life we can now live is that of God, that lived by the Lord Jesus in His mortal life; it is out of Heaven in that there is direct connection between that life we can live, and the life or Spirit of God in Heaven itself.

*6:59 These things said he in the synagogue, while teaching in Capernaum-* A synagogue has been unearthed in Capernaum which was called "the house of bread". He purposefully used such challenging language right there in the seat of Orthodox Jewish learning, in order to accelerate the process of choice in His hearers- to accept what He was offering, or remain 'safe' within a literal hearing of His words which would result in their utter rejection of Him. And the subsequent revolt against

Him, and the protestation of the disciples' loyalty to His words, shows that He succeeded.

*6:60 Many therefore of his disciples, when they heard this, said: This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*- As noted on :59 and earlier, the Lord phrased Himself in such a way as to provoke a choice in the hearts of those who heard Him. They had just witnessed the miracle of the bread; but the claim He really was Messiah, and they could live for ever, with the life and spirit of God, was too much for them. For all time, the idea that miracles lead to faith is demonstrated as false. John 6 shows how John seeks to present Jesus Himself as the words which give eternal life if eaten / digested (Jn. 6:63). And some commented: "This is a hard saying, who can hear him?" (Jn. 6:60 RVmg.), as if to present Jesus the person as the embodiment of His sayings / words.

There's something in our nature which shies away from the true Gospel because it's too good to believe. Paul had this struggle with the Jews, both in and outside of the church. They heard the offer of life from the Lord Himself, and rejected it: "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?" (Jn. 6:60). It was just too good to believe. There is something in our natures which is diametrically opposed to the concept of *pure* grace. We feel we must *do* something before we can expect anything from God. And yet in condescension to this, the Father sometimes almost goes along with us in this. See on Mt. 8:34.

*6:61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at this, said to them: Does this cause you to stumble?*- The talk of :60 was therefore carefully out of the Lord's earshot. But He perceived that many were now stumbling; and I have suggested that He intentionally phrased Himself in such ways as to provoke such a decision. The murmuring of the disciples was influenced by the murmuring of the Pharisees; see on :41. It was the equivalent of Israel's murmuring against Moses (1 Cor. 10:10 s.w.).

*6:62 What then if you should see the Son of Man ascending where he was before?*- I have suggested that the Lord spoke of eating His blood and body in order to deliberately provoke the audience to accept Him and His Spirit; or to remain on the level of the literal, meaning they would reject Him as heretical and weird. And so He now utters another such saying, which the unspiritual to this day also stumble over, thinking that He speaks of a literal ascent to literal Heaven where He had literally been before. But as noted earlier, literal pre-existence in a personal form in Heaven is not at all what He meant, nor what the Bible teaches. He was "with the Father" just as John the Baptist had been with the Father. He is rhetorically asking whether they would wish for this whole wondrous offer of salvation, this theophany of God coming down before them, to just abruptly end. For 'coming down' is the language of theophany. "Where he

was before" may refer to how He had been before age 30, when He gave no hint of His Divine origins. This point becomes more probable when we recall as noted on :42 that this crowd of people personally knew Him and His family, and felt He could not be God's Son nor Messiah exactly because they had known Him "before", in His life before His ministry. He would then be asking them: 'So do you want the wonderful offer and theophany to end, and me to just go back to being the Nazareth carpenter? Would you then feel better and less challenged?'

6:63 *It is the spirit that gives life. The flesh profits nothing-* I suggested on :62 that their problem was with the fact that they had known Him after the flesh, as He was "before"; for they had earlier known Him and His apparent family of origin (see on :42). They were not a crowd of anonymous people; they knew Him personally from His life before His ministry had begun. He may be saying to the effect: 'I as you knew me after the flesh will not save you. Nor will the bread I gave you physically. It is my words, my spirit, which is now available, which will give you eternal life'.

*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life-* The Lord in Jn. 6 taught parallels between belief in Him leading to eternal life, and His words, blood and body having the same effect. The word of Christ is in that sense His body and blood; it speaks to us in "the preaching (word) of the cross". There are parallels between the manna and the word of Christ; yet also between the manna and His death. His words give life as the manna did (:63), and yet the manna is specifically defined as His flesh, which He gave to bring life (:51). In this context He speaks of gaining life by eating His bread and drinking His blood, in evident anticipation of the memorial meal He was to institute (compare 'the bread which I *give* is my flesh' with 'this is my body, *given* for you'). Eating / absorbing His manna, the sacrifice of the cross, is vital to the experience of eternal life now and the future physical receipt of it.

Assimilating the spirit and life of His cross into our lives is the vital essence of eternal life; and He foresaw that one of the ways of doing this would be through remembering that cross in the breaking of bread service. And yet notice how the Lord took that bread of life and gave it to the disciples as His guests at the last supper. To take the bread is to show our acceptance of the gift of life which is in Jesus. The Lord stated that when He had been lifted up on the cross, *then* the Jews would realize the truth and integrity of the words that He had spoken (Jn. 8:28). Again, the cross is presented as a confirmation of all the words / verbal teaching of the Lord.

"Bread" or manna was a phrase the Rabbis commonly applied to the Torah- e.g. they interpreted Prov. 9:5 ("Come, eat ye of my bread") as referring to the Law. And the Lord was clearly playing on and extending this idea in John 6. The Lord taught that in the same way as Moses gave

Israel manna, so He was giving them Himself, and His word. He defines the meaning of the manna in Jn. 6:63 as His words. He is inviting us to eat Him in the sense of His words; He is the word of God. Remember how Jeremiah says that he found God's word and ate it, God's word was unto him the joy and rejoicing of his heart. Think too of the words of Job in 23:12, speaking as a type of Christ on this occasion: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food". We tend to think that as we eat physically, so we should eat spiritually. The point is often made amongst us that as we always find time to eat physically, so we should to eat God's word. But this is not quite what Job is saying. He says that we should relate to our spiritual food even *more* importantly than to our natural need for food. It's second nature for us to eat regularly, every day; we don't have to schedule time to eat, it flows naturally into our daily organization of life.

There are a number of similarities between the record of the gathering of the manna and that of the Passover. They could seethe the manna, as the Paschal lamb could be seethed. They were to gather the manna according to the size of their families, and the collection was to be organized by the head of the house. This is all the language of the Passover. The lamb represented Jesus, and so did the manna. The saving work of the lamb of God is further mediated to us through the medium of His word. In John 6 the Lord says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to have eternal life; and He says the same about eating His words (v.63). So often the Lord says that we have got eternal life, here and now. He keeps on saying it in John 6.

The parallel between the Lord's word and His Spirit should not be taken as justification for believing in a so-called 'spirit word', and assuming that He is here exhorting us to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, including the Chronicles genealogies, in order to get His Spirit; as if Bible reading somehow equals getting the Spirit. The words spoken by the Lord refer specifically to His words, and not the whole Bible. This is not to in any sense decry study of the Bible. But here, the Lord is saying that the abiding of *His* words within us is associated with His Spirit abiding with us. Those words are the message of Him. We can understand why early Christian converts were required to memorize the Gospels, Mark especially. The word of Him, which John is teaching in this Gospel of John, was to abide in them. There may even be a suggestion that they were to repeat His words as recorded in the Gospels, for most converts would have been illiterate and without access to written versions of the Gospels. Having Him, His manner of life and being, ever before us... this is having His Spirit, eating Him, abiding in Him.

6:64- see on Jud. 16:13; Jn. 13:11.

*But there are some of you that do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe, and who it was that would betray him-* Many of the crowd had now walked away in disgust. But lest those who remained now thought that they were the chosen ones, the Lord warns that there were even some of them who did not.

The impression of a close spiritual relationship and subsequent shock on appreciating that Judas was a traitor that we see expressed in the Psalms is hard to reconcile with our Lord knowing Judas' motives from the beginning. Jesus knew from the beginning that some would betray him: "There are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him... Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto me of my Father" (Jn. 6:64,65). Our Lord knew that not all were called by God to be able to come to Him- He knew who would not believe. And yet He suppressed this knowledge in his love and hope for Judas- just as it could be that God limits His omnipotence and omniscience in His dealings with us [hence His sense of hurt, shock and genuine disappointment with human behaviour]. If this passage does imply Christ's knowledge of Judas' intentions (as Jn. 6:70 seems to), these words were spoken in the final year of the Lord's ministry, when Christ's sensitive spirit would have noticed the tell-tale signs in Judas. [Or is "He spake of Judas... that should betray him" (Jn. 6:70) a comment added by John, which would mean that Jesus was not necessarily thinking of Judas when he said "One of you is a devil"?].

The Lord was human, and there is a capacity within human nature to know something on one level and yet deny it in practice. Samson surely knew what Delilah was going to do to him, yet his love for her made him blind. And so it could be that on one level the Lord knew Judas' apostasy; and One of His sensitivity would likely have perceived anyway the man's dishonesty and wrong motivations. But His love and hope for him was such that He acted and felt with genuine surprise and shock when Judas actually did what the Lord foreknew he was going to do. We have here a profound window onto the Lord's humanity.

*6:65 And he said: For this cause have I said to you, that no one can come to me, except it be given to him of the Father-* As noted on :44, we must be "drawn" to the Father. But as Paul develops at length in Romans, the very existence of such things as calling and predestination indicate that the final algorithm of human salvation includes God's grace at a personal level. For not all are called. The calling is itself a gift, a term often used about the gift of the Spirit.

*6:66 Upon this many of his disciples withdrew, and no longer walked with him-* Just as today, the teaching that some are called and some are not (:65) makes some turn back. Already, many had turned away, and the Lord was left with a smaller crowd; and now many of them "withdrew".

But "withdrew" is literally 'to go back from', 'to go behind', and is also used of men following the Lord, behind Him. The same word is used of turning back, going behind; and also of going behind in the sense of following. This is intentional. The idea may be that it is not a question of literally following after Him, behind Him; but of following Him in the heart. Peter was taught this when he walked behind the Lord physically, but was told that if he were to really follow Him, he must take up the cross daily and follow. And John's Gospel ends with a play on the same theme, of following behind. The same word is used of how the Jews perceived that the whole Jewish world had gone behind Jesus (12:19); but in fact very few were really following Him. To not walk with Him, the light of the world, was to walk in darkness (12:35; 1 Jn. 1:6,7). And they did so because they thought it unreasonable that some are called and others are not (:65). They played God, and thus turned away from the greatest grace- of having been called to see and know Him.

*6:67 Jesus asked the twelve: Would you also go away?*- The large crowd had diminished twice, as the Lord purposefully provoked them with His language and ideas. Perhaps now only the twelve and a few others were left. And He asks them if they will also "go away", using the term used for their 'going away' from Him and seeking to return to their home area in Capernaum (see on :21).

*6:68 Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life-* It was the Lord's "words", His use of language about drinking blood, ascending where He had been before, and about not all being called... which had caused the majority to go away into the darkness. Hence the significance of Peter's comment that His words were those of life eternal. His life was His words, and Peter was abiding with those words and that life. Peter was one of the few who really grasped the meaning of the Lord's miraculous provision of bread, and the discourse which followed. The Lord had said that He was the living bread, of which a man could eat and live forever. Peter's comment that only the Lord had the words of eternal life showed that he quite appreciated that it was the *words* of the Lord Jesus which were the essential thing, not the physicality of the miracle (fascinating as it must have been to a fisherman; Jn. 6:51 cp. 68).

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be



because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). Again we have the same words, 'quicken' and 'his spirit'. And Paul says that our resurrection will have some similarities with that of our Lord- who was "put to death in the flesh but quickened by [on account of] the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). It was according to the spirit of holiness, of a holy life, that Jesus was raised and given eternal life (Rom. 1:4). What all this means in practice is that if we live a 'quicken' spiritual life now, a life modelled around what Jesus would have done or said in any given situation, then we have the guarantee that we will be 'quicken' in the Kingdom. Thus Rom. 8:2 speaks of "the law of the spirit of life in Christ". Having "the spirit" in our hearts is therefore the seal, the guarantee, of our future salvation (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14).

6:69- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

*And we have believed and know that you are the Holy One of God-* The people's real problem was that they could not accept a man well known to them as Messiah. Out of all the range of Messianic titles which Peter could have chosen, he chooses one which implies the Lord was God's "One", His begotten Son. The Lord must have been greatly encouraged, but He instead takes issue with Peter's statement that "we have believed and know...". For one of them did not. The implication could be that Judas did what he did not simply for money, but from a disbelief that Jesus was in fact Messiah and Son of God.

6:70- see on Jn. 6:64; 8:44.

*Jesus answered them: Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?-* As noted on :64, the crowd had progressively diminished as they all became offended at the Lord's words. Perhaps only the twelve remained, and the Lord didn't want them to think that even they were all going to abide. Even one of them was an opponent, a false accuser. Judas was 'chosen'; but being chosen is not of itself enough. We must make our choosing or election "sure" (2 Pet. 1:10- perhaps written by Peter with his mind on Judas).

6:71 *Now he spoke of Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot; for he was the one of those twelve who would betray him-* Clearly the term "devil" doesn't refer to an Angelic being who fell off the 99th floor in Eden. The term is here applied to Judas, just as "satan" is to Peter. Perhaps this is another of the points of similarity between Peter and Judas, who in essence did the same thing in denying the Lord; and yet Peter's core faith triumphed and he repented, whereas Judas could not believe in the Lord's grace as Peter did.



## CHAPTER 7

*7:1 And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for he would not walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him-* This is an exemplification in practice of how the Lord's life was not taken from Him, but He gave it at the time and in the manner which He Himself wished. He knew that if He went to Judea and walked openly, He would be killed. And He wished to die at Passover, not tabernacles (:2). This conscious self-giving of the Lord is hard to plumb, but it remains our constant pattern. Yet we note that the Lord did in fact teach openly at the feast of tabernacles. He did go into Judea. His reasoning may have been that He could be killed on the way, but He judged [rightly] that public opinion was sufficiently for Him that He would not be killed by the Jews within Jerusalem at the time of the tabernacles feast. This could have all been beamed into Him by the Father, but I prefer to imagine His own sensitivity and spiritual reasoning leading Him to these conclusions.

*7:2 Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of tabernacles, was at hand-* Again, what the Old Testament describes as "the feasts of Yahweh" are spoken of as the feasts of the Jews; the law of God through Moses became "their law", and the temple of Yahweh became the temple of the Jews. They had hijacked God's ways and turned them into their own mere religion.

*7:3 His brothers said to him: Depart from here and go into Judea, so your disciples may also see the works you do-* The disciples in view were presumably the Lord's sympathizers in Judea. "The works" refer to miracles. The Lord had been rejected by many exactly because the Galilean audience knew Him before His ministry began, and now He was claiming to be Son of God and Messiah, unwelcome public attention would be focused upon His family of origin. They therefore wanted Him to go to Judea, and taunted Him as to why He didn't do His miracles there too. Both his family and the men of Israel generally rejected David's claims to be able to save Israel (1 Sam. 17:28-30), and this pointed forward to the Lord's rejection by His brothers. Eliab's "Why camest thou down hither?" matches the Lord's brothers telling Him "depart from here".

*7:4 For no one does anything in secret while he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world-* This was another form of the temptation to "come down from the cross" and the wilderness temptations, to persuade the Jewish world by visible miracle. But the Lord's experience in chapter 6 had prepared Him for this; the miracle of the feeding had only led to men turning away from Him once it was explained to them. As explained on :3, the Lord's family didn't want all the public attention now given to them because of His claims to be God's Son and Messiah. They taunted Him that doing miracles in backwater Galilee was effectively being secretive; if He were indeed

Messiah then He surely would want to be "known openly", and so they urged Him to leave them and go to Jerusalem and manifest Himself openly to the Jewish world there. Just as the Lord's synagogue-influenced brothers wanted Him to show Himself openly to the world (Jn. 7:4), so did the disciples (Jn. 14:22). There was that hankering for Him to openly display Himself as the Messiah which Judaism had created within its own mind. This was all a repeat of the wilderness temptation.

Perhaps they were alluding to the Rabbinic idea that as Moses hid himself and then re-emerged from obscurity, so Messiah would. Rabbi Berekiah said: "As the first deliverer [Moses] was revealed, then hidden and afterwards appeared again, so will it also be with the last deliverer [Messiah]". John's record is clearly presenting the Lord as Moses in this sense.

In collective societies, where life was totally lived in the public realm and anything done 'in private' is seen as deviant (cp. Jn. 7:4; 18:20), shame was related to how *others* saw you, not your internal reflections and assessment of your guilt or innocence for things like private thoughts and unknown deeds. And there's every reason to think that the global village of the 21st century is an equally conscience-less place, where so long as you talk in nice speak and don't get caught actually *doing* anything society thinks is wrong, you can exist with no internal, personal conscience at all. Indeed, the word "conscience" originated from words which literally mean 'common / with others / knowledge'- conscience was collective, whereas the Biblical understanding of it is more on a personal level.

*7:5 For even his brothers did not believe in him-* The later New Testament records that they did later believe in Him. This would have required fair humility on their part. His behaviour in family life would have been perfect before God; no sins of omission nor commission. But the beauty of it all was that nobody perceived that. And it was His very humanity which stopped them believing in Him, just as it is His humanity which has been such a barrier to faith for so many, leading them to create false doctrines such as the Trinity in order to try to get over the problem, and thereby make Him the less challenging to we who share His same nature.

*7:6 Jesus replied to them: My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready-* "My time" surely refers to the time for Him to die on the cross. The phrase is only used elsewhere by Paul about "my time of departure" (2 Tim. 4:6), reflecting how he saw the Lord's death in his death, and thereby was confident in sharing in His resurrection. We need to have the same attitude. The word *kairos*, "time", can also refer to a specific time, i.e. a Jewish feast. It is used like this in Lk. 13:1 AV: "There were present at that season some...", the idea being that there is reference to some who were present [in Jerusalem] at that feast. So the Lord may mean that *His* feast, the one at which He was to die, Passover,

had not yet come. For the debate was about going up to the feast of Tabernacles, not Passover. But their feast was always prepared [NEV "ready"], for they were participating in the feast in a literal manner. The idea seems to be that the Lord's feast, the Passover when He was to die, was not yet prepared. He, and other factors, were not yet prepared. But for their feast of tabernacles, everything was ready for them and they might as well go to it at any time.

*7:7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify of it, that its works are evil-* The Lord's brothers were on the side of the Jewish world. They feared they would be hated by Jewish society because of their connection with the Lord, but He assures them that they have nothing to fear. Because it was His testimony against their evil works which was the basis for hate. The Lord did not specifically state that the works of the Jewish world were evil; but the phrase issued in 3:19 of how the Lord's life was such a light that the Jews shrunk back from it, preferring the darkness, lest His light reveal their works as evil. His life lived was therefore a testimony. Just as our most powerful witness is our life lived rather than words spoken or theology preached. The Jewish world hated the Lord's true disciples because they were not "of" that world (15:18,19; 17:14). Separation from the world elicits hatred from the world simply because we are different. This is basic human group psychology, to hate any outside the group or who leave the group. It has to be, therefore, that the true believer is hated by the world; we should not marvel at it (1 Jn. 3:13). Our positions are an implicit criticism and rebuke of them, which they 'hear' and respond to with hatred rather than indifference or the 'religious tolerance' which is the talk of the West at this time.

*7:8 You go up to the feast. I will not be going up to this feast, because my time is not yet fulfilled-* The AV adds "I go not up yet". Perhaps He is using spiritual language in order to confuse those who did not wish to spiritually perceive Him. He was going to the feast of tabernacles; but He means that He is not 'going up' to it in the sense of making His self-offering there at that feast, because His hour has not yet come for that. He knew He must wait until Passover for that. He may simply have meant that He perceived that He could be killed on the way to the feast, and so He was not going to go up at that time, because that was not the intended time for His death.

*7:9 And having said these things to them, he stayed in Galilee-* Perhaps He did not want to join the caravan of travellers going to the feast from Galilee, for this would have involved Him camping out with His family. They did not want association with Him, and He did not wish to force the issue. It was perhaps this gentle, sensitive policy which led to many of them coming to believe in Him after His death.

*7:10 But when his brothers had gone to the feast, then he also went to it, not publicly but as it were in secret-* The caravans descending upon Jerusalem for the feast were strictly organized according to families and towns of origin. The Lord did not wish to have to raise His earthly background because this would distract from His self-presentation as the One "from Heaven", of Divine origin, as emphasized in chapter 6. He therefore "in secret" joined the caravans, disguising His identity. There were many who would have been eager to use His presence amongst the pilgrims as an opportunity for staging a revolution and enthroning Him as king. Remember that this was one of His wilderness temptations, which returned to Him at times like this. His wisdom in avoiding such a situation is a mark of His recognition of His own frailty. He avoided temptation.

*7:11 The Jews searched for him at the feast, and asked: Where is he?-* This question "Where is he?" is recorded three times in John, and nowhere else in the New Testament (9:12; 20:15). The Lord's apparent absence was in order to elicit that question and a seeking for Him. His apparent absence and silence in the traumas of life is to likewise provoke in us the same question. I suggest in John's context this is all to add background to the momentous statements we have in the promise of the Comforter- that the Lord who was physically absent is present through His Spirit. His physical absence is not critical. And those who seek for Him shall find Him.

*7:12 And there was much murmuring among the crowds concerning him. Some said: He is a good man. Others said: Not so. He deceives the people-* The miracles done were clear enough, but still some thought He was a deceiver. Again John is making the point that miracles do not play a great role in eliciting faith. And this was a necessary point to be made, seeing John was writing at the time when the miraculous gifts were being withdrawn and phased out.

*7:13 Yet no one spoke openly about him for fear of the Jews-* Another theme of John is that belief in Jesus as Messiah and Lord must be openly stated. He records the examples of the healed blind man, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who 'came out' for the Lord. The Greek word for "openly" is used around 30 times in the New Testament for the 'openness' of the Lord's witness and that of the disciples. It is a characteristic of those who believe they are living the eternal life and have been filled with the love and Spirit of the Father and Son. But it is fear of our image before others which stymies that boldness. The same word is used of how the Lord spoke openly or boldly (:26); seeking those who heard Him to likewise be open and bold in coming out for Him. Joseph of Arimathea is presented as a secret disciple who "for fear of the Jews" did not come out

openly for the Lord (19:38 s.w.), and John uses the same term to describe how they the disciples were likewise living "in fear of the Jews" (20:19). It was the experience of the Lord's death and resurrection which results in the Acts record so often describing how they "spoke openly" of the Lord, now fearless of the Jews. The Lord's crucifixion and rising again should have a similar impact upon us.

*7:14 When the feast was half way through, Jesus went into the temple and taught-* "Half way through" is "in the midst", and the term is usually used not of time but of being in the midst of persons. His entry into the temple in the midst of Israel could have been seen as a triumphal entry, in preparation for what He planned to do at the next Passover feast. If the reference is to waiting half way through the eight days of the feast, then we see how the Lord was carefully calculating His impact. He knew that if He were to openly preach for eight days, He could be arrested or provoke a revolution. So He timed His appearance at the optimal time- to get His message over to as many as possible without provoking the events which would lead to His death. He of course planned His Passover appearances to lead to His death. We see here something of the degree to which the Lord gave His life, it was not taken from Him; He Himself carefully planned things rather than being a mute puppet in the Divine hand.

*7:15 The Jews marvelled, saying: How is it that this man has learning, when he has never had an education?-* As the Son of God, the Lord would or could have been an intellectual without compare. The fact He had not been educated would have been revealed in all the background checks they had run on Him. And His lack of education speaks of the abject poverty in which He had grown up- out working from a child rather than studying. But in the Lord we see a challenge for all time to the effect that lack of time, long hours, little cash, demanding domestic situations... are no ultimate barrier to developing God's mind and growing spiritually.

*7:16 Jesus answered them and said: My teaching is not mine, but His that sent me-* The Lord says nothing of how He had figured out Hebrew and Aramaic letters because of His own intelligence. Rather He says that His ability to teach when He was uneducated was yet another sign that He was sent from God with God's message. The differentiation made by the Lord here between Himself and the Father is yet another problem for the Trinitarian paradigm.

7:17- see on Jn. 8:43.

*If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know of this teaching, whether it is of God, or I speak from myself-* Most of the audience were illiterate and had no access to the Hebrew scrolls of the Old Testament in order to check out whether the Lord's doctrine was of God or simply from Himself,

His own philosophy. The will of God is of our salvation and sanctification; this has been developed so far throughout John's Gospel. He who wishes above all things to live God's life, to have His Spirit, to live the life eternal with Him... they will intuitively know whether the Lord's doctrine is right or not. This intuitive element is in fact what leads to faith in the first place. There is a strong tendency to talk this down, and assume that it is by intellectual process that a person decides what is true or otherwise. But all appeal to intellectual process alone to decide 'truth' is flawed. For we are talking of spiritual things and not material. And legitimate intellectual process varies between persons. They may come to different conclusions about the same teaching which they analyse. And some are far more capable of intellectual analysis than others. There has to be something beyond intellectual process to decide truth. Here the Lord expresses this as a willing to do God's will, a heart for God, a desire for eternity. In a word, we must be open to the things of the Spirit. And then, the teachings make sense and there is an intuitive congruence between them and our own spirit.

*7:18 He that speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but he that seeks the glory of Him that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him-* The Lord here discerns that all public teaching tends towards self-glorification. If a teacher is totally concerned with God's glory and not at all for his own glory, then he is of God. Indeed, the Lord here defines having "no unrighteousness" with not seeking one's own glory. He sees this principle as so fundamental that He considers that a person who seeks totally God's glory is therefore from God. This is a sober warning to all who teach publicly. Only the perfect, in whom is no unrighteousness, can say that they totally seek God's glory and not at all their own. There is in all of us [for none are without unrighteousness] a tendency towards our own self glory. This must be accepted, and struggled against. Nor should we seek to give glory to teachers. We must remember the principle here- that the Lord Jesus alone had no unrighteousness in Him, and therefore He sought only and totally God's glory in His teaching; and thereby He was validated as a teacher from God.

Seeking His glory is to be the essential issue in our lives. If we seek God's glory- i.e. the development of the attributes and characteristics of His Name- He will seek ours (John 8:50), and our glory is His glory. The Lord sought the Father's glory as the Father sought His glory (8:50). The word for 'seek' used here can imply 'worship'- we must worship this concept of giving glory to God in our lives. God's glory is His essential self (17:5), yet He is willing to give us His glory. He will not give His glory to anyone apart from His people (Is. 48:11). What higher honours can be revealed to us?

Fear of false teachers, even paranoia about them, is what has led to so much division in practice. The Lord Jesus tackled the issue of whether a



person is a true or a false teacher. He didn't make the division so much on the *content* of their teaching, as we usually do, but rather says that the true teacher is motivated by seeking the Father's glory, whereas the false teacher seeks only his own glory (Jn. 7:18). Yet it is the endless fear of 'false teachers' in terms of the *content* of their teaching which has led to so much division- and often the process of it seems to have led to self-glorifying individuals establishing their own followings. It is by their *fruits* that they are known / discerned, rather than the analysis of their *content* by intellectual process alone.

*7:19 Did not Moses give you the law and yet none of you does the law? Why do you seek to kill me?*- Jews sought the death penalty for a person who broke the Mosaic law; yet the Lord points out that they were not obedient to that law themselves. He had taught in 5:45 that Moses actually condemned them.

*7:20 The crowd answered: You are crazy! Who seeks to kill you?*- The crowd surely knew the Jews were plotting to kill the Lord; hence their fear of speaking openly about Him (:13). But the Lord did not get engaged in trying to persuade them of a different version of events and history. Instead He focused on the essence, which was their marvel instead of true faith (:21). "You are crazy" is literally 'you have a demon'. Unexplained illnesses, especially mental conditions, were understood as demon possession. And the Lord went along with that misunderstanding. Here too He doesn't stop to argue with them about their false theology of demons; His concern is with their deeper unbelief (:21).

*7:21 Jesus answered and said to them: I did one work and you all marvel because of it!*- The Lord said this in response to their denial that anyone was out to murder Him. He could have responded by giving quotations of words and statements both heard and reported. But He rarely answers questions on their own terms. Such point for point debating, striving to enforce one version of events upon another, virtually never succeeds in bring about understanding. Instead He comments further on how just one miracle had led to "marvel", to disbelief rather than belief; and had led some to plan to kill Him. He doesn't say 'I did a miracle, and some got so jealous they tried to kill Me'. Instead He argued that 'I did a miracle and you didn't believe as you should, you just marvelled'.

*7:22 Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses but of the fathers) and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man*- The crowd had not responded to the Lord's accusation that they broke the Law. But He knew that they were angry about that, filling their minds with lists of their own righteousness and legalistic obedience to laws. But again He rises above the temptation to comment upon their major disobedience in other areas. Rather does He seek to demonstrate that within the very legal structure of the Mosaic law, there was the requirement to break one law in order to

keep another. The reason for that was to drive the thoughtful Israelite to throw themselves upon grace, and to realize that justification could not be achieved by obedience to law.

*7:23 If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man completely whole on the Sabbath?*- As noted on :22, the structure of the Mosaic law was in order to make legalistic obedience impossible if one insisted upon a casuistic, literalistic reading of it. For one command resulted in another being broken. And the Lord is pointing the contrast between their cutting off a piece of flesh, and Him making a man completely whole- implying His cure of the lame man was a total cure of every part of the man's wasted body. The Lord rightly perceived their 'anger' with Him for doing a good work. The reference is back to how the healing of the impotent man led to the Jews seeking to kill the Lord (5:18). The implication is that on His current visit to Jerusalem, He had done no miracles. They were still remembering with indignation that previous incident. We see here how the Lord worked with an economy of miracle.

*7:24 Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment-* The Lord is still alluding to the incident in chapter 5, where He cured the impotent man on the Sabbath and the Jews plotted to kill Him. He had explained that He had done so because "My judgment is just" (5:30). These are the same words as used here in inviting the crowd to "judge righteous ["just"] judgment". John will later again emphasize how God's judgments are just (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). We are not to judge in the sense of condemning, pre-judging in an ultimate sense; but rather is the invitation to see things from God's perspective.

As recipients of God's grace through the experience of His way of working with us reflecting His character, we too must reflect those same characteristics to others. This is why we *must* judge- for in doing so, we have the opportunity to reflect God's character. We must judge righteous judgment (Jn. 7:24) in reflection of that of "the Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim. 4:8). David was almost eager to replicate the principles of God's judgments in how he judged issues (Ps. 75:10 cp. 7; 75:7 cp. 2). And therefore Asaph poses the question to Israel's judges: 'Because God judges justly, why don't you?' (Ps. 82:1-3). As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge. "Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the... fatherless and widow" (Dt. 27:79) because "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widow is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). Israel were to reflect God's judgments in their judgments.

*7:25 Therefore, some of those from Jerusalem asked: Is this not he whom they seek to kill?*- "Those from Jerusalem" knew that indeed the Jewish leadership wanted to kill the Lord. It was the crowd of visiting pilgrims from the provinces who seemed quite unaware of this (:20). The Lord could so easily have responded to the mocking claim that nobody sought to kill Him by arguing that yes, indeed there are such people here in Jerusalem, and you provincial folk are ignorant of that fact. But that is not His style, and such point blank confrontation should likewise be avoided by us. Instead as ever He cut to the essential spiritual point and issue.

*7:26 And lo, he speaks openly and they say nothing to him. Can it be that the rulers indeed know that this is the Christ?*- They wondered whether the rulers had abandoned their well-known plans to kill the Lord because actually they now recognized Him as Messiah. The Lord's openness of 'boldness' of speaking was emulated by the disciples- the same word is used throughout Acts of their witness. He wished that His hearers would come out as openly as He had; for we learnt in :13 that His hearers feared to speak openly of Him as He did of Himself.

*7:27 However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is-* The Lord's claims had been researched, and it had been discovered that He was the son of a questionable woman called Maryam who had gotten pregnant out of wedlock and the whole thing had been covered up. We note Mary [and the Lord] did not publicize His real history, His birth in Bethlehem, the visit of the wise men etc. Perhaps this was news indeed for those who first read or heard it in the accounts of Matthew and Luke. Thirty years earlier, the Jews had known full well the answer to the question 'Where does the Christ come from?'. They had given the correct answer- from Bethlehem, as stated in Micah. But now, their theology had changed and veered into mysticism, claiming that the origins of Messiah would be unknown. We see here a classic example of how theology changes in order to cope with inconvenient truths. The mysticism of the Trinity would be a parade example; it is an attempt to cope with the human Christ whose achievement of perfection within human nature requires much faith, and is a challenge to all of us who bear the same nature. And so the height of the challenge was blunted, the height of the demand minimized, by a slide into mysticism, abstracting the amazing concrete achievement into mere theological terms which are words with no weight in practice.

If He were really like us, then this demands an awful lot of us. It rids us of so many excuses for our unspirituality. And this, I'm bold enough to say, is likely the psychological reason for the growth of the Jesus = God ideology, and the 'trinity' concept. The idea of a personally pre-existent Jesus likewise arose out of the same psychological bind. The Jews wanted

a Messiah whose origins they wouldn't know (Jn. 7:27), some inaccessible heavenly figure, of which their writings frequently speak- and when faced with the very human Jesus, whose mother and brothers they knew, they couldn't cope with it. I suggest those Jews had the same basic mindset as those who believe in a personal pre-existence of the Lord. The trinity and pre-existence doctrines place a respectable gap between us and the Son of God. As John Knox concluded: "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the pre-existence and we can have the pre-existence without the humanity. There is absolutely no way of having both". His person and example aren't so much of an imperative to us, because He was God and not man. But if this perfect man was indeed one of us, a man amongst men, with our very same flesh, blood, sperm and plasm... we start to feel uncomfortable. It's perhaps why so many of us find prolonged contemplation of His crucifixion- where He was at His most naked and most human- something we find distinctly uncomfortable, and impossible to deeply sustain for long. But only if we properly have in balance the awesome reality of Christ's humanity, can we understand how one man's death 2,000 years ago can radically alter our lives today. We make excuses for ourselves: our parents were imperfect, society around us is so sinful. But the Lord Jesus was perfect- and dear Mary did her best, but all the same failed to give Him a perfect upbringing; she wasn't a perfect mother; and He didn't live in a perfect environment. And yet, He was perfect. And bids us quit our excuses and follow Him. According to the Talmud, Mary was a hairdresser [*Shabbath* 104b], whose husband left her with the children because he thought she'd had an affair with a Roman soldier. True or not, she was all the same an ordinary woman, living a poor life in a tough time in a backward land. And the holy, harmless, undefiled Son of God and Son of Man... was, let's say, the son of a divorcee hairdresser from a dirt poor, peripheral village, got a job working construction when He was still a teenager. There's a wonder in all this. And an endless challenge. For none of us can now blame our lack of spiritual endeavour upon a tough background, family dysfunction, hard times, bad environment. We can rise above it, because in Him we are a new creation, the old has passed away, and in Him, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Precisely because He blazed the trail, blazed it out of all the limitations which normal human life appears to impress upon us, undeflected and undefeated by whatever distractions both His and our humanity placed in His path. And He's given us the power to follow Him.

*7:28 Therefore Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself. But He that sent me is true, whom you do not know-* The Lord's appeal was so emotional and direct because He knew that subconsciously, they recognized Him for who He was. They were in denial. They were so near to salvation, but so far. The leaders of first century Israel initially recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Mt. 21:38 cp. Gen. 37:20;

Jn. 7:28). They saw (i.e. understood, recognized) him, but then they were made blind by Christ (Jn. 9:39). It was because they "saw" Jesus as the Messiah that the sin of rejecting him was counted to them (Jn. 9:41). This explains why the Roman / Italian nation was not held guilty for crucifying Him, although they did it, whereas the Jewish nation was. And yet there is ample Biblical evidence to suggest that these same people who "saw" / recognized Jesus as the Christ were also ignorant of his Messiahship. "Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am... Ye neither know me, nor my Father... when ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 7:28; 8:19,28) were all addressed to the same group of Jews. Did they know / recognize Jesus as Messiah, or not? As they jeered at him on the cross, and asked Pilate to change the nameplate from "Jesus, King of the Jews", did they see Him as their Messiah? It seems to me that they didn't. In ignorance the Jewish leaders and people crucified their Messiah (Acts 3:17 RV). And yet they knew Him for who He was, they saw Him coming as the heir. I would suggest the resolution to all this is that they did recognize Him first of all, but because they didn't want to accept Him, their eyes were blinded, so that they honestly thought that He was an impostor, and therefore in ignorance they crucified Him. And yet, it must be noted, what they did in this ignorance, they were seriously accountable for before God.

*7:29 I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent me-* The Son's knowledge of / relationship with the Father was partly because of His being God's Son, "from Him". He had a natural aptitude for the things of the Father. For all their searching of the Scriptures, they did not know God (:28). The Hebrew sense of 'knowing' is of relationship, rather than academic knowledge.

*7:30 Therefore they sought to take him, but no one laid his hand on him- because his hour had not yet come-* The upsurge of hatred against Him was not just because He claimed to be Messiah; for there were many who claimed to be Messiah and who were greeted with jovial scepticism. The anger was because as explained on :28, they did actually realize in their subconscious that He was both Messiah and Son of God. Their desire to catch and kill Him at that feast was somehow frustrated; He had an intended time to die, and it was not yet. The details are not given, but the overall picture is that the Lord's death was not achieved by the Jews just wanting Him out of the way, murdering Him. It was orchestrated by the Father, in response to the Son's desire to give His life.

*7:31 But of the crowd many believed in him; and they said: When the Christ comes, will he do more signs than those which this man has done?-* John is generous in crediting them with belief, because he goes on to explain that they were not completely sure if He were Messiah or not. And

they also predicated His Messiahship upon the number of miracles performed, whereas John's theme is that the Lord used an economy of miracle, and that the miracles in any case did not elicit lasting faith. Our view of others' immature faith ought to be similarly positive. For often our own faith is not actually much more mature.

*7:32 The Pharisees heard the crowd murmuring these things concerning him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take him-* There is fair emphasis upon the 'murmuring'. It was all very undercover. We may well ask, why the Jewish leadership minded so much that a claimant to Messiahship was so popular? Was it not that subconsciously, they felt it took away their power? They were playing Messiah, as men play God today. They didn't actually want Him to come because they had too much vested interest in Him actually not coming. Likewise there were those in Am. 5:18,19 who desired the day of the Lord, in words at least, and yet not really. We have to ask whether our desire for the Lord's coming is more than a matter of words, a respectably expressed public dissatisfaction with things as they are... when in real spiritual and psychological terms, we actually prefer all things to continue as they are.

*7:33 Jesus replied: Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go to Him that sent me-* The Lord's ministry was incredibly short. Three and a half years within the entire span of human history, and indeed, all existence and time as we know it.

The disciples were all too influenced by Judaism, the "generation" or world around them. The disciples and Judaism / the Jewish world are paralleled in Jn. 7:3,4: "Let your disciples see your work... shew yourself to the world".

The Lord Jesus has to say the same words to the Jews as He does to the disciples:

<b>Phrase</b>	<b>To the Jews</b>	<b>To the disciples</b>
"I am to be with you only a little longer"	Jn. 7:33	Jn. 13:33
"You will look for me"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33
"Where I am going, you cannot come"	Jn. 7:34; 8:21	Jn. 13:33

Greek (unlike Hebrew) uses tenses in a very precise way. There are some real problems in understanding exactly why the Lord changes tenses so often, e.g. in Jn. 7:33,34: "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go

unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am [we would expect: 'Where I will go / be'], thither ye cannot [not 'will not be able to'] come". He saw Himself as both with the Father, already glorified, and yet also still in mortal life. Another example is in the way He speaks of how the faithful *are* equal to the Angels, *being* the children of the resurrection (Lk. 20:35,36- in the context of explaining how 'all live' unto God)- we would rather expect Him to speak of how the faithful *will be* equal to Angels, *will be* resurrected etc. But He pointedly speaks in the present tense. He realized that He had not yet made the required sacrifice and broken the power of death in resurrection. But He also was confident in faith that He would achieve these things, and He looked at things from outside of time as we know it- from His Father's perspective.

*7:34 You shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, you cannot come-* This sounds like Moses ascending the Mount, leaving Israel behind him. Yet "Where I am" refers to the Lord's unity with God; the heights of His relationship with God connect with the physical ascent of Moses into the mount to hear God's words. "I will that they also... be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (17:24) alludes to the 70 elders sharing Moses' experience in the Mount (Ex. 24:70); it is as if the Lord is saying that His disciples really can enter into His relationship with God, we can be where He was spiritually in His mortal life. The Jews would seek that, and not find it. Their window of opportunity was incredibly brief. There is no evidence that they sought the Lord and didn't find Him in their mortal lives; I suggest the reference is to the awful time of condemnation at the last day, when they shall seek Him too late but not find Him. The window of opportunity we have in this life is very small. Every moment is of intense, eternal significance. This motivated the Lord to shout out and appeal for them to respond (:28,37); and we must likewise see our witness as having the same urgency.

John 7:33-34: "Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come". He then went on to foretell how that out of His pierced side there would come the water of the Spirit. "Where I am" is parallel with "I am going...". He was going to the cross, but He speaks as if He was there right then at that moment. The cross was ongoing in His life. His going unto the Father was how He understood going to the cross (13:1,3 make the connection clear). Later, the Jews would recollect Golgotha's scene and seek Him, but not find Him. There was a time for them to accept the cross, but there would come a time when they would not be able to accept it. This surely cannot refer to their mortal lives; for whoever comes to the Son, He will in no

wise cast out. So it presumably means that at the judgment, as they wallow in the wretchedness of their condemnation, they will recall the cross and wish desperately to appropriate that salvation for themselves. They will seek Him, but be unable then to find Him.

*7:35 The Jews queried among themselves: Where will this man go that we shall not find him? Will he go to the diaspora among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?*- Where He was going, as noted above, was to the cross, to the Father, and to His "I am" relationship with Him. As noted earlier, they actually understood on one level what He meant. The possibilities they offered as to His intended meaning were really a smokescreen to cover over their own bad conscience. For they both knew Him and from where He had come (:28). So they knew where He was going to, for He had said He was going to where He came from. And again we see the Bible revealing core human psychology to us. Misunderstanding is so often psychologically motivated. It wasn't that they simply failed to make the right intellectual connections in order to accept Him. Accepting Him is not therefore something which some 'get' and some 'don't get' with no further culpability. The apparent misunderstandings and misconceptions are all a reflection of a determined desire within, not to accept Jesus of Nazareth as Lord of our lives.

*7:36 What is his meaning when he said: You shall seek me and shall not find me; and, Where I am, you cannot come?*- As noted on :35, they knew His meaning. This is why there is no recorded response of the Lord to their questions. Instead we read of the Lord's impassioned plea to come to Him (:37). He had spoken of their condemnation at the last day, how there would come a time when they would seek and not find Him, and not be able to come "Where I am", with the Father- even though they would then dearly wish to. And people today likewise pretend they do not see the possibility of future condemnation, the reality of their answerability at the last day... they may shrug it all off with nonchalance and raise various questions, as if to say that the interpretation of all these things is far from clear and who can be sure... But this is all a smokescreen for their own bad conscience, their own realization [well beneath the realms of conscious awareness] that in fact these things are true.

*7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying: If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink-* "The last day" suggests the Lord saw this as a preview of judgment day; and they could even now come to Him and drink. The invitation to drink from Him is to be connected with the Lord's words to the Samaritan woman, where the water offered was of the Spirit. The gift was for all those who realized their Spiritual thirst. The self-satisfied religionists were not those who



hungered and thirsted to be righteous. This is John's equivalent of the Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, that those who long to be righteous would be filled. Those who thirst for the Spirit will be given it. And the water given, the spirit of life given, was "eternal life" in that this is how we shall eternally live.

7:38- see on Jn. 1:14.

*He that believes on me, as the scripture has said: From within him shall flow rivers of living water-* The connection is again with the teaching to the Samaritan woman at the well. The water given was of the Spirit, and would provide springs of living water of the Spirit in an ongoing sense to the believer.

But clearly the idea is also that those who receive the Spirit become a source of Spirit life to others: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Surely Ez. 47:1,9, the prophecy of how in the Messianic Kingdom, rivers of spring water will come out from Zion and bring life to the world; and perhaps too the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special preaching campaigns (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities for evangelism to others. But here the Lord speaks as if we have no option but to bubble out the water of the Spirit to others.

There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Living water was to come out of the smitten rock. When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. He paralleled His 'smiting' on the cross with His glorification (Jn. 7:38). And He elsewhere seems to link 'glory' with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19). The Hebrew idea of 'glory' means that which is lifted up; and thus His references to His death as a lifting up suggested that He saw His death as His glory. And we with

Isaiah and with John and the Lord Himself should find in the glory and terror of the cross the vision which will endlessly inspire our ministry. Ps. 96:10 in some LXX versions reads: "Say among the nations, The Lord reigned from the tree". What would have looked like the utter, pathetic humiliation of the Man from Nazareth was in fact His glorification, His moment of triumph and victory; just as the pathetic death of a poor saint may be their glorious triumph over their mortality. And He there was and is our King. And this has implications for us; we were constituted a people over whom God reigns by the cross (Rev. 1:5 Gk.). Because of His utter victory there, He becomes our all controlling Lord, King and Master. We are no longer free to do what we want. This is why baptism into His death is an acceptance of His Lordship, of His will being the command of our lives.

7:39- see on Jn. 12:24,28.

*He spoke of the Spirit, which they that believed in him were to receive. For the Spirit had not yet been received, as Jesus had not yet been glorified-* Some manuscripts read "The Holy Spirit had not yet been received". This parallels the Spirit and the Holy Spirit- once the emphasis upon the word "yet" is appreciated. "Ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. 3:16) is matched later in the same epistle by "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you" (1 Cor. 6:19). See on Rom. 8:26. No great difference can be argued between "Spirit" and "Holy Spirit".

The Lord invites His audience right then to receive the water of the Spirit, and yet John notes that the Spirit was not then given. Clearly the Lord was speaking of future realities as if they already were. The gift of the Spirit in view was that within the human heart, within the "innermost being" (:38 NIV). This gift is not therefore referring to miraculous gifts. The power of internal transformation was therefore the gift of the Spirit given at the Lord's glorification. And the activity of the Spirit in transforming human minds into His mind is therefore His glorification.

*7:40 Therefore some of the crowd, when they heard these words, said: This is truly the prophet!*- "The prophet" (also in :52) is clearly a reference to "the prophet" like Moses, i.e. Messiah. There are many other allusions by John's record to the Dt. 18:18 passage: "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I command him". References to the Son only speaking what the Father commanded Him are to be found in Jn. 4:25; 8:28; 12:49. John perhaps emphasizes that at this time, the Lord did no miracle. It was by hearing "these words" that they were persuaded He was a prophet. There was something about His claims which was intuitively attractive and credible; see on :17.

*7:41 Others said: This is the Christ. But some said: What! Does the Christ come out of Galilee?*- As noted on :27, the Jews had changed their theology over the last 30 years regarding the origin of Messiah. In any case, some were sold on the idea that geographical origin must produce people of a certain character- a common source of prejudice in first century Mediterranean society. No matter what else was done by the Lord, if He were from Galilee- then they would not accept Him. Their prejudices were stronger than the argument of miracles. Their predispositions were so strong that they were not open to any spiritual argument.

*7:42 Has not the scripture said that the Christ comes of the seed of David and from Bethlehem, the village where David was born?*- It seems that the Lord, along with Mary and Joseph, had somehow kept His origins from Bethlehem a secret. One would expect to read Him making a big point about His origins from there, in order to back up His claims to Messiahship and in order to answer the objections to His Messiahship on the basis that He was from Galilee. But He doesn't. It was not His style to get involved in horns-locked debate in this manner, overpowering arguments by dismantling them. He hardly appeals to Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled. The Gospel writers do at times, but the Lord does not. He as He was, His personality, His lack of sin... this was who He was and it was persuasive enough to those who were spiritually minded. He could so easily have made capital out of the fact He was born in Bethlehem, and Messiah was prophesied as coming from there. But He doesn't, and I find profound the way He doesn't even rise up to the opportunity now offered Him to do so. Fulfilment of Bible prophecy on some point or other was not His style. Instead He asks those who were thirsting for spirituality to come to Him, and have springs of the Spirit open up within their innermost being. And there was a powerful credibility about Him which did not depend upon argumentation about His Bethlehem origins.

There are very few direct statements from Jesus about Himself- e.g. He never actually says He had a virgin birth, nor does He explain that He was born in Bethlehem as required by Micah 5:2. He left people assuming He was born in Nazareth (Jn. 7:42).

*7:43 So there arose a division in the crowd because of him*- Division over the Lord's origin and credibility has always been. John emphasizes this (s.w. 9:16; 10:19). He is not a source of unity amongst people generally; only those who are of His Spirit find themselves united with each other. All others find themselves bitterly divided over Him. This is why a divided church is not the Lord's church, at least on a collective level. The net which caught the 153 fishes was not 'divided' despite the large number (21:11).

*7:44 And some of them would have taken him; but no one laid hands on him-* Again we sense that those who wanted to kill Him could not do so because His death was a function of His self-giving, and the Father's empowerment of the process. It was not yet time, and so somehow, all the plans didn't come to anything. And further, when His arresters came close to Him, there was clearly something unusual about Him to the extreme. The "some" refers to the officers sent by the priests and Pharisees to arrest Him (:45). The implication is that as they pushed through the crowds to arrest Him, the power of His words somehow repelled them and made them retreat.

*7:45 The officers went to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them: Why did you not bring him?-* This was surely the only time they had been sent to arrest someone but had felt stopped from doing so by the power of His words, so that they had to beat a shamefaced retreat back through the crowd and thence back to those who had sent them.

*7:46 The officers answered: Never has a man spoken like this man!-* As noted on :44 and :45, it was the power of the Lord's words alone which stopped these officers from arresting Him. This is a theme we have noted in John- the power of the Lord's word and personality, even when no miracles were being done by Him. This was necessary for John to underline seeing he was writing at around the time when the miraculous gifts were fading. The repetition of "man" suggests that they perceived Him as unique amongst men, whilst being man, because of His words. He was a man, with a message which was clearly from God- somehow fused with the texture of His personality in a way and to an extent that no other messenger of God had ever been.

*7:47 The Pharisees therefore answered them: Are you also led astray?-* The officers could have given any number of reasons why they had not managed to arrest the Lord. But they spoke the truth. The Pharisees considered Him a deceiver (s.w. :12) and yet the Lord and John often warn that it was the Jews who were the great deceivers, leading astray the converts. John's language allows no middle ground between Judaism and Christianity. One is a deceiver, the other is the truth; and both consider the other to be deceitful.

*7:48 Have any of the rulers believed in him, or any of the Pharisees?-* Truth, and the true identity of Messiah, was posited by them on who else had believed in Jesus as Christ. If no rulers or Pharisees had done, then whatever miracles were done or words spoken, He could not be Messiah. And this is the problem with so many to this day- they will only believe, or claim to believe, if others do; and if those others are suitably respectable. They judge the person of Christ by those who follow Him.

And whilst that is understandable on a secular level, the idea of John's Gospel is that we are to be impressed by personal encounter with the Lord, and respond to Him regardless of whether others have, or which others have. This is how the Gospel ends, with the idea that we are to personally follow the Lord whether or not others do.

*7:49 But this rabble, which does not know the law, are accursed!-* "Rabble" was a technical term used by the Pharisees for the mass of Israel, whom they considered apostate. "Accursed" is their allusion to the cursing promised for all who were not completely obedient to the law. The same word is used by Paul when he quotes that cursing, probably alluding to this incident, which he may well have been present at: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written: Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do all things that are written in the book of the law". The Pharisees were implying that they were completely obedient to the law; but the Lord has just demonstrated that the law is structured in such a way that to obey one commandment, e.g. to circumcise a child on the eighth day, could break a legalistic interpretation of another, e.g. to not work on the Sabbath.

*7:50 Nicodemus (he that had earlier come to him by night, being one of them)-* This continues the theme noted on :13 of the secret believers slowly coming out in the open. He was "one of them" at this stage.

*7:51 Said to them: Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and knowing what he is doing?-* He is alluding to how the Jews proudly considered that the provision of Roman law to only judge / condemn after giving the accused a hearing was in fact based upon Jewish law. He appeals to their national pride in order to save the Lord's life. However, there is no specific statement in the Law of Moses requiring this principle to be followed. Nicodemus may well be alluding to rabbinic law which required that a death sentence [using "judge" in the sense of condemning to death] could only be asked for after a man had appeared before the Sanhedrin and been condemned by them.

7:52- see on Jn. 1:46.

*They answered and said to him: Are you also of Galilee? Search the scrolls and you will see, that no prophet is to rise from Galilee-* They were in fact wrong, for Jonah [a great type of the Lord Jesus] was from Galilee. But the record has more spiritual culture than to point out this obvious error. We are left to perceive it, and the silence regarding their ignorance becomes the more powerfully deafening exactly because the obvious point is not made. The Jewish leadership were trying to paint the Lord as supported only by some of the Galilean pilgrims who had come up to that feast of tabernacles. Their damaged consciences are revealed in their over

sensitivity to merely being asked to apply their own law to the case of Jesus of Nazareth. They jump to the conclusion that Nicodemus is also on the Lord's side and must therefore also be Galilean. Recall how Peter is unmasked as one of the Lord's followers because of his Galilean accent.

*7:53 At that, each of them went home-* As noted on :52, the glaring error in claiming that no prophet is from Galilee, when Jonah was from there, is left without comment. The implication is that alone at home, away from the group mentality, they would have reflected upon that error. And thought about Jonah, who the Lord had said was a sign to them about His own death and resurrection (Mt. 12:39). The Sanhedrin now broke up; the members returned to their own homes in the various towns of Palestine, without having made a formal conclusion about how to proceed with the case of Jesus of Nazareth.

## CHAPTER 8

8:1 *Jesus went to the Mount of Olives-* This may be in contrast to the Sanhedrin members going back to their own homes (7:53); the Lord by contrast slept rough on Olivet.

8:2 *And early in the morning he again went into the temple, and all the people came to him; and he sat down and taught them-* "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives... he came again into the temple, and all the people (i.e. the leaders and the crowd, see context) came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them" (John 8:1,2). This is framed to recall Moses coming down from Sinai: "The Lord came (down) from Sinai (manifest in Moses)... yea, he (God) loved the people (in the fact that) all his saints (Israel) are in thy (Moses') hand (as we are in the hand of Christ, Jn. 10:28-30): and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words... the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel (i.e. both leaders and ordinary people) were gathered together (to Moses)" (Dt. 33:2-5).

Sitting down and teaching may simply be stating the obvious, for many rabbis taught sitting down. But given the large crowd and the need to project His voice, we wonder why it is so stressed. Surely given the situation and size of the crowd, most teachers would have stood. But the Lord was totally focused upon seeking the Father's glory (see on 7:18) and totally not upon His own glory as a teacher; and this may have been reflected in His choice at this point to teach sitting, on the level of His immediate audience, rather than standing.

8:3 *And the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in the act of adultery; and having placed her before him-* This was surely a set up. The Lord was apparently obligated to agree that she should be stoned. But this was against Roman law, which only considered recommendations from the Sanhedrin for death sentences in the case of desecration of the temple. The woman was used as a pawn; her feelings were unimportant to these men, bent as they were upon finding a case against the Lord. And of course the guilty male was not brought to Him for judgment.

8:4 *They said to him: Teacher. This woman has been caught in the very act of adultery!*- Seeing it was early morning at the end of the Tabernacles festival (:2), we assume she had been dragged fresh from her sin into the temple.

8:5 *Now, in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?*- They were seeking to set the Lord either against Moses or against Rome (see on :2).

8:6 *And this they said to test him, so they might have some reason to accuse him-* I have explained in *The Real Devil* that the Jewish opposition

to the Lord and His church is often described as "the devil" or "Satan". They were quite literally false accusers and were ever looking for false accusations to make, seeking to spin situations so that they could accuse the Christians to the local authorities and get them shut down.

*But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground-* He could have been doodling, or have done so just from plain male awkwardness before a naked woman. In these suggestions we see so clearly His humanity. If this is so, then there would have been an artless mix of His Divinity, His utter personal moral perfection, and His utter humanity. Embarrassed in front of a naked woman, crouching down on His haunches, doodling in the dust... that, it seems to me, would've been the ultimate conviction of sin for those who watched. It would've been surpassingly beautiful and yet so challenging at the same time. And it is that same mixture of utter humanity and profound, Divine perfection within the person of Jesus which, it seems to me, is what convicts us of sin and leads us devotedly to Him. Maybe I'm wrong in my imagination and reconstruction of this incident- but if we love the Lord, surely we'll be ever seeking to reconstruct and imagine how He would or might have been.

But the way He challenges them with their personal sins (:7) suggests He was writing their sins in the dust, or perhaps their names: "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth" (Jer. 17:13). Or He could have been using a well known way of communicating deafness. Hence AV adds, with Codex Beza: "As though he heard them not". He would have been thereby saying that He was deaf to the accusations, possibly alluding to Messiah as the deaf servant who was morally perfect (Is. 42:19). Just as we are commanded not to be interested in hearing about others' sins, neither is the Lord Jesus. Or perhaps He meant that He was deaf to their accusations, because they too were sinners. If He wrote their sins, then they were written in the dust, only temporarily. They too could be brushed out by the Lord with ease; and they too were but dust.

*8:7 But when they continued asking him, he stood up and said to them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her-* The trick of the question had been to get the Lord to agree to what the Romans would have called extra-judicial murder. Here, the Lord asks them to be obedient to the Mosaic law and stone her- but adding the rider that only if they were "without sin". He is introducing a dimension not found in the Law of Moses- that we cannot actually judge with integrity because we too are sinners and deserve death. He was of course also addressing Himself, for He was the only one "among you" who was "without sin". He could have thrown the first stone, leading others into condemning the woman; but He would not, because He sought to save not to condemn. The Lord viewed obedience to such laws as voluntary. The fact there was a command to do something doesn't mean that we



must do it; there are other factors. This is and was impossible for the legalistic mind to get around. The way to the Father is not by such casuistic obedience, but through the Spirit.

8:8 *And again he stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground-* The second writing on the ground may have been of their sins, perhaps writing them next to the names of the men which He had written earlier (:6). The record seems to imply that it was the way Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust which convicted the accusers of the adulteress in their consciences. As He kept on writing, they one by one walked away. It's been speculated that He was writing their deeds or names there, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy of how the names of the wicked would be written in the dust (Jer. 17:13).

8:9- see on Mt. 27:5.

*And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, to the last; and Jesus was left alone with the woman, with her still standing in the middle-* It can be no coincidence that the Lord Jesus is described as being "left alone" only twice in the New Testament, and they are both within a few verses of each other: "They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was *left alone*, and the woman standing in the midst" (Jn. 8:9)... "Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not *left me alone*; for I do always those things that please him" (Jn. 8:28,29). He was not alone because the Father confirmed Him in the judgments He made (Jn. 8:16). What is the meaning of this connection? As the peerless Son of God stood before the repentant sinner, with all others convicted by their consciences to one by one slink away from His presence, He was left alone with His perfect Father as well as the repentant woman. Jesus saw in that scene a prefiguring of His death on the cross. There, lifted up from the earth, He was left alone with the Father, a repentant sinner [the thief], and again, one by one, the condemning onlookers smote their breasts in conviction of their sin and walked away. The cross was "the judgment of this world" (Jn. 12:31). There men and women are convicted of their sin and either walk away, or take the place of the humbled woman or desperately repentant thief. This alone should impart an urgency and intensity to our memorial services, when through bread and wine we come as it were before Him there once again, facing up to the piercing reality of our situation as sinners kneeling before the crucified Son of God. One aspect of the loneliness of the cross was that simply the Lord's righteousness set Himself apart from humanity- and He so

intensely felt it: "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:32). Yet it was the loneliness which drew Him to the Father. For the isolated believer, the loneliness of being in some sense more righteous living than e.g. your alcoholic husband, your atheist daughter, the materialistic women at work...is a burden hard to live with. Yet in this, we are sharing something of the cross of our Lord. And if we suffer with Him, we shall also share in the life eternal which He was given. Being "left alone" with the Father and your humbled, repentant brethren is a sharing in the cross of the Son of God. This is the gripping logic, the promise of ultimate hope, which is bound up with the sense of spiritual loneliness which is in some ways inevitably part of the believing life.

*8:10 And Jesus stood up and said to her: Woman! Where are your accusers? Did no one condemn you?-* There are many links between Romans and John's Gospel; when Paul asks where is anyone to condemn us (Rom. 8:34), we are surely intended to make the connection here to Jn. 8:10, where the Lord asks the condemned woman the very same question. It's as if she, there, alone with the Lord, face down, is every one of us. His question "Did no one condemn you?" was rhetorical, in order to help the point be underlined to her- that all are sinners, and she should not feel nor fear the condemnation of men, for they too are sinners, equally condemned. The healing she needed was partly to do with this; for the shame of condemnation at the hands of her religious elders was utterly traumatic. And the Lord removed that, as well as assuring her of her acceptability before God.

*8:11 And she said: No one, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither do I condemn you. Go your way. From this time forward, sin no more-* He was the only one without sin who could stone her; but He chose not to, He chose to not obey the Mosaic commandment to stone her. Thus by obeying the spirit of the law He broke the letter, at least in the legalistic, casuistic understanding of the Pharisees. To judge sin is not absolutely essential, as many legalistic Christians today seem to think. Not walking in darkness in the next verse [12] connects with the "sin no more" spoken to the woman. We are each in her position.

*8:12 Again Jesus spoke to the crowd, saying: I am the light of the world. He that follows me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life-* The Lord's subsequent teaching in this chapter is allusive to the incident with the woman taken in adultery, so I would not be supportive of any attempt to exclude that section as uninspired. "I am the light of the world" alludes back to the prologue; the life the Lord lived is to be our light, which we live by and understand life according to. Hence here we

read of the "light of life". Life lived any other way is lived in darkness. John's letters develop the thought in practice by saying that if we live in hatred towards our brother, we walk in darkness. Such a hateful life is lived because the heart is focused upon the life of Jesus, His Spirit, His life, doesn't live within us. Having the light of life may be another way of saying what we read in Mt. 5:14: "You are the light of the world". In His light we become light to others.

The teaching of Jesus was very much centred around Himself. Other religious teachers tend to say 'This is the truth, these are the ideas I have put together: follow them'. But Jesus says: "I am the truth; follow *me*". His formula was not "Thus saith the Lord", but rather "Truly, truly *I* say unto you...". The personal pronoun forces itself upon our attention as we read His words:

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to *me* shall not hunger"

"I am the light of the world; he who follows *me*..."

"I am the resurrection and the life... whoever lives and believes in me shall never die"

"I am the way and the truth"

"Come to *me* ... learn of *me*".

He called people to Himself- to come to Him, learn of Him, follow Him. He knew, too, that the example and achievement of His death would exert a certain magnetism upon men and women: "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto myself". He is drawing them not primarily to a church, to a statement of faith, to a 'truth'...but to Himself.

The "light" was a lifted up torch of fire, exactly as He was to be lifted up on the cross (see on Jn. 3:19-21). But He saw Himself as there and then lifted up as the light of the world. The principles of the cross must be the light, the only light, of our lives. When the Lord speaks of Himself as the light / burning torch of the Jewish world, He continues: "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness" (Jn. 8:12). Nobody follows the sun when they walk- so the "light" referred to is hardly the sun. Surely the reference is back to the fiery pillar in the wilderness, which gave light by night so that the Jews could walk in the light even when darkness surrounded them. And there's an upward spiral in all this. If "the light" is specifically a reference to God's glory manifested through the crucifixion, then this must provide the background for our understanding of Jn. 12:35-50. Here the Lord teaches that only those who walk in the light can perceive who He really is, and "the work" which was to be "finished" on the cross. It is the light of the cross which reveals to us the essence of who the Lord really is... and this in turn leads us to a keener perception of the light of the cross. Which in turn enables us to see clearer the path in which we are to daily walk.

Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johannine

references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46) The light of the Gospel is not just light which we behold and admire for its beauty; it is a light which by its very nature opens the eyes of blind people (Jn. 8:12)!

Many passages in John speak of the believer as being in a state of constant spiritual strength; e.g. "he that followeth me shall never (Gk.) walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12). These kind of passages surely teach that God does not see us on the basis of our individual sins or acts of righteousness; He sees our overall path in life, and thereby sees us as totally righteous or totally evil. Thus Proverbs contains many verses which give two alternative ways of behaviour, good and evil; there is no third way. Thus, e.g., we *either* guard our tongue, *or* we speak rashly (Prov. 13:3). At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5).

8:13 *The Pharisees replied to him: You testify of yourself. Your witness is not true-* As noted on :12, the Lord did indeed focus heavily upon presenting Himself as the life to be lived, the light to be followed. The Pharisees were judging the Lord, and they claimed that He had no witnesses to testify for Him apart from Himself. See on :17

8:14- see on 1 Jn. 5:9.

*Jesus answered and said to them: Even if I testify of myself, my witness is true. For I know from where I came and where I go; but you do not know where I come from, nor where I go to-* This appears to contradict His statement in 5:31 "If I testify of myself, my witness is not true" (the same words are used in the Greek). Likewise "You do not know where I come from" contradicts 7:28 "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself". Few commentators have engaged with these intentional paradoxes. I suggest the Lord is probing the fact that in their consciences, they knew He came from God. Their confidently proclaimed, quasi logical legalistic arguments were but a smokescreen to disguise their inner voice of conscience. So I suggest His sense is: 'Even if I am My own witness, My witness is true because both I and you know from where I came- from God!'. "You do not know where I come from" is allusive to their own position expressed in 7:27: "When Messiah comes, nobody knows from where He comes". Their claim to not

know where He came from was in fact an admission that they accepted He was Messiah.

8:15 *You judge after the flesh. I judge no one-* Their legal language of 'witnesses' reflects how they were judging Him in the sense of condemning Him. He condemned nobody- and the context is His refusal to condemn the woman taken in adultery. This connection further strengthens the case that the incident with the woman is the basis of His later teaching here, and should not be removed from the text.

8:16 *Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone that judge, but I and He who sent me-* "I judge no one, yet even if I do judge..." recalls His argument that He did not testify of Himself (5:31), and yet even if He did... (:14). 'Not A, but sometimes A' is a common construction in Semitic languages as it is in several Eastern European languages to this day. "Not A" doesn't mean 'Never ever A'. Their judgment "after the flesh" (:15) is contrasted with how He judges with God's judgment, i.e. 'after the Spirit'. His judgment "is true" because He seeks the Father's will, which is of human salvation (5:30 and context). Any condemnation uttered by the Son is made having done God's will to the full, i.e. to save men rather than condemn them. Condemnation is therefore only for those who have refused the will of God for them, His will for their salvation.

8:17 *Even in your law it is written, that the witness of two men is true-* "Your law" could mean that He considered that God's law had now been hijacked by them, just as the house of Yahweh had become the temple of the Jews, the feasts of Yahweh had become the feasts of the Jews. The requirement of two witnesses is to be found in Dt. 17:6; 19:15; but the Lord carefully changes "two witnesses" to "two men". His point is that the witnesses to Himself are more than men; He has God Himself, and Himself as Son of God.

8:18 *I am he that testifies of myself; and the Father that sent me testifies of me-* If the witness of two *men* was acceptable, then the Lord argues that the testimony of God Himself and of Himself as God's Son was far more conclusive.

The Lord's sense of authority helps explain His mysterious logic in Jn. 8:17,18. The Jews accuse Him of bearing witness of Himself, and that therefore His witness is untrue. The Lord replies that under the Law, two witnesses were required in addition to the accused person. And He argues that He is a witness to Himself, and His Father is too: "I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness". But this was exactly their point- He was bearing witness of Himself, and therefore

"thy witness is not true" (Jn. 8:13 RV). Yet His reply seems to have silenced them. Clearly the authority attached to Him was so great that effectively His bearing witness of Himself was adequate witness.

The Lord often began His statements with the word "Amen" - 'truly', 'certainly', 'surely... I say unto you...'. Yet it was usual to *conclude* a sentence, prayer or statement with that word. But the Lord *began* His statements with it. And this feature of His style evidently caught the attention of all the Gospel writers. Mark mentions it 13 times, Matthew 9 times, Luke 3 times and John 25 times. And it should stand out to us, too. Joachim Jeremias mentions that "according to idiomatic Jewish usage the word *amen* is used to affirm, endorse or appropriate the words of another person [whereas] in the words of Jesus it is used to introduce and endorse Jesus' own words... to end one's own prayer with *amen* was considered a sign of ignorance". Thus Jesus was introducing a radically new type of speaking. The Lord's extraordinary sense of authority was not laughed off as the ravings of a self-deluded 'holy man'. For the crowds flocked to Him, and even hardened guards sent to arrest Him had to give up on the job for the humanly-flimsy excuse that "never man spake like this man". And it is that very sense of ultimate authority which amazingly comes through to us today, who have never met Him nor heard His words with our own ears. This is the power of the inspired Gospel records, yet it is also testimony to the extraordinary, compelling power of the Personality which is transmitted through them.

8:19 *They replied to him: Where is your Father? Jesus answered: You know neither me, nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also-* There seems to be a verbal connection at least between the Jews' mocking question of Christ "Where is your father?" (Jn. 8:19) and Saul's "whose son is this youth?" (1 Sam. 17:55); David was indeed a type of the Lord. On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But it is a theme of John's Gospel that one can see and not see, hear and not hear, know and not know. The appeal is to actualize that knowledge, to follow the likes of Nicodemus in allowing our encounter with the Lord to take over our lives, so that we know Him not theoretically, as propositions, but in the Hebrew sense of 'knowing', i.e. being in an ongoing relationship with. We can note here that knowing the Father is predicated upon knowing the Son. It is encounter, experience and relationship with Him which leads us to know the Father; He is the way to the Father. Archaeology, creationism, science, arguments from nature and logic... will not provide lasting relationship with the Father. All is predicated upon the Son.

8:20 *These words spoke he in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; and no one took him- because his hour had not yet come-* Again we see

that the Lord only died because the Father and Himself allowed it to happen; His life was not taken from Him against His will, He gave it freely. "The treasury" was in the Court of the Women, the busiest and most public place in the temple (hence the public show of giving money at that place), with the Hall Gazith where the Sanhedrin met right next to it. Yet even there, in the busiest thoroughfare, "no one took him". It was here where it seems the Lord often sat and taught (Mk. 12:41, note the Greek tense there). We might perceive from this choice too that He was eager to get His message to the women; for the treasury was within the Court of the Women.

8:21- see on Jn. 7:33.

*He replied again to them: I go away, and you shall seek me, and shall die in your sins. Where I go, you cannot come-* There is never a time in mortal life when a man cannot seek the Lord and find Him; indeed, many of the Pharisees were later baptized, according to Acts. So this time of seeking and not finding must refer to the last day. They could not come to the relationship He had with the Father because He was going away, they were going to kill Him on the cross, and would never after that find the humility to repent. For they need not die in their sins, if they accepted that "I am He" (:24).

"I go my way" was to the cross. He was and is the way, the cross is the only way to the true life, both now and eternally. "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know" (14:4) further cements the connection between His "way" and the cross. From here up to :25, the Lord twice seeks to confront them with their sin, and yet they ignore this matter and get lost in speculation about His more cryptic statements. And this is why a man can spend hours or even a lifetime in 'Bible study' and come out with a conscience untouched as to his personal sin. Because humanity has a terrible way of footnoting the Lord's conviction of our sins and getting endlessly lost in striving about words and their interpretations.

8:22 *The Jews replied: Will he kill himself? Because he said: Where I go, you cannot come-* The Lord's death was not suicide, but it was also not a cessation of life as a result of murder. For He gave His life, and it was not taken from Him. I have argued throughout that subconsciously, they knew the truth about Him; of His origin and upcoming death and ascension to the Father. Here they come very close to stating that truth, even cloaked in apparent jest and scepticism.

8:23 *And he said to them: You are from beneath. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world-* "Not of this world" cannot mean that He personally pre-existed in Heaven before His birth, for He uses the same phrase as to how His followers were not of this world as He was not

(17:14). His Kingdom was "not of this world" (18:36). He was very much "in" this world, as He states often in John 17:11,12,13 etc. His being "from above" referred to how He was in relation to the world, rather than His literal origins. It was this which meant that they did not perceive His language correctly.

8:24 *I replied to you, that you shall die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you shall die in your sins-* As explained on :21, this dying in sins refers to their final destruction in "the second death" at the last judgment. But they could avoid it, by accepting Him as the "I am". Just as He so often uses the term, *ego eimi*, "I am..." (e.g. :23). In :21 He seems to say that because they would crucify Him, they would die in their sins. But they could still have repented of that. His sense was therefore that by doing such a huge sin, they were going to find repentance hard, and He knew many of them would not come to it, for it would require too much sacrifice of vested personal interest and standing. And thus at the last day, they would die in their sins, seeking Him all too late at that day (:21).

8:25 *They replied to him: Who are you? Jesus said to them: Even that which I have spoken to you from the beginning-* Most of His messages are hidden in His lifestyle and in the way He treated people. He left it to those who watched Him to see how the word was being made flesh in Him. In this sense Jesus' words really were eminently deeds. He was the word made flesh. When the Jews asked Him "Who art you?", He replied: "How is it that I even speak to you at all? I have many things to say...When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he" (Jn. 8:25,28 RVmg.). Jesus didn't have to speak anything about Himself; He was the word made flesh, His deeds and above all His death would declare who He was. This self-proclamation that didn't require any self-advertisement or even self-explanation was so wonderfully unique to Jesus. Thus Peter says that a wife should convert her husband without needing to speak a word- and there we have something of the same idea.

We have here yet another allusion to the prologue. The word spoken from "the beginning" was the person of the Lord Jesus as exhibited and spoken from the beginning of His ministry- not of the present creation.

8:26- see on Jn. 6:44.

*I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you. However, He that sent me is true, and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world-* Even when making the profoundest claims to be God's Son, sent from God and destined to ascend to Heaven, the Lord in



the same context emphasizes His humanity- e.g. in Jn. 8:26, having spoken of His origins, Father, and destiny, He stresses that *He* has much He'd like to say and judge of His generation, but He could only share what His Father had taught Him to speak. This was a very pointed presentation of His humanity, and He made it lest His hearers think that He was altogether other-worldly.

How the Lord heard things from the Father is not defined. It could have been from His own study of the Father's word mixed with direct revelation. Is. 50:4 may suggest early morning teaching sessions in communion with the Father: "The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary: He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught". Jn. 15:15 states that all He heard from the Father, He declared to the disciples. The things He heard were therefore nothing more than what He told them during His ministry, and which we can read in the Gospels. It was not that He had huge revelations of material which remained private between Him and the Father. What He was told, He told them. It was enough to motivate them, as it was to motivate Him. And it should be enough for us too. This of course heightens our need to apply ourselves to His words as found in the Gospels.

Consider how here and in 12:49,50 He says that He *says* only what the Father taught Him to say; whereas here He says He *does* nothing of Himself but only what the Father taught Him. His words and His doings are thereby paralleled. See on Lk. 9:44; Jn. 14:10. Again in allusion to the prologue, the word was made flesh, completely actualized in a person and a life lived (1:14).

8:27 *They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father-* On one hand they did know Him and His Father: "You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). But again we see the difference between knowledge on a theoretical level, and on the level of true understanding and relationship.

8:28- see on Jn. 5:36; 6:63; Jn. 20:28.

*Jesus continued: When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me-* The Jewish conscience about the cross is predicted by the Lord here. But the Jews generally were not subsequently persuaded that Jesus was indeed Messiah, bearer of the "I am" Name of God. Potentially, in their consciences, they *did know* that He was, once they crucified Him. The words of Jesus were of course true. But they didn't confess that faith, because they suppressed it in their conscience. This is why to this day there is this Jewish conscience about the cross.

And it's why conversion to the Lord Jesus cannot be far from the heart of every Jew. They perceived the manifestation of the great "I am" there, Yahweh Himself, but unless they gave themselves to it in total commitment, they would die eternally. Eternal life therefore depends upon an appreciation of the cross. For this reason, the atonement must be the central doctrine of the Gospel, and those who believe it must feel it and know it personally if they are to be saved in the end. This is why 20:27-29 seems to show that the Lord understood the essence of faith in all His people as meaning that they would discern and believe the marks in His hands where the nails were. The cross would confirm all He had spoken. There the words of Jesus were made flesh (1:14). In the lifted up Jesus, we see all His words, God's words, brought together in that body.

He predicted that when He was crucified, then His people would believe on Him; yet "As he spake these things, many believed on him", there and then (:30). There was such congruence between His message of crucifixion and His actual life, that people believed there and then, even before seeing the actual crucifixion. His life was a crucified life, and it elicited faith in those who perceived this.

In many discussions with Trinitarians, I came to observe how very often, a verse I would quote supporting the humanity of Jesus would be found very near passages which speak of His Divine side. For example, most 'proof texts' for both the 'Jesus=God' position and the 'Jesus was human' position- are all from the same Gospel of John. Instead of just trading proof texts, e.g. 'I and my father are one' verses 'the Father is greater than I', we need to understand them as speaking of one and the same Jesus. So many 'debates' about the nature of Jesus miss this point; the sheer wonder of this man, this more than man, was that He was so genuinely human, and yet perfectly manifested God. This was and is the compelling wonder of this Man. These two aspects of the Lord, the exaltation and the humanity, are spoken of together in the Old Testament too. A classic example would be Ps. 45:6,7: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever [this is quoted in the New Testament about Jesus]... God, thy God, hath anointed thee [made you Christ]". It was exactly because of and through His humanity that His glory, His 'Divine side', was and is manifested. His glory was 'achieved', if you like, not because He had it by nature in Heaven before His birth; but exactly because He as a human of our nature reflected the righteousness of God to perfection in human flesh. Thus "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He" (Jn. 8:28)- the 'I am' aspect of Jesus was manifested at the point of His maximum humanity. Thus He was 'made sin for us' so that we might have the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; 8:9). It was only because the Word was made *flesh* that the glory of God was revealed (Jn. 1:14).

"I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28). "The

Lord hath sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of myself" (Num. 16:28 LXX).

8:29 *And He that sent me is with me. He has not left me alone. For I always do the things that are pleasing to Him-* This idea of not leaving but present with is repeated by the Lord in His promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. The Father's presence was by the Spirit, and the Lord wishes to share His relationship with the Father with us. His presence however was due to always pleasing the Father. The Lord's sense of being forsaken on the cross (Mt. 27:46) was therefore because He so identified with our sins that He was identified with those who were not pleasing to the Father, and so felt the lack of His presence. "Pleasing" is a reference to doing the Father's pleasure or will. That will is explained in chapter 5 as being for our salvation. All the Lord did was for the end of our salvation. And to that end He had the Father's presence through the Spirit always with Him; just as we will, if human salvation is our constant focus.

We are the witnesses in the same way as the Lord Jesus was the word made flesh- in His very person, He was the essential witness and message. When He said "I do always those things that please [God]", it is recorded that "As he spake these words, many believed on him" (Jn. 8:29,30). There was something real and credible. He was His words made flesh.

When the Jews lifted up Christ in crucifixion, then they would know that the words He spoke were the words of God, that the Father had not left Him at all, and that Jesus had done "always those things that please Him" (Jn. 8:28,29). Surely this implies that His death, His dead body motionless there, was in fact some sort of word of testimony, a voice from God. Note too that when He looked as if He was forsaken by God, it was apparent that He was not. The Jews had jeered at Him as He still clung on to life, implying that God and the prophet Elijah had now abandoned Him- clearly, they mocked, He was not the Son of God. But when He was lifted up by them- i.e. in death- the lifeless body must have spoken to them of something. Somehow [and the earthquake and darkness doubtless confirmed this], there was the very real presence of God evident in the scene once He had died. The Centurion realized that "truly, this was the Son of God"- and from these prophetic words of the Lord, it appears that the Jews generally had to face the same conviction. This is the sort of paradox God delights to use- the humanly hopeless and God forsaken, the lost cause, becomes the very convicting proof of just the opposite- that we are *not* forsaken. In all this there was the word of the cross.

8:30 *As he spoke these things, many believed in him-* Many of the Jews believed on Jesus as Christ- but He rebukes them for not being His "

disciples indeed", not really having the freedom which a true acceptance of this Truth will bring, not really being children of Abraham, still living in sin, not really hearing His word, and passively wanting to kill Him (Jn. 8:33-44). Yet He spoke all these criticisms to those whom the record itself describes as believing in Him (Jn. 8:31). It's as if the Spirit wants to show us that belief in Christ can exist on a completely surface level. Earlier on this chapter I have noted that one can know Him but not really know Him; and here, one can believe but not really believe. He says they were Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37,56); but almost in the same breath, He says they weren't anything of the sort in spiritual reality (Jn. 8:39).

*8:31 Jesus replied to those Jews that had believed him: If you abide in my word, then are you truly my disciples-* This credits some of the Jews with believing on Jesus- and yet the Lord goes on to show how they didn't 'continue in His word', weren't truly confirmed as His disciples, and were still not true children of Abraham. Yet it would appear God is so eager to recognize any level of faith in His Son that they are credited with being 'believers' when they still had a very long way to go.

The idea that the Gospels are transcripts of the early preaching of the Gospel becomes more obvious when we start to probe how the Gospels would have originated. As accounts and rumours about Jesus and His teaching began to spread around, some would have been sceptical. Those who had met Jesus would have wished to persuade their neighbours and friends that really, what they had seen and heard was really so. People who had met Jesus would share their impressions together and reflect upon the striking things He had said and done. The beginnings of the Gospels were therefore rooted in preaching the good news about Jesus. The Lord speaks of us abiding in His word (Jn. 8:31) and yet also of His word abiding in us, and us abiding in Him (Jn. 15:7). I suggest this refers in the first instance to the new Christian converts reciting over and over in their minds the Gospel accounts. In all situations they were to have the 'word of Jesus' hovering in their minds. To abide in Christ was and is to have His words abiding in us. Paul's evident familiarity with the Lord's words is an example of how one of our brethren lived this out in practice. We have to ask how frequently in the daily grind the words of the Master come to mind, how close they are to the surface in our subconscious... for this is the essence of Christianity. It's not so much a question of consciously memorizing His words, but so loving Him that quite naturally His words are never far from our consciousness, and frequently come out in our thinking and words. No wonder it seems the early church made new converts memorize the Gospels. See on 1 Jn. 2:24.

Jn. 8:30,31 records how He spoke about how the Father was with Him, "that I am he", with full reference to the Yahweh Name. As He spoke the

words, it was evident that they were more than words, they were an expression of the truth that was in this Man. He was the word made into flesh. People are tired of words, of language... which in any case doesn't convey as well as we may think any lasting impression. People need to see what we believe lived out. They need to see, e.g., that our understanding of the representative nature of Jesus issues forth in our praying and in our feeling for this man "whom having not seen ye love". And perhaps this is why it can be observed that Jesus almost never "went out of his way" to help people but rather walked along and helped the people He met in His path.

8:32- see on 1 Thess. 1:3.

*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free-* The Lord and the Gospel writers seem to have recognized that a person may believe in Christ, and be labelled a 'believer' in Him, whilst still not knowing the fullness of "the truth": "Then said Jesus to those Jews which had believed on him, If you continue in my word, then are you truly my disciples; and you shall know the truth" (Jn. 8:31,32). Clearly the Lord saw stages and levels to discipleship and 'knowing the truth'. The truth makes free; and yet it is Jesus who makes free (Jn. 8:32,36). The Truth in the person of Jesus, not just in our perception of doctrines in intellectual purity, is what liberates our personhood. "The truth" is defined in :34 as meaning being made free from sin. Following Him, as His followers / disciples (:31), means that we are made free from sin as we walk in the light of His life. Freedom from sin is no longer attempted by steel-willed struggle against hot temptation; but as part of a way of life in the Spirit of the life the Lord Jesus lived. We will 'do the truth' in that we begin to live the only ultimately true and free life- the life He lived. Truth and freedom are popular ideas in religion, everyone aspires to them; but the ultimate truth is the life of the Lord Jesus, and freedom from sin.

Therefore the Lord Jesus told the truth to this world in the sense that He was sinless (Jn. 8:47). Likewise in Jn. 17:19 He says that He sanctifies Himself, so that "the truth", i.e. His perfect life and death, might sanctify us; so that His freedom from sin might become ours. This was His telling of truth to men. By continuing in the word of Jesus we will know the truth (Jn. 8:31,32)- not so much that we will attain greater doctrinal knowledge, but that our lives will reflect our knowledge of Jesus who is "the truth". The truth sets us free; the Son sets us free (Jn. 8:32, 36). "The truth" is therefore a title for Jesus. Mere academic knowledge alone cannot set anyone free from sin; but the living presence and example and spirit of life of another Man can, and does. And so in Jn. 14:6 the way, truth and life are all parallel- truth is a way of life; "truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21 RV), we are to "do the truth", to walk in it (3:21; 1 Jn. 1:6,8; 2:4; 2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3). This is all empowered by the gift of the Spirit of

Jesus, the Comforter, "the spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26), which guides us into truth (16:13)- not in an intellectual sense, but guiding us into the way of life and being which is "truth", which is freedom from sin. For the Spirit is the truth (1 Jn. 5:6); the gift of the Spirit empowers us to live "in truth", according to the life and spirit of Jesus.

The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to choose for themselves. He was Himself supremely free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was the red heifer "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin by Christ through "freedom" (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be 'used' to love others (Gal. 5:13). He didn't spell things out to His followers in the detailed way many religious leaders do. And yet it is surely related to a sense one gets from re-reading the Gospels that Jesus was in tune with nature. He so often uses examples and parables grounded in a perceptive reflection upon the natural creation. He spoke of the carefreeness of birds and other animals; and yet He had the shadow of the cross hanging over Him. The way He was evidently so relaxed with people is a tremendous testimony to Him, bearing in mind the agony ahead. All this is what makes and made Jesus so compelling. On one hand, an almost impossible standard- to be perfect, as the Father is. And yet on the other, an almost unbelievable acceptance of fallen men and women. He didn't criticize those who came to Him. He Himself was the standard by which their consciences were pricked, and yet not in such a way that they were scared away from Him. This mixture of high standards and yet acceptance of people wherever they were is what we all find so elusive. The fact none of us get it right is what turns so many away from our preaching. How compelling He was is shown by how He polarized people- He sought to provoke a final decision in people for or against Him personally- not a yes or no to a particular dogma, rite or law. His compelling power is associated with the sense of urgency which there was in His teaching. The Lord repeatedly spoke of His return as being imminent- and surely His intention was to inspire in us a sense of urgency about His return, a living for His kingdom today rather than delaying till tomorrow.

*8:33 They answered him: We are Abraham's seed, and have never yet been in bondage to anyone. What do you mean, you shall be made free?-* The life of freedom from sin is predicated upon living with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, and not physical descent. "Truth" came by Jesus Christ, as the prologue states (1:17); and that truth is defined here as the life in the spirit of the Lord Jesus, free from sin.

8:34 *Jesus answered them: Truly, truly, I say to you: Everyone who commits sin is the servant of sin-* For all their detailed Bible study, they were servants of sin. To habitually live in sin ["commits" in the ongoing sense] is because we serve sin and have not been set free. Not sinning is not therefore just a question of white-knuckled struggle against temptation; it is more about an allowing of the Lord Jesus to free us from sin by His Spirit.

8:35 *And the servant does not stay in the house for ever. The son stays forever-* The Lord tweaks the metaphor a little, to argue that sinners are servants of sin; but the Lord is making us free from that servitude, turning us into freedmen, permanent members of the actual household. This metaphor of freedom from slavery is used heavily by Paul in his later explanations of the meaning of the Lord's death. A slave might spend his life in slavery within a household, but could never actually enter the family. The Son is master of the household, for ever.

8:36 *If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed-* As noted on :34, Paul also uses this metaphor of redeeming us from slavery to sin into free and actual members of the household family. But he sees this as an outcome of the crucifixion and resurrection. The Lord at this stage was confident as to the outcome of His mission.

8:37 *I know that you are Abraham's seed. Yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you-* The Jews could be described as both Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44). This connects with the theme that the Jews on one level knew who the Lord was, and on another, did not. In John, one can see but not really see; believe but not really believe. The Lord Jesus described the unbelieving Jews as having Abraham as their father, and yet He also said that they weren't the real children of Abraham. They appeared to believe in Him, but effectively denied Him (Jn. 8:37,39,56). Like Israel, we can have an appearance of faith, an assumption that we believe because we are through baptism the children of faithful Abraham, when the real, house-on-the-rock faith is unknown to us.

The Jews thought that they were righteous because they were the descendants of Abraham. The Lord Jesus therefore addressed them as "the righteous" (Mt. 9:12-13), and said "I know that you are Abraham's seed" (Jn. 8:37). But He did not believe that they were righteous, as He so often made clear; and He plainly showed by His reasoning in John 8:39-44 that they were *not* Abraham's seed. So He took people's beliefs at face value, without immediately contradicting them, but demonstrated

the truth instead. We have shown that this was God's approach in dealing with the pagan beliefs which were common in the Old Testament times. His attitude to demons in New Testament times was the same; His God-provided miracles made it abundantly plain that illnesses were caused by God, not any other force, seeing that it was God who had the mighty power to heal them.

The argument was that if they were Abraham's seed they would not be seeking to kill the pre-eminent seed of Abraham, Messiah. "My word" had no place in them; and that word was therefore His self-proclamation of Himself as the seed of Abraham, a proclamation made through His life and character rather than any specific statement that "I am Messiah". "My word" therefore refers not to the whole Bible, nor to any specific spoken words of the Lord; but to His whole life and being, which was His word to men. His word was the Father's word (14:24), just as the prologue had declared the word, which was all about Jesus, to be God. His word was Him, His spirit, His life, His spoken words- which were to abide within them (:31).

*8:38 I speak the things which I have seen with my Father, and you also do the things which you heard from your father-* The parallel indicates that being 'with the Father' was not to be understood in a literal sense. It was not that He heard words from God in Heaven which He then transported to earth, just as they did not hear words from a literal being called the devil in some underworld. He spoke not only what He heard, but what He 'saw' with the Father. His life and teaching was a reflection, an articulation in words, of what it meant to see the Father. Moses had been denied that honour, but the Son 'saw' the Father and reflected it to us in the 'word' or *logos* which was His life.

*8:39 They answered and said to him: Our father is Abraham. Jesus said to them: If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham-* When the Jews proudly said "Abraham is our father!" (Jn. 8:39) they were showing the very same spirit as Ishmael- in persecuting Isaac / Jesus. They were proclaiming themselves to be the seed by the flesh but not of the Spirit nor according to the promise in Isaac. See on Jn. 12:31. Intentionally, the Lord was saying that in one sense they were the seed of Abraham (:37) but in another sense they were not. Likewise they knew Him, but in another sense didn't know Him. The work of God is to believe in His Son (6:39), and it seems the Lord had that idea in view here. He appealed for them to be like Abraham in his belief in his Messianic seed.

*8:40 But now you seek to kill me, a man that has told you the truth, which I heard from God. This Abraham did not do-* "The truth" has been defined earlier as a way of life free from sin, the life of the Lord Jesus, His Spirit, living now the eternal life; see on :32. "The truth" that the Lord "told" them was not in learned lectures of courses of dissertations, but in



the life lived which was a reflection of all He had heard and seen with the Father.

8:41 *You do the works of your father. They said to him: We were not born of fornication. We have one Father, even God-* They insisted that God and not "the devil" (:44) was their father. By insisting upon this, they were condemning themselves. For they sought to kill the Lord because He claimed to be God's Son. And now He had cleverly led them to make the same claim about themselves. He didn't do this to score debating points; He really wanted them to realize that in condemning Him, they were condemning themselves. They were furious that He should imply they were not full Israelites, of Abraham. "Born of fornication" was how the Jews referred to the descendants of Abraham through his other partners apart from Sarah, such as Hagar and Keturah.

8:42 *Jesus said to them: If God were your Father, you would love me. For I came forth and am come from God. For neither have I come of myself, but He sent me-* It is impossible to love God without loving His Son, Jesus (Jn. 8:42); and 1 Jn. 5:1,2 is alluding to this, saying that this principle means that we can't love God without loving *all His* sons, those who are in Christ, the Son of God. Christian disillusion with Christianity is disobedience to this. If we think we can love God while disregarding His sons, we are making the same mistake as the Jews; they confidently thought they could love God and disregard His Son. And this faulty logic led them to crucify the Son of God.

The fact that Jesus was humanly fatherless has been extensively commented upon by Andries van Aarde. He points out that: "Against the background of the marriage arrangements within the patriarchal mind-set of Israelites in the Second Temple period, a fatherless Jesus would have been without social identity. He would have been excluded from being called a child of Abraham, that is, a child of God. Access to the court of the Israelites in the temple, where mediators could facilitate forgiveness for sin, would have been denied to him. He would have been excluded from the privilege of being given a daughter in marriage". Behold the paradox. Because He was the Son of God, He was written off by Israel as not being a child of God; because He was *the* seed of Abraham, He was rubbished as not being a son of Abraham. We can now understand better how He could attract other social outcasts to Him; we have another window into the fact He never married; we appreciate more deeply the significance of His offering forgiveness and fellowship with God to those who were outside of the temple system. He could offer a new social identity to people on the basis that He knew what it was like to be without it. All this is confirmed in the Biblical record. This is why the Jews accused

the Lord of being both not a "child of Abraham" and also illegitimate" (Jn. 8:42), a "sinner" (Jn. 9:16). And He was also called a "Samaritan" (Jn. 8:48). According to the Mishnah, "... they are the people of uncertain condition, with whom one may not marry: those of uncertain parentage, foundlings and Samaritans". Refusing to declare Joseph as His father meant that the Lord would've been unable to marry, at least not any girl from a religious family. See on Jn. 19:9.

8:43 *Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word!*- They could not, it was not in their power [Gk.] to hear His *logos*, and so how He spoke, the language He used, was as it were foreign to them. They were not empowered to hear His *logos*, which according to the prologue was Him, His life and spirit, because they did not allow the movement of the Spirit in their hearts. And this is why people today cannot understand the Lord's teaching; it is because they refuse to accept His *logos*, His life and person coming into their lives as the light of their thinking and practice. And so His words / speech remain a jumble to them. Interpretation fails them, because they were refusing to hear Him as a person, His *logos*.

Intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a resistance to having our lives disturbed in a moral sense. How many have started studying true doctrine, only to draw back, perhaps unconsciously even, because they sense that this stuff is life-changing, and altogether too demanding for them to handle in practice? This inextricable link between doctrine and practice is brought out by the Lord in Jn. 7:17: "If any man willeth to *do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine...". My expanded paraphrase of this would be: 'If you want to do right before God in practice, then you will discern between right and wrong doctrine, because true doctrine leads to true practice. If you really want to be *doing* the right thing, then God will lead you to true doctrine'. And not long afterwards, the Lord hammers home His point: "Why do you not understand my speech [teaching]? Even because you cannot hear [i.e. accept] my word" (Jn. 8:43).

That refusing to believe or understand truth has a moral basis is brought out by the Lord's comment in Jn. 8:46: "If I say the truth, why do you not believe me?". He surely implies that it's not hard in itself to believe and accept His words as true- but He explains that the Jews didn't believe because they preferred to believe the words of the "devil". The "devil" speaks his own language (Jn. 8:44 NIV), the Lord says, and the Jews preferred to hear *that* language because it was actually their own language. They did not "understand my word" because they preferred to do 'their own lusts' (Jn. 8:43). Those 'lusts' are paralleled with the language of the devil- which is exactly what 'the devil' refers to in so many Biblical contexts. The point of all this is that misunderstanding God's word is because we prefer to hear the language of our own self

talk, our own lusts, the Biblical 'devil'. "The lusts of the [devil] it is your will to do", the Lord commented (Jn. 8:44 RV). This was their "language", and therefore any other language which was not of their own self talk was 'foreign' to them. And in this we have the essential basis for why people misunderstand the Lord's words today.

The Lord's cryptic manner of speaking at times yielded "hard sayings"; and yet He utters most of them in conversation with His critics. Thus having said that "If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death", and the Jews predictably responded with misunderstanding and confusion, He goes straight on to utter an even harder saying: "Your father Abraham... saw my day, and was glad". And they again come back at Him with the anger born of misunderstanding. And so He rounds off the episode with a yet harder saying: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Jn. 8:51-58). In all this He was using "hard sayings"- which have come down to us as 'wrested scriptures, 'difficult passages'- in order to drive the unbelievers further down the downward spiral. And He does the same today, with the same passages. Because the Jews didn't "hear my word / logos", therefore they couldn't understand His speech, i.e. the words as individual words which He spoke (Jn. 8:43). They stumbled over each word, as a child struggling to read a text way too advanced for her. Because they didn't hear His logos, the essence of Him. This is why the simplest minds which firmly understand the logos, the essential idea, the bigger picture, don't find the "hard sayings" to be hard for them, they aren't stumbled by them. But the word-by-word theologian does stumble at them, if he doesn't believe the simple logos of Jesus.

8:44- see on Hos. 6:7.

*You are of your father the Devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies-* The Jewish religious leaders were "of your father the Devil" (Jn. 8:44). This would explain the Lord's description of Judas as a Devil (Jn. 6:70) because the Jewish Devil had entered him and conceived, making him a 'Devil' also. In the space of a few verses, we read the Lord Jesus saying that "the Devil" is a "liar" – and then stating that His Jewish opponents were "liars" (Jn. 8:44,55). These are the only places where the Lord uses the word "liar" – clearly enough He identified those Jews with "the Devil". If the Jews' father was the Devil, then 'the Devil' was a fitting description of them too. They were a "generation of (gendered by) vipers", alluding back to the serpent in Eden, which epitomized "the Devil"; "that old serpent, called (i.e. being similar to) the Devil and Satan" (Rev. 12:9). In the same way as Judas became a Devil, the "false prophet, a Jew, whose

name was Bar-Jesus" is called a "child of the Devil" (Acts 13:6,10), which description makes him an embodiment of the Jewish opposition to the Gospel. There are many other connections between the serpent and the Jews; clearest is Isaiah 1:4 "A people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters". This is describing Israel in the language of Genesis 3:15 concerning the serpent. Thus the Messianic Psalm 140:3,10 describes Christ reflecting that His Jewish persecutors "have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips... let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire" (referring to the falling masonry of Jerusalem in A.D. 70?). It is quite possible that Christ's encouragement to the seventy that "I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy" (Lk. 10:19) has a primary reference to their ability to overcome Jewish opposition during their preaching tour.

We all personally struggle to accept basic Bible teaching about generosity, materialism and money. Think of what the Hebrew word "Cain" means- for he is alluded to by the Lord as the epitome of the "devil", the "murderer from the beginning", the archetypical sinner (Jn. 8:44- perhaps because Adam and Eve's sin was forgiven, whereas Cain was the first impenitent sinner). "Cain is defined on the basis of a double Hebrew etymology, as 'possession' (from *qana* = acquire) and 'envy' (from *qana* = be envious)". Personal possession is almost- almost- inextricably linked with envy, and led to the lies and murder for which Cain was noted by the Lord. To have a strong sense of our personal 'possessions' will lead us into the same sins. Indeed, it's the epitome of 'the devil'. The concept of 'private property' is indeed a myth. For we die, and leave it all behind.

Ensure that all you are saying to yourself, even if it's not about spiritual things, is at least truthful. This is where this great theme of truth starts and ends. Ideally, our self-talk should be of Jesus, of the Father, of the things of His Kingdom. Of anything that is just, true, of good report... Yet our self-talk is closely linked to what Scripture would call the devil- the constant fountain of wrong suggestions and unspiritual perspectives that seem to bubble up so constantly within us. The devil- the Biblical one- is "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44). And untruthfulness seems to begin within our own self-talk. I would even go so far as to almost define the devil as our own self-talk. And it's likened to a roaring, dangerous lion; a cunning snake. And it's there within each of us. The control of self-talk is vital. And the Biblical guidance is to make sure it is truthful; for lack of truthfulness is the root of all sin. The account of the wilderness temptations is in my opinion a wonderful window into the self-talk of the Lord Jesus. He set the example there, of dealing with internal temptation by a self-talk based solidly on the truth of God's word. Sin is normally committed by believers not as an act of conscious rebellion, but rather through a complex process of self-justification; which on repentance we recognize was the mere sophistry of our own self-talk. This is why

truthfulness is the epitome of the spiritual life. To deny ever being untruthful is to deny ever sinning. We all have this problem. It's why the assertion of Jesus that He was "the truth" was tantamount to saying that He was sinless. Only thus is He thereby the way to eternal life.

For those who believe in an orthodox devil, bear in mind that the use of the pronoun "he" does not indicate that the Devil is a person. "Wisdom" is personified as a woman house-builder (Prov. 9:1) and sin as a paymaster paying wages (Rom. 6:23). Human lust is personified as a man who drags us away to enticement. If it is accepted that sin and sinful tendencies are personified, there should be no problem in imagining that persona being given a name – "Satan", the adversary. There is no specific reference here to the serpent in Eden. We sin because of the lusts that begin inside us (Mk. 7:21–23; James 1:14; Jer. 17:9). Our evil heart – the real Devil – is the father of our lusts and sins. "The lusts of your father" the Devil, are thus the same as the lusts of our evil heart – the Devil. The Devil is a murderer. But "no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). The Devil must, therefore, die – but as angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36) they are therefore immortal, and have eternal life abiding in them. As noted on Mark 4:15, the children of the Devil are those who obey their evil desires – the real Devil. The Jews had not literally seen a person called the Devil; the Lord was clearly using figurative language. They were *of* the Devil in the sense that "you do the deeds of your father" (:41), i.e. they continued the family likeness. If the Devil is a murderer then he isn't immortal, for in commentary on this verse John later explained [as if there had already arisen misunderstandings in the time between John's Gospel and epistles]: "No murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). Angels are immortal (Lk. 20:36), so therefore this "murderer" wasn't a 'fallen Angel'.

The Devil, the desires which are in our heart forming and stimulating an evil inclination, has the characteristics of the serpent, but it does not mean that the serpent was the Devil itself. The serpent was "subtil" (Gen. 3:1; 2 Cor. 11:3); this may well be behind the description of the Jews consulting "that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him" (Mt. 26:4). The serpent in Eden was the prototype of the Jewish system; their killing of Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecy that the seed of the serpent (sin manifested in the Jews, Mt. 12:34; Lk. 3:7, in its primary meaning) would wound the seed of the woman, Christ, in the heel (Gen. 3:15).

John 8:44 is also a reference to Cain, the first murderer – "he was a murderer from the beginning" (Gen. 4:8–9). He "abode not in the truth" as he was the father of the seed of the serpent who corrupted the true way of worshipping God. The letter of John often alludes to the Gospel of John, and 1 John 3:12,15, is an example; it confirms this interpretation: "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one (i.e. the Devil – Mt. 13:19 cp.

Mk. 4:15) and slew his brother...Whosoever hateth his brother (as Cain did) is a murderer". However, it is also true that John 8:44 alludes to the serpent as well. The serpent told the first lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4); he did not abide in the truth; he was a murderer in the sense that he brought about the death of Adam and Eve. "He is a liar, and the father of it". Cain was not a super-human person called the Devil, but an ordinary man. He characterized sin, the Devil. The way in which the fire consumed Abel's offering but not Cain's is paralleled by the fire burning up Elijah's offering but leaving those of the apostate Jewish Baal worshippers (1 Kings 18:19-40). This would associate Cain with apostate Jews, i.e. the Jewish Devil.

Note: "...he is a liar, and the father of it". The Lord Jesus does not say "he was a liar". If we tell a lie, it is a result of the Devil, in the sense of our evil desires prompting us – not due to any force outside of us. Lying is one of those things that Jesus lists in Mk. 7:15,21-23 as not entering a man from outside him, but originating from within him. The Devil is the 'father' of lies in the sense that they originate from within us – which is where the Biblical Devil is located.

"When he speaks a lie" – when someone lies, it is not a super-human person called the Devil standing in front of him, it is the Devil, in the sense of the man's evil desires speaking to him. "Deceit" – i.e. lies – proceed "from within, out of the heart of men" (Mk. 7:21-22).

8:45 *But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me-* Truth is what makes a person believe the speaker. But the Jews did not believe exactly because the Lord told them "the truth". The "truth" in view is not therefore intellectually pure exposition. They did not believe because they were dominated by sin, "the devil", and sin is essentially a lie. So their sense of truth and error was inverted. "The truth" as explained on :32 was the Lord's sinless life, His Spirit; hence He challenges them in :46 as to who could convict Him of sin. "The truth" He told was that He was sinless. They did not want to believe that; it demanded too much, that a man of their nature could be sinless, and that His Spirit could enter them and transform their lives so as not to be servants of sin.

8:46 *Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?-* As noted on :45, "the truth" was the Lord's sinlessness. They could not accept that, because it demanded too much of them. So much of the Trinitarian theological fog cast over the person of the Lord Jesus is psychologically rooted in a refusal to be so challenged; that our nature is capable of far more than we like to think; and that His spirit can be our spirit.

8:47 *He that is of God hears the words of God. For this cause you do not hear them, because you are not of God-* If they were the children of God, then the Father's words would be naturally discernible. There would be an

intuitive sense toward them. In this we see the upward spiral of spirituality which belief in God's word creates. In the same discourse the Lord reasoned "If you continue in my word... you shall know the truth (the word- Jn. 17:17)" (Jn. 8:31,32). Note that believers in the Lord Jesus are here called "of God", just as the Son was "of God"; not in that they literally descended from Heaven, as required by the pre-existence idea; but in that they were His children rather than the children of this world.

8:48- see on Jn. 8:42.

*The Jews answered and said to him: Say we not well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?- Perhaps the emphasis was upon "you".* They complained that the Lord was casting aspersions about their purity of descent from Abraham (see on :41). Now they suggested that *He* was in fact the one of questionable descent from Abraham. Their 'research' of His family of origin had led to this aspersion- that Mary and / or Joseph had Samaritan connections. The Lord purposefully framed Himself as a Samaritan in the parable of the good Samaritan; perhaps they wilfully misinterpreted that as meaning that He was in fact a Samaritan.

It has been widely recognized that John's Gospel often refers to the same themes found in the Synoptics, but in different language and from a different perspective. The account of the virgin birth as the word being made flesh is one such example. Another would be the effective repeating of the great commission in different terms. Yet another would be the description of water baptism as being born of water (Jn. 3:3-5). The accounts of casting out demons which we have in the Synoptic Gospels are not found in John - not in so many words. But I suggest that the essence of it all is there in John, too. The battle between Jesus and the 'Devil' is referred to there frequently. He is accused of being in league with the Devil (Jn. 7:20; 8:48; 10:20); but He labels His critics as being of the Devil (Jn. 8:44). And in that same passage He redefines their view of "the Devil" as being a question of doing sinful "desires". Judas is portrayed as being "of the Devil" (Jn. 6:70,71; 13:2,27). John speaks of an epic struggle between life and death, light and darkness, truth and error, faith and unbelief, God and evil / sin. In this struggle, the forces of evil have no real power over the Lord Jesus; He is greater than them and overcomes them to such an extent that they are effectively non-existent for those in Him. The Synoptics speak of the opposition to Jesus as being from Scribes, Pharisees etc. John describes this opposition as the Jewish 'Satan' or adversary to the Lord. John presents the opposition to Jesus from the Jews as being symbolic of evil and sin itself. Effectively, the more literal accounts of the Synoptics are saying the same thing - that the Lord showed that the power of God is so great that effectively, demons don't exist as any realistic force in the lives of both Jesus and His

people. John puts this in more epic and symbolic language – the forces of evil were overcome and revealed to be powerless by the Lord Jesus, ultimately expressing this through His death. And perhaps that's why John's Gospel doesn't speak of the Lord casting out demons – because his record has made it clear enough that effectively, those things don't exist.

8:49 *Jesus answered: I do not have a demon. I honour my Father, and you dishonour me-* When He was wrongly accused of being a Samaritan, Jesus did not deny it (Jn. 8:48,49 cp. 4:7–9) even though his Jewishness, as the seed of Abraham, was vital within God's plan of salvation (Jn. 4:22). Even when the Jews drew the wrong conclusion (wilfully!) that Jesus was "making himself equal with God" (Jn. 5:18), Jesus did not explicitly deny it; instead He powerfully argued that His miracles showed Him to be a man acting on God's behalf, and therefore he was *not* equal with God. The miracles of Jesus likewise showed the error of believing in demons. But here He does baldly deny the accusation that He 'had a demon' and was mad; because such dishonour of Him personally was a dishonouring of God. Attitudes to the Son were a statement about the Father. He therefore implies that by dishonouring Him, they were not honouring the Father; whereas He was all about honouring the Father. He is explicit in 5:23 that honour of the Son is honour of the Father, and vice versa. One cannot therefore claim to be honouring God when they are not honouring His Son. This means that all non-Christian religions are not offering any legitimate relationship with God the Father; for they do not honour His Son.

8:50 *I do not seek my own glory. There is One that seeks and judges-* God is seeking our salvation, and our glory in the true sense. If we believe this, we will not seek our own glory. The Father loves us, and is seeking out an eternal future for us, optimal for us personally. He is not simply passively prepared to grant us eternity; but is seeking our glory. The wonder of this means that like the Lord, we shall not seek glory of men, because it is God who wants to give us glory (5:41). This amazing Father who seeks our glory is also our judge; His judgment will be in accordance with His seeking out of glory for us. We need not therefore fear Him and His judgment.

8:51 *Truly, truly, I say to you: If a man keeps my word, he shall never see death-* 1 Jn. 2:4-6 defines keeping the Lord's word as keeping His commandments, walking as He walked, abiding in Him, living with His Spirit. We shall therefore live the kind of life we shall eternally live; we live the eternal life now, and in this sense we shall never see death in the sense of eternal death. We shall die, but not rise again. Death itself will be perceived differently by us, if our hearts are ever with Him who conquered death, and is the resurrection and the life. If our view of death



itself, the unspoken deepest personal fear of all humanity, is different... we will be radically different from our fellows.

8:52 *The Jews said to him: Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets, but you say: If a man keep my word, he shall never taste of death-* Again, they misunderstand His use of language. By "death" He refers to eternal death; there is "death" and "the second death"; but they did not perceive that difference. Just as unspiritual people can read God's words in the Bible and find it all a haze of contradiction and uncertainty, because they are not reading in a spiritual way. The Lord had promised that those who kept His word would never "see death"; but they misquote Him as saying that they would never "taste of death".

8:53 *Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died, and the prophets who died? Whom do you make yourself?-* The Lord was not making Himself anything, because it was the Father who was glorifying Him (:54). The Jews perceived that offering eternal life was making those who received it greater than the prophets and Abraham who had died. The Sadducees disbelieved any resurrection; the Pharisees, according to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, believed in existence as an immortal soul. Their views of immortality and "eternal life" were deeply wrong; they considered Abraham to be permanently dead. They didn't understand that he must rise again to inherit the land promised to him for an eternal possession. The Lord was teaching a resurrection of the body to eternal life, for those who lived that eternal life now in that they had His Spirit and lived His life.

8:54 *Jesus answered: If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father that glorifies me, whom you say is your God-* As the Father glorified the Lord, so He seeks out the glory of all his children (:50). If the Father was truly their Father, then they would perceive that the Lord was already being glorified by the Father. Again, there is an appeal to an intuitive sense which was lacking amongst the Lord's critics. These appeals to intuitive sense all reference the work of the Spirit and a person's acceptance or rejection of it.

8:55 *You have not known Him, but I know Him-* There are two different words used here. They did not know God, but the Lord had seen Him. The allusion is to Moses who desired to see God and could not. And the Lord implies that He all the time was seeing God, not just for a passing moment, but walking in the light of knowing Him.

*And if I should say I know Him not, I shall be like you, a liar; but I know Him and keep His word-* The statement that He 'saw' God was deeply blasphemous to the Jews. He was tempted not to make it, knowing the

persecution and anger it would create. But to do so would be to lie. To see / know God was to keep His word, living according to God's word.

8:56 *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and rejoiced-* This is surely an allusion to how he laughed [for joy] at the promise of Isaac. He "gladly received the promises" (Heb. 11:17 RV). And realizing that through baptism the promises are made to us ought to inspire a deep seated joy too. The only time Abraham is recorded to have laughed and been glad was when he was given the promise that he would have a seed; he understood that ultimately that promise had reference to Jesus (Gen. 17:17). Abraham "saw" ahead to Christ through the promises made to him concerning Jesus. He cryptically commented about the future sacrifice of Jesus: "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14). It was in this sense that Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen him. It is in this context of speaking about the promises that Jesus could say "Before Abraham was, I am". He appreciated that God's promises to Abraham were revealing the plan about Jesus which God had known from the beginning of the world. That purpose, which had been "before Abraham was", had been revealed to Abraham in the promises to him, and was now being fulfilled in the eyes of the Jews of the first century, as they stood in a ring around Jesus, "the word (of promise) made flesh".

It seems reasonable to conclude that Isaac was offered on or near the hill of Calvary, one of the hills (Heb.) near Jerusalem, in the ancient "land of Moriah" (cp. 2 Chron. 3:1). The name given to the place, Yahweh-Yireh, means 'in this mount I have seen Yahweh'. The events of the death and resurrection of the Lord which Isaac's experience pointed forward to were therefore the prophesied 'seeing' of Yahweh. When Abraham 'saw the place [of Isaac's intended sacrifice] afar off" (Gen. 22:4), there is more to those words than a literal description. Heb. 11:13 alludes here in saying that Abraham *saw* the fulfilment of "the promises" "afar off". The Lord in Jn. 8:56 says that Abraham *saw* His day or time [usually a reference to His sacrifice]. And yet that place of offering was called by Abraham 'Jehovah Jireh', 'Jehovah will be *seen*'. Note the theme of *seeing*. In some shadowy way, Abraham understood something of the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; and yet he speaks of it as the time when Yahweh Himself will be 'seen', so intense would the manifestation of God be in the death of His Son. See on Jn. 19:19.

8:57 *The Jews replied to him: You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?-* Again they did not follow His reasoning. The Lord had said that Abraham had seen Him, not that He had seen Abraham. He was not saying that He was older than Abraham- obviously He was not older than Abraham. We observe that their guess at the Lord's age placed Him somewhat older than He was. Days and nights spent in prayer and

focus upon the Father and others would have been reflected in His face and body; such was His humanity.

8:58 *Jesus said to them: Truly, truly, I say to you: I am of higher status than Abraham ever was-* When the Jews mocked Him for saying that He had seen Abraham, the Lord didn't respond that of course that wasn't what He meant; instead He elevated the conversation with "before Abraham was I am" (AV). These words are often misapplied to teach that the Lord Jesus existed before Abraham did. However, closer investigation reveals the opposite to be true. He did not say 'Before Abraham was, I was'. He was the promised descendant of Abraham; we make a nonsense of God's promises to Abraham if we say that the Lord Jesus physically existed before the time of Abraham. The context is the discourse with the Jews concerning Abraham. As far as they were concerned, Abraham was the greatest man who would ever live. The Lord Jesus is saying "I am now, as I stand here, more important than Abraham". As they stood there, He was the one to be honoured rather than Abraham. He is saying 'I am now, more important than Abraham ever was'. It is possible to understand "before" in Jn. 8:58 with some reference to time, in the sense that before Abraham existed, Christ had been in God's plan right from the beginning of the world. It was because Jesus was "before" Abraham in this sense that he was "before" him in terms of importance. But the more comfortable reading is to understand "before" as referring to importance rather than time. In 2 Sam. 6:21 there's a good example of "before" meaning 'before' in importance rather than time. David tells his wife: "The Lord chose me *before* your father [Saul]". Actually, in terms of *time*, God chose Saul well before He chose David. But God chose David *above* Saul in terms of importance and honour.

"I am" may indeed be a reference to the Divine Name which Jesus, as the Father's Son, carried (Jn. 5:43). But "I am" is also used by the healed blind man in Jn. 9:9 with no apparent reference to the Name. The same Greek words are also used by Asahel in the LXX of 2 Sam. 2:20. Jesus and the Father were "one" and so for Jesus to bear the Father's Name is no reason to think that 'Jesus = God'. Note however that the unity between Father and Son spoken of e.g. in Jn. 10:30 is the same kind of unity possible between the Father and all His children (Jn. 17). The use of the neuter form for "one" (*hen esmen*) in Jn. 10:30 shows that the Father and Son aren't interchangeable- they are at one with each other, not one and the same. And sharing such unity it is quite appropriate for them to share the same Name. A related misunderstanding is often applied to the comment of John the Baptist about Jesus- that "He was before me" (Jn. 1:30). John the Baptist was actually older than the Lord Jesus; he therefore meant that Jesus was "before" him in the sense of being more important than him. C.H. Dodd interprets this passage as meaning: "There is a man in my following who has taken precedence over me,

because he is... essentially my superior" (C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition In The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) p. 274).

8:59 *Therefore they took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple-* They wanted to kill Him for blasphemy, as in 10:31,33; for He had just alluded to the "I am" Name of Yahweh. Perhaps He miraculously avoided them (as in Lk. 4:30), or maybe as in:20 the very public spotlight upon them somehow held them back from stoning Him to death. It has been suggested that the stones were the stones left around as a result of the temple construction project. Again we see that the Lord gave His life, and it was not taken from Him.

## CHAPTER 9

9:1 *And as he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth-* The same terms for "passed by" is used in the preceding 8:59. As the Lord was 'passing by', more like quickly rushing away from His persecutors and would-be murderers, He takes time to heal a blind man, with quite a lengthy process. He didn't allow His own fears and self-preservation instinct to make Him so self-centred that He didn't notice and engage with others' physical and spiritual needs.

9:2 *And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?-* The section begins with the issue of sin and blindness, and ends with it (:41). D.A. Carson's commentary on John lists Talmudic citations which show that the Jews considered each disability to be the result of specific sin; to be born blind was listed as the result of the mother committing adultery (hence their claim he was born in sin, 9:34). This connects the incident with the previous chapter, as does the phrase "passed by" in 8:59; 9:1. The Lord is consciously seeking to challenge the Jews' false theology at the points in which it was devaluing to the human person- He wasn't seeking theological controversy for the sake of it. See on Jn. 9:6. Their question assumes that being born blind was an outcome of sin- their question was 'whose sin?'. As ever, the Lord attacks the terms of the question and lifts the issue far higher. He now dismantles the connection between sin and blindness.

9:3 *Jesus answered: Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be revealed in him-* The Lord isn't saying that they were not sinners, but that the issue of how a person got in the situation they were in wasn't the essential issue. We can learn a lesson from that, for so often, we like to focus on past behaviour as being so significant in present suffering. But the Lord urges us not to have that perspective, but rather to see the present suffering as an opportunity for God's works to be revealed within a person. "The works of God" is a phrase previously used in John's Gospel for miracles. The Lord is saying that the unleashing of power within the man was as great as the performance of any miracle, including healing from literal blindness. "*In him*", rather than on or through him, suggests that the manifestation of God was to begin *within* the man, and the essential miracle was to be on his internal spiritual vision, through the work of the Spirit within him.

The Lord refused to get caught up in the philosophical questions about 'Why suffering?'. Instead He saw the simple reality of human suffering as a call to do God's work; the disciples like so many were caught up on the 'fairness of suffering' question to the extent that they didn't perceive the extent of human need and try to do something about it.

"But that the works of God should be manifest in him, I must work..." (Gk.) would suggest that God has prepared potential 'works' but we must do them; if we don't, they will not be done. This is perhaps the sense of 9:4- we only have limited opportunity to do this, life is brief, the night comes when no man can work. If we don't use those opportunities, they are gone forever, and the works God potentially enabled will not be performed. Yet time can be frittered away today as never before.

'Revealed or "manifested" within him' may mean that the whole drama of blindness and healing happened so that God's work could be revealed within the man's heart. In this sense the Lord manifested God's Name to His disciples (17:6), His life, *the* life, was manifested in the hearts of His followers (1 Jn. 1:2). All that happens physically, externally in our lives is so that internally we might perceive spiritual things.

9:4 *We must work*- We are lights in the dark world (Mt. 5:14; Phil. 2:15), because we are in Christ, the light of the world (Jn. 9:5). Notice how in the preceding verse, Jesus said spoke of how "I must work the works of him that sent me" (Jn. 9:4 AV), yet the RV reflects the manuscript difficulties by giving "We must work". Could it be that the Lord said: 'I must work, we [you in me] must work'? The Lord Jesus was the light of the world on account of His resurrection: "He first by the resurrection from the dead should proclaim light both to the [Jewish] people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23 RV). If we are baptized into His death and resurrection, we too are the light of this world in that the light of His life breaks forth in us. And this is exactly why belief in His resurrection is an imperative to preach it. And it's why the great commission flows straight out of the resurrection narrative.

*The works of Him that sent me, while it is day. The night comes, when no one can work*- In the prologue, the night is the darkness of Jewish unbelief, and the light is that of the person of the Lord Jesus and His life. The coming of the night therefore refers to the Lord's death, the temporary extinguishing of the light by the darkness. There would be no works / miracles doable then, so the Lord was keen to bring light to people whilst He could. And likewise people only had a very short frame of opportunity to be in the light. Perhaps the Lord was speaking in a kind of soliloquy when He mused that "the night comes, when no man can work", and therefore man should walk and work while he has the light (Jn. 9:4, quoting Ecc. 9:10). He was speaking, in the context, not only of His own zeal to 'work' while He had life, but also applying this to His followers.

9:5 *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*- The Jewish world only had the chance to see the light whilst the Lord was with them. His presence, His light, would continue for the believers in Him, but as the

prologue puts it, the light shone [briefly] in darkness but they did not accept it. The Lord Jesus calls both Himself and us "the light of the world". He is "the light of the world" whenever we, who are in the world, are His light to people.

9:6 *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and anointed his eyes with the clay-*D.A. Carson's commentary on John cites Talmudic evidence that there were specific regulations against ploughing (cp. rolling spittle in the dirt), kneading (the clay), anointing and curing on the Sabbath. In this case, the Lord was purposefully seeking to provoke issues with the Jews regarding their false theology- see on Jn. 9:2. The paradox was that the man was made yet further blind in order to have his sight restored. Commentators note that putting saliva on weak eyes was common in the first century; the Lord's point was that *His* saliva, Him, His word, the word that was Him, His Spirit (for His words were His Spirit, 6:63) mixed with human flesh, the dust of humanity, could achieve permanent cure. The anointing with saliva was usually accompanied by some imprecation, cursing Satan or appealing to the gods. The Lord did none of that; instead, He mixed His saliva with the dust of humanity and there was permanent cure.

9:7 *And said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloam (which means Sent). He went away therefore and washed, and went home seeing-* In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus is the one "sent" from God- He has just stated this in 9:4. The Siloam pool therefore represented washing / baptism in Him, becoming the 'sent one' just as He was. The cure was not immediate; it required washing. This speaks of how baptism was to be the requirement for the giving of the Spirit, the new psychology, the new vision, the new worldview.

9:8 *His neighbours and those that had seen him previously, as a beggar, said: Is this not he that sat and begged?-* He "went home" (:7) but perhaps he had not been home for a long time, hence the difficulty in recognizing him. "Neighbours" may well imply 'relatives'. His blindness had cut him off from his family, a situation made worse by all the myths about blindness being a punishment for sin. His cure therefore potentially enabled the re-establishment of relationships within his family, just as it can mean in lives today.

9:9- see on 9:27.

*Others said: It is he. Others said: No, but he is like him. He said: I am he-* He repeated the "I am" used by Jesus in Jn. 8:58, because God's Name was now being manifested in him. As Jesus was the light of the world, so should we be. His usage of "I am" is perhaps recorded intentionally, in order to demonstrate that usage of the term did not make

a man God Himself, but rather spoke of the manifestation of God's Name through him. Trinitarian apologists need to accept this point more readily.

9:10 *They replied to him: How then were your eyes opened?*- Perhaps they wondered whose saliva and with what incantation his eyes had been opened. They were clearly struggling to believe that such a miracle could have been done.

9:11 *He answered: The man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to Siloam and wash. So I went away and washed, and I received sight-* "The man" is yet another indication of the Lord's humanity. He was well known- He was a public figure in Jerusalem. He was known as "the man called Jesus"; He never gave any encouragement to see Him as anything other than a man, and certainly not as God. But consider how the healed blind man grew in his appreciation of the Lord: a man (Jn. 9:11), a prophet (:17), the leader of disciples (:27), a man sent from God (:33), and finally, one to be worshipped as God is worshipped (:38). Because we've gone up one level in our appreciation of the Lord, don't think that we're there. Progressive growth in appreciation of Him should be true of us too. This experience of a growing appreciation of the Lord is in fact a foretaste of the Kingdom; for this will feature an everlasting growth in appreciation of the Lord's excellence (Is. 9:7). For us, that process has already begun. When Christ comes, we will say in that day "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: *this is the Lord*; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Is. 25:9). It doesn't mean we'll turn into Trinitarians. It means we will behold and marvel at the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, to an extent hidden from mortal eyes.

9:12 *And they said to him: Where is he? He said: I do not know-* The questions 'Who is He?' and 'Where is He?' are commonly provoked in John's Gospel. The first hearers of the Gospel were encouraged to see themselves as these unbelievers, asking these same questions, and coming to faith. We are invited to enter into the feelings of all present then- that the Lord was not physically present, but clearly He was somewhere, and had power and authority beyond the level of any human miracle worker or quack doctor.

9:13 *They took him that was previously blind to the Pharisees-* "They took" may imply they marched him off, whether he wanted it or not. They considered the Pharisees as the judges of truth in these matters; the evidence before their eyes they didn't want to see nor judge. They, like many today, based their judgments upon what others thought.

9:14 *Now it was the Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes-* The man's relatives and neighbours knew that the Pharisees would consider such healing to be working on the Sabbath. Even quack doctors were not allowed to work on the Sabbath, and they



thought they had a great opportunity to get the Lord in trouble- One who had clearly done nothing but good to this man. No good deed goes unpunished, in our experience; and in those moments when we lament that fact, we find fellowship with our Lord's experiences.

9:15 *So the Pharisees asked him how he received his sight. And he said to them: He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed and I could see-* Perhaps the man was at pains to point out that this was no quack doctor miracle involving putting saliva on weak eyes; because he actually had to wash to remove the Lord's saliva before he could see. The further shutting of his eyes with clay was to underscore the point that he had to become yet more blinded before he could properly see.

9:16 *Therefore, some of the Pharisees said-* We notice it was only "some" of them who said this. Some Pharisees later believed and became Christians, and it is a theme of John that there was a significant sense amongst the Jews that the Lord was Messiah. His crucifixion was a result of the suppression of conscience, and of an embittered minority leading a majority to do the unthinkable, as so often happens in human societies.

*This man is not from God, because he keeps not the Sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was division among them-* This division amongst the Pharisees even at this stage, relatively near to the Lord's crucifixion, shows how His destruction was the result of a weak minded majority, overly sensitive to their image, being lead to do the unthinkable evil. For the Pharisees as a group numbered no more than 5000 throughout the Roman empire. And even they were divided about the Lord. In :18 the language of 'belief' is even credited to them; but they still crucified the Lord. And so often this sad scenario plays out amongst religious people; fear of image and possible corollaries leads a majority to do evil which they would not otherwise have done.

9:17 *Therefore they said to the man born blind: What do you say concerning him, in that he opened your eyes? And he said: He is a prophet!-* The Gospel records are full of questions posed about the person and nature of the Lord Jesus. "What do you think about the Christ?... What do you think? Is He worthy of death?... What do you think... about the portrayal of the Father and son in various parables..." (Mt. 21:28; 22:42; 26:66; Jn. 11:56). And we have another example here. In teaching his Gospel, John would have laboured these questions- 'What do you say concerning Him?'. It is hard for some of us to get a second naiveté and enter into the feelings of a secular person, or a Moslem or Buddhist, as they read the Gospels for the very first time. These questions are powerful, and they would have been powerful to the audiences to which the Gospel records were first read or recited.

"He is a prophet!" was the response of the Samaritan woman (4:19). Miracles were understood as the validation of a prophet (6:14). There was no doubt the man considered that this miracle marked out the Lord as one sent from God. The Pharisees were seeking to elicit the answer "I think He is Messiah!" so they could excommunicate him (:22). But the man didn't think that, at this stage. He had no knowledge about the Lord Jesus beyond the fact that He had done a miracle. We see here grace- that the Lord took the initiative to work in a man's life to bring him to faith, before the man had any faith or the knowledge upon which to base faith.

9:18 *The Jews did not believe him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called his parents-* The implication is that they did believe once they were satisfied that he had indeed been born blind. See on :16.

9:19 *And asked them: Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?-* The implication was that the parents were lying. They asked the questions in a legal style, pressuring the parents to disown their son. This is so often the outcome of legalistic religion, when religious leaders have a point to make and have no thought for the collateral damage to human relationships caused by their obsession in proving someone else wrong.

9:20 *His parents answered and said: We know that this is our son and that he was born blind-* We sense their nervousness in answering up before this kangaroo court. They feared more than anything the social exclusion which would come as a result of excommunication.

9:21 *But how he now sees, we do not know. Or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him! He is of age. He shall speak for himself-* The Jews considered that any over 13 years of age were "of age" to answer for themselves in such cases. Surely they had been present at his "home" when he first returned with the amazing information about "the man called Jesus" and how his eyes had been opened by saliva and washing. They surely were aware of this information, and likely believed it in their hearts. But unlike their son, they feared excommunication. They would not come out openly in confessing faith, or even in accepting the simple reality that the Lord had performed a miracle. This theme of open confession rather than secret acceptance is significant in John, for he was probably using his Gospel record to preach to other Jews who were likewise cowed by the synagogue system into not openly confessing their faith.

9:22- see on Jn. 12:42.

*These things said his parents, because they feared the Jews. For the Jews had agreed already, that if anyone should confess him to be Christ, he*

*should be thrown out of the synagogue*- The fear of excommunication has stymied so much spirituality and faith over the centuries. John's initial audience were facing the same problem. "The Jews had agreed already" on this policy, but it was only some of them who forced it through; see on :16 and :18. This policy was apparently dropped when thousands of Jews were baptized into Christ at Pentecost, and remained within the synagogue system. The Lord however predicted that the time would come when this policy would again be enforced, and His followers would be excommunicated from the synagogues (16:2). And so it happened. Hebrews was apparently written to the last remnants of the Christians in Jerusalem, the majority of whom had caved in and returned to Judaism because of this policy.

Excommunication from the synagogue meant total social isolation; such a person could not buy from or sell anything to another Jew. The language of the mark of the beast in Rev. 13:17 is virtually quoting from Jewish synagogue excommunication language. Whatever later applications the beast has, John saw it in terms of the evil system of Judaism, based upon Jerusalem, the city spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, persecuting the saints and having its total destruction in the events of AD70.

The "man born blind" in John 9 was an eloquent type of the believers: the unclean one had the spittle (word / spirit) of the Lord Jesus mixed with dust (flesh) and placed on his eyes. Then he had to go and baptize himself at Siloam, and then his blindness was lifted. It is stressed, really stressed (12 times in 32 verses) that the man was "blind"; as if to emphasize how totally blind we are before our "washing", and how blind the unsaved world is. The result was that the man was "put out of the synagogue" (Jn. 9:22)- and the very same phrase is used about all the other first century Jewish believers (Jn. 16:2). They were to go through exactly what he did. The Lord Jesus was well known for His many miracles of curing blind people (Lk. 7:21,22; Jn. 10:21; 11:37); it was as if he healed this affliction especially. All these miracles were surely acted parables of His work in saving men from the spiritual blindness of their earlier life. The figure of blindness being lifted is truly a powerful picture of what happened at our conversion. From then on, we began to see (i.e. understand) for the first time. We began to understand something properly for the first time. We were *blind* beforehand. Previously, all our 'knowledge' was just perception, passing through paradigms.

9:23 *Therefore his parents replied: He is of age, ask him!*- Despite knowing the facts about their son's healing and the association of "the man called Jesus" with it, they refused to openly testify to what they knew. Fear of religious excommunication has led many over the centuries to put religious acceptance by others far before truth and basic family relationships.

9:24 *So they questioned the man that was born blind a second time, and said to him: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner-* The demand to "Give God the glory" was an admonition to repent and tell the truth (Josh. 7:19). But the man refused to take false guilt, piled onto him by his religious elders. There is true guilt, the guilt we should feel for actual sin; and false guilt, which is placed upon us by others. The man refused to take this, as we should. To receive grace is no crime.

9:25 *He answered: Whether he is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see-* We see here how little the man knew about the Lord. Yet the Lord worked in his life to bring him to faith, before he believed. This is grace itself. It also puts a stop to all Pentecostal claims that faith is required before miracles can happen. The Lord's cures were by the power of the Spirit, and were not some form of faith healing, which requires the healed person to focus their minds in faith.

9:26 *They replied to him: What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?-* Playing the role of prosecutors, they asked him the same questions, hoping his answers would contradict themselves. But truth was on the man's side and his account was consistent. He refused to be brow beaten by them, unlike his parents.

9:27 *He answered them: I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Would you also become his disciples?-* His styled was copied by the Lord Jesus- 10:25. As Jesus was the "I am", so this man too manifested God and uses the same phrase *ego eimi*, 9:9. They would have considered his attitude to be some form of contempt of court. He rightly perceived that they had been told the truth but did not 'hear' it. He is unconsciously repeating the Lord's own comment that they could not understand His speech because they did not hear His word (8:43). We can only respect the man; for he appeals to them to "become His disciples". If they would wish to become disciples, then he would repeat his testimony. But he wouldn't waste his breath for any other reason. As noted on :17, these questions are recorded in the way they are because they are the questions a person is being asked as they first hear the Gospel of Jesus. 'Will you also be His disciple?'

9:28 *And they reviled him and said: You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses-* The man could hardly be described as a disciple of the Lord as he knew so little about Him. And yet his challenge to them to become the Lord's disciples (:27) was understandably read by them as meaning that he was a disciple of the Lord. Just as 'belief' is credited to people in John's Gospel when they still have major problems in their faith, so this man is presented as a disciple when he knew hardly anything. It

was by their questioning of him that he came to articulate his own understanding and faith.

9:29 *We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know from where he came-* Yet they were claiming that nobody would know from where Messiah came; their position here flatly contradicts the statement in 7:27: "However we know from where this man is; but when the Christ comes, no one knows from where he is". The sensitive reader is left to perceive this; neither the Lord, nor John the narrator, makes big capital of this glaring contradiction in their position. That is not the way of the Spirit, and it will not be fruitful for us to use this style either- even though religious debate is full of this kind of thing.

Guilt by association is deeply ingrained in the human psyche- it's one of the most obstinate parts of our nature with which we have to do battle. We tend to assume that people are like those with whom they associate. The association of God's Son with us just shows how totally untrue that assumption is- and He went out of His way to turn it on its head by associating with whores and gamblers. You can see an example of the guilt by association mentality in the incident of the healed blind man here. The Jews accused Jesus of being illegitimate- they mocked the former blind man about his healer: "as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is" (Jn. 9:29). When the healed man stands up for Jesus, the Jews get really mad with him: "You were completely born in sin!"- i.e. 'you're illegitimate' (Jn. 9:34). But the record reveals that the Jews knew the man's parents and had just spoken with them (Jn. 9:20). Clearly the mentality of these learned men was: 'You follow a bastard; so, *you* are a bastard'. Simple as that.

9:30 *The man answered and said to them: This is the marvel! You do not know from where he came, even though he opened my eyes-* The man may be alluding to their position that none would know from whence Messiah comes (7:27). But his reasoning was that since they accepted a miracle had been done, why then did they not perceive that this man was from God? Even Nicodemus thought as much, although he would not at that time confess it (3:2). The years of blindness had not been wasted on this man. He had thought things through and displays a fine command of logic and spiritual insight, although he knew nothing of the Lord Jesus.

9:31 *We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone be a worshiper of God and does His will, him He hears!-* Paul Tournier in *The Meaning Of Persons* perceptively comments: "We become fully conscious only of what we are able to express to someone else. We may already have had a certain intuition about it, but it must remain vague so long as it is unformulated". This is why anyone involved in preaching, public speaking, writing or personal explanation of the Gospel to someone else will know that *they* have gained so much from having to state in so many

words what they already 'know'. And in the course of making the expression, our own understanding is deepened, our personal consciousness of what we believe is strengthened, and thereby our potential for a real faith is enhanced. Tournier's observation is validated by considering the record of the healed blind man in Jn. 9. Initially he says that he doesn't know whether or not Jesus is a sinner, all he knows is that Jesus healed him. But the Jews force him to testify further, and in the course of his witness, the man explains to them that God doesn't hear sinners, and so for Jesus to have asked God for his healing and been heard... surely proved that Jesus wasn't a sinner. He was sinless. The man was as it were thinking out loud, coming to conclusions himself, as he made his bold witness (Jn. 9:31,33).

*9:32 Since the world began it has never been heard of a man born blind having his eyes opened-* There are no O.T. accounts of a born blind person being healed; this was specifically the work of God (Ps. 146:8) and His Messiah (Is. 35:5). The healed man seems to have been aware of this and therefore came to the conclusion that his healer must be Messiah. It wasn't that he believed and therefore was given the benefit of healing; by grace, God first of all healed him and this grace, reflected on and believed, led him to faith in Christ. The man was coming to see that his healing, of a man born blind, was an indication that the Kingdom of God was breaking in amongst men.

*9:33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing-* Truth is arrived at by different paths. The Lord had clearly stated that He could "do nothing" apart from the fact He was empowered by the Father (5:30). The man arrived by reflection at the very positions which the Lord had Himself taught, although it seems he had never heard the Lord's teaching. Or perhaps he had heard some garbled versions of the Lord's message, and now he was joining the dots and all was making perfect sense.

*9:34 They answered and said to him: You were altogether born in sins, and you teach us! And they excommunicated him-* By saying he was born in sin, they were admitting that he had indeed been born blind- for they believed blindness was a result of the mother's sin (see on 9:2). Yet they had refused to believe that he had been born blind (9:18,20). Thus the Lord worked to even move them onwards in their faith; He gave up on nobody (cp. His efforts to witness to the priests by asking the cleansed leper to offer a sacrifice for cleansing). They had insinuated that the Lord was illegitimate because His family origins were unclear, and their 'guilt by association' mindset led them to assume that as the Lord was, so was anyone who openly stood up for Him. We can make this same basic human psychological error so easily, especially when it comes to religious issues. They excommunicated for believing Jesus was the Messiah (:22).

The man did not believe that, but they took his criticism of them as meaning he did. Their logic is continually exposed as false- to those who join the dots. The contradictions are not explicitly exposed. They claimed he was illegitimate, when his parents had just given sober legal testimony that he was their legitimate son. But the way of the Spirit is not to make capital out of the contradictions in others' positions. Such contradictions are left to work on the conscience.

*9:35 Jesus heard that they had excommunicated him; and on finding him, he said: Do you believe on the Son of God?-* Perhaps the Lord wondered whether the man's logical and spiritual process had led him to conclude that "the man called Jesus" was in fact Son of God. As noted on :17 and :27, John's Gospel is full of questions which would have jumped out at the initial hearers- 'Do *you* believe on the Son of God?'. The man is clearly set up as representative of all who would afterwards believe. John's Gospel was written, and the "signs" such as the healing of the blind man were recorded, so that others would make this very same confession of faith in the Son of God (20:31). John urges his converts to continue their 'belief in the Son of God' (1 Jn. 5:13). Surely he is alluding to this man as the prototype of all the Christian converts.

*9:36 He answered and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?-* When the blind man asks Jesus to tell him who the Son of God is, I don't think it was because he didn't recognize Jesus to be Messiah. He was surely saying 'Tell me more about Him / you, that I may believe properly' (Jn. 9:36). The Lord Jesus didn't give a doctrinal exposition. But instead He just tells the man to keep looking at Him and hearing Him. And in the next chapter, the Lord says that His sayings and His works are the same thing (Jn. 10:32,33,38)- whereas the Jews kept making a distinction between them. They said that His words, not His works, were the problem. His works, they said, were OK. But not His words. And Jesus tells them to "*believe* the works" - for they are His words to men. Thus the Lord showed that His actions were His words made flesh.

The blind man asked about Jesus: "Who is he, that I may believe on him?". True belief depends upon having the true image of Jesus. The goal of conversion to Him is love from a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). To know Him properly leads to love within us. 1 Jn. 3:22 brackets together believing in His Name and loving one another. Again and again we say: images and understanding of Jesus matter.

*9:37 Jesus said to him: You have both seen him, and he it is that speaks with you-* 'Seeing' in John means 'understanding in faith'. The Lord is saying that the man has indeed figured things out correctly. In literal terms, the man had to be first given the gift of sight in order to see the Lord. And there was a spiritual equivalent. There is an element of calling, of enlightenment by the Spirit (Eph. 1:18); so that within the final algorithm of human salvation, there is the factor of God's grace. This is

why Paul starts talking about predestination and calling in Romans; they are parade examples of how salvation is by grace and not of works nor of human tenacity or correctness of Biblical interpretation. These things are not outside of the algorithm, but they are not the only factors, lest salvation be of works and human ability.

9:38 *And he said: Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him-* This is a climactic moment. The once blind man realizes that this man standing before him is in fact God's Son. These are the very words of the man of Mk. 9:24, of Martha in Jn. 11:27 and effectively of Thomas in 20:25. The whole incident is definitely set up to present the man as a prototype of all who come to faith in the Lord. The significance of the man's confession is that it was made in the presence of the Pharisees (:40); he openly confessed his faith before the Jewish world, which again was intended to be a pattern for all.

9:39 *And Jesus said: For judgment I came into this world, that they that cannot see may see, and that they that see may become blind-* Remember the Lord had cured the man by first making him more blind. His judgment of the world, in blinding them, was still done in the hope that they would come to sight. Saul's blindness leading to his conversion and washing in baptism was surely allusive to the Lord's teaching here. Receiving sight was a result of judgment. The man was made to realize that his blindness was symbolic of judgment for sin, although the Lord had no interest in the history of or guilt for that sin. It was through that judgment that the man came to see.

"They that see" may require an ellipsis to be read in, to the effect 'those who think that they see'. Or the Lord may be alluding to the way that on one level, they did 'see' that He was from God, but because they had refused to follow the Spirit's leading, they were blinded so that they could not further perceive Him.

The Lord's very existence among men was their judgment- for judgment He came into this world, the light of His moral excellence blinded the immoral (this is again alluding to the prologue's description of the Lord as light). Bright light shows up every shadow. Whenever men were in Christ's presence, they were judged. The very presence of His light amongst men was their condemnation (Jn. 3:19; 5:27; 12:31; 16:8,11). In this sense He could say that for judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39).

9:40 *Those of the Pharisees who were with him heard these things, and said to him: Are we also blind?-* As noted on :39, they considered that they 'saw' and were not spiritually blind. The Lord had said that they were blinded- not from birth, but blinded by Him, as a result of the process of



refusing to believe what on one level they had 'seen'. They sensed they were the ones being referred to as blind- and yet they considered themselves the most spiritually perceptive in Israel.

9:41 *Jesus said to them: If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say: We see, therefore your sin remains*-There was a difference between being born blind, and being blinded. The Lord has said that they were in the category of those who had been blinded, because they had seen but not believed (:39). It was because they refused to accept this that their sin remained. The implication was that being cured of blindness, receiving spiritual sight, meant forgiveness of sin; but blindness meant that sin remained. It is only by walking in the light of the Lord Jesus, with the eyes of the Spirit, that sin no longer remains in our lives. John develops this point in his later pastoral appeals to his converts to not remain in sin if they were really in the light. Living in the light of His presence and with His life ever before us as our life... means that we will not remain in sin. Blindness in the sense of genuine ignorance is not therefore reckoned as sin by the Lord. It is refusal to 'see' what we have 'seen' that makes us culpable for sin; it is this kind of blindness that is associated with condemnation (2 Pet. 1:9).

## CHAPTER 10

10:1-see on Mk. 13:34.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that enters not by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber-* The good shepherd searches for the sheep until He finds it. John 10 is full of reference to Ezekiel 34, which describes God's people as perishing on the mountains, eaten by wolves. But the Lord Jesus set Himself to do that which was impossible- to search *until He found*, even though He knew that some were already lost. Our attitude to those lost from the ecclesia and to those yet out in the world must be similar. The material in John 10 follows straight on from the incident in chapter 9, where the Lord had sought out the healed blind man and brought him into the fold, in the teeth of the terrible behaviour from Israel's false shepherds.

The Lord will go on to define Himself as the only door into the fold. He is speaking in the context of the healed blind man being excommunicated from the synagogue in 9:34 and the threat of excommunication for any who believed in Him in 9:22. This was a major issue at the time and also for the communities to whom John was preaching his Gospel.

The Lord is saying that He is the only way into the fold, and therefore the threats of excommunication are irrelevant; especially as they were made by unbelievers in Him, who were only apparently within the fold by illegitimate means. This is all comfort to those who are excommunicated for whatever reason. So many lose their faith or spirituality because of it, but the Lord is saying that the definition of who is within the fold is not in the hands of the men who practice this evil. For He is the door, and whoever enters by Him shall be saved and is within the fold. Those who excommunicate have not really known the spirit of Christ, and so their claims to authority are illegitimate. They were thieves and robbers- in that the Jewish leadership were covetous and were using religion as a source of money. Elsewhere the Lord speaks of "the thief" coming to rob the master's household (Mt. 24:43) and in the first instance He may have had in view the Jewish attempt to take over the Christian movement. He had labelled the temple "a den of thieves" (Mt. 21:13). And Israel chose a robber rather than the Lord Jesus (Jn. 18:40; Mt. 27:38). The "thieves" who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable may well refer to this same category of Jewish religious leaders (Lk. 10:30).

10:2 *But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep-* The Lord was both the door and the shepherd. But the context in chapter 9 is of people the parents of the blind man being so fearful of the religious leaders. The Lord is perhaps saying that any spiritual shepherd will have entered the fold through the door, which is Him. Only those who have become in Christ are shepherds; the Jewish converts need not fear nor

respect any others who claimed to be shepherds, and that included the entire Jewish religious leadership at that time.

*10:3 To him the gatekeeper opens the gate, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his sheep by name and leads them out-* As noted on :2, the Lord is speaking in the context of the excommunication of the blind man by the Jewish religious leaders. He is teaching that the only legitimate shepherds in God's flock are those who have passed through Him, the door. "The gatekeeper" may be another reference to the Lord; He is the One who allows the legitimate shepherd access to the flock. They need not therefore fear excommunication, because those practicing it were not legitimate shepherds, and instead were the incarnations of the false shepherds of Israel which the Old Testament condemns. But we could also understand the gatekeeper as representing John the Baptist, who responded to the voice of the Lord Jesus (3:29), and who opened the way for the flock to enter through the Christ-door into the new fold.

The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd, whereas the Jewish leadership had shown many times over that they did not understand the Lord's speech because they did not hear His word (8:43); they were continually misunderstanding His language. The events and dialogues of chapter 9 were proof enough of this; the flock should not therefore respect the voices of these men, seeing they did not hear the Lord's voice. Indeed, the Lord considered that the flock of Israel at that time were without any shepherds apart from Himself (Mt. 9:36).

The Lord knows each of His sheep and has given us a unique name. This is a picture of the very personal relationship between the Lord and each of His sheep. We hear His voice in different ways, for He speaks with a different intonation to each of us. This is not to say that false teaching is not false teaching; but all the same, each sheep has a different, although not contradictory, nuance of understanding the Lord's voice. The idea of being known by name recalls Yahweh's statement to Moses, that He knew him by name (Ex. 33:12,17). The Lord is encouraging the flock that each of them could have no less an intimate relationship with the Father and Son as Moses had. No longer should they see Moses as some unreachable climax of spirituality; they could all reach that level of intimacy, through the Lord's work and word.

If we respond to the Lord's voice, then we are 'led out' by Him; a word used of Israel's being led out of Egypt and through the wilderness. But the word is also used of the leading by the hand of the blind man in Mk. 8:23, and I have shown that this teaching in chapter 10 is clearly developing the themes of chapter 9 where a blind man was cured. The leading of the sheep is by the Lord's voice. The place of His word can never be underrated.

10:4- see on Mt. 16:22-25.

*When he brings out all his sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice-* The personal knowledge of every sheep (:3) is stressed again by the "all". The connections continue with the preceding chapter, as "brings out" translates the same Greek word translated "excommunicate" in 9:34,35. Unlike the false shepherds, the Lord doesn't drive out as punishment and leave the sheep alone. He leads His sheep out by going before them, and not by driving from behind or scaring them with sheepdogs. The image of the Lord going ahead with the disciples following Him connects with the idea of the Lord carrying His cross and bidding us follow Him on that last walk. John's Gospel concludes with the disciples following the Lord Jesus, focused upon Him solely. And the same image is used when He says that after His resurrection, He would "go before them into Galilee" (Mt. 26:32; 28:7).

John's record stresses that the key to following Jesus to the cross is to hear His word, which beckons us onwards (Jn. 10:4,27). All our Bible study must lead us onwards in the life of self-sacrifice. The Lord Jesus "*putteth forth his own sheep by name*" (Jn. 10:4); the same word is used by Him in Lk. 10:2 concerning how He *sends forth* workers to reap converts in preaching. Each of those He calls has a unique opportunity ["by name"] to gather others to Him.

The idea of 'following' Jesus is invariably associated with the carrying of the cross. Why do this? Because of the voice / word of Jesus, of who He is, of His Spirit. This must be the ultimate end of our Bible study; a picking up of the cross. For there we see God's words made flesh.

10:5 *A stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him. For they do not know the voice of strangers-* This is again an appeal to the intuitive sense within those who are of the Spirit; they instinctively discern those whose voice is not of God. The Lord puts it another way in 7:17, where [see note there] He explained that whoever has a heart for God's will can intuitively sense true and false teaching.

Remember that it was in full knowledge of the disciples' impending collapse of faith and feeling from Him, that the grace of Jesus confidently spoke of how His men would not follow "a stranger... but will flee from him". But the disciples fled from their Lord in Gethsemane, as He knew they would (from Zech. 13:7, cp. Mt. 26:31) at the time He said those words. He knew that He must die for the sheep who would scatter each one to His own way (Is. 53:6). "The time comes... when you shall be scattered, every man to his own" (Jn. 16:32); and true enough, they all fled from Him (Mt. 26:56). But in Jn. 10 He spoke of His followers as calm, obedient sheep who would not scatter if they had a good shepherd (Jn. 10:12); even though He knew they would. The Lord's way of imputing such righteousness to His followers seems to be brought out in Jn. 10:4 cp. 6: "The sheep follow Him: for they know (understand,

appreciate) His voice... this parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake", i.e. they didn't know His voice.

10:6 *This parable spoke Jesus to them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them-* This 'not understanding' seems an exemplification of His words in :5 that the true sheep will not follow the voice of strangers; and likewise, those who were not the Lord's sheep would not understand His voice. However, there is a purposeful ambiguity about who it was who "did not understand"; for that comment is often made about the disciples. As noted on :5, they did in fact "flee" from the Lord Jesus instead of remaining faithful to Him. Even although they did not understand His voice as they should have done, still He counted them as His sheep. This was grace itself.

10:7 *Jesus then said to them: Again, truly, truly, I say to you: I am the door of the sheepfold-* The statement in :23 that the Lord was teaching in Solomon's Porch appears to apply to all the material in this chapter; for the same themes of sheep and folds continue seamlessly. The ideas of a "fold" and that of the "courts" of the temple are very similar. Solomon's Porch was as a colonnade area that ran along the east side of the court of the Gentiles. There was a sign warning that any Gentile going further into the temple court was liable to death. The Lord surely alludes to these courts as He was standing right next to them- teaching that being in Him was the only source of entry into the fold / court, and that He was creating only one court / fold. The various courts, of the women, of the Gentiles etc. were to all be merged into the one fold / court, into which He alone gave exclusive access.

10:8 *All that came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them-* Messiah was "he that comes", the 'coming one'. These others who 'came before Me' could refer to false Messiahs. It was their teaching which meant they did not persuade the sheep to follow them; and again the Lord appeals to an intuitive sense that the sheep have as to whose is the true voice. And He clearly locates the motives for these false Messiahs and teachers as being materialistic- "thieves and robbers". The false teachers as mentioned both in the Gospels and epistles were teaching as they did for money or personal gain.

10:9 *I am the door. By me if anyone enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture-* The going in and out is hard to interpret. I suggested on :8 that the Lord was standing near the divide between the court of the Gentiles and the further courts; He was alluding to them in His talk about creating one fold, and He being the door of entry into the fold / court. I suggest this is the best understanding of going in and out freely- no longer passing a sign threatening death for going

further, if you were a woman or a Gentile. No longer going out, looking at the excluded ones in another court, feeling more righteous than them by reason of ethnicity or gender. But going out and in is also a Hebraism for leadership. Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well-known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep. So the idea may be that true shepherds of the new flock would be believers in Christ, the door, and only through Him would enter in and lead the flock. For the Lord is emphasizing the danger of false shepherds, of the kind who had excommunicated the blind man, the sheep, of chapter 9.

Ex. 38:18 describes the curtain over the door of the tabernacle in similar language to how the veil hiding the Most Holy is described. The Lord Jesus is the door of the tabernacle through which we enter at our conversion. By doing so we also enter, in prospect, through the veil into the Most Holy of eternity and Divine nature.

10:10 *The thief only comes so that he may steal and kill and destroy-* Again the Lord is stating that the motive of the false shepherds was solely materialistic. And because of that, they ended up spiritually destroying the flock. The allusions are clearly to Ezekiel 34 and the condemnation of Israel's greedy, destructive shepherds.

*I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly-* The life more abundant refers to the gift of the Spirit, the gift of His life lived in us, whereby we have His presence. Belief on the Son means that we "have [everlasting] life" right now (3:36; 5:24; 6:47,54; 1 Jn. 5:12,13). And that life shall eternally endure; it is the kind of life we shall eternally live in the Kingdom. Yet the gift of this life was made available by the Lord's death. It was the smitten rock that gave abundant, springing life. "I am come" seems to refer to His 'coming down' on the cross, as if it were already happening. Think for a moment of *how* the death of a man on a stake, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, irritated by flies and barking dogs... could actually give us life "more abundantly"? What was the process, what *is* the process, going on here? What's the connection between that dying man, and a transformed life in you and me today in the 21st century? Surely the connecting power is that the spirit / disposition of the Lord there and then has an inevitable, transforming influence upon those of us who believe in Him; the super-abounding grace and generosity of spirit that was in Him there, which was epitomized in the hours of public, naked exhibition... can't fail to move our spirits to be likewise. Paul speaks of this when He says that God does for us exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, by the spirit / power / disposition that works in is (Eph. 3:20). That power, that spirit, is

surely that of the crucifixion of Christ. For we cannot be passive to it, if we really 'get it'. It is a power that "works in us". See on 2 Cor. 8:7.

10:11- see on Jn. 13:36-38.

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep-* It was through His death that the abundant life was created for the sheep; see on :10. Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num. 27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so the Lord gave His life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. "The good shepherd" may well have been a Rabbinical title for Moses; the Lord therefore was saying "I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this". In a sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in that he was excluded from the land *for their sakes* (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolise how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of the Lord's for us. The Lord Jesus likewise died the death of a sinner; He was "forsaken" in the sense that God forsakes sinners, whilst as God's Son He was never forsaken by the Father.

The Lord's life was laid down on the cross, and yet in another sense He was laying it down in the process of His mortal life, in which He gave His life to us. Yet in the shepherd metaphor, He laid His life down for the salvation of the sheep from danger. He was temporarily slain by the wolf seeking to attack them; and He was slain by the Jews. They were the wolves attacking the flock just as Paul foresaw the Judaist attacks on the fledgling ecclesia as being the attacks of wolves upon sheep.

10:12 *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them-* The disciples were indeed scattered when the shepherd, the Lord Jesus, was smitten. The analogy suggests that He died fighting for their protection. He temporarily died and they were scattered by the wolf of Jewish persecution. But His resurrection led to a gathering together of all His true people, in the face of the wolf's persecution. This general picture is developed in John's later writing, Revelation, where the beasts persecute the sheep; and whatever later application that has, the initial application was to Jewish persecution in the first century.

All this implies that the Lord, the good shepherd, saw the wolf coming. He didn't flee, but fought with this ferocious beast until the death. He says that if He had not done this, the sheep would be scattered. The struggle between Christ and the devil / flesh was therefore at its most intense on the cross, in His time of dying. The cross was not only a continuation of His struggle with the (Biblical) devil. It was an especially intensified struggle; and the Lord foresaw this fight coming. There is an element of unreality in this story that serves to make two powerful points. Firstly, no normal shepherd would give his life in protecting his sheep. The near fanaticism of this shepherd is also found in Am. 8:4, which describes the Lord as taking out of the mouth of the lion the legs or piece of ear which remains of the slain sheep; such is the shepherd's desperate love for the animal that now is not. The love of Christ for us on the cross, the intensity and passion of it, is quite outside any human experience. Hence the command to copy His love is a new commandment. And secondly, wolves don't normally act in the way the story says. They will only fight like this when they are cornered, and they aren't so vicious. But the point the Lord is making is crucial to us: the devil, the power of sin in our natures as manifest in the Jews, was far more powerful than they thought, and the struggle against it on the cross was far harder than we would think. And there's a more tragic point. In the short term, the sheep were scattered by the wolf, even though Christ died so this wouldn't happen. And Christ knew in advance that this would happen (Is. 53:6; Mk. 14:27; Jn. 16:32). The Lord faced His final agony with the knowledge that in the short term, what He was dying in order to stop (i.e. the scattering of the sheep) wouldn't work. The sheep would still be scattered, and He knew that throughout the history of His church they would still keep wandering off and getting lost (according to Lk. 15:3-6). Yet He died for us from the motive of ultimately saving us from the effect of doing this. He had clearly thought through the sheep / shepherd symbolism. Unity and holding on to the faith were therefore what He died to achieve (cp. Jn. 17:21-23); our disunity and apostasy, each turning to his own, is a denial of the Lord's sufferings. And this is why it causes Him such pain. Not only is the shepherd unreal. The sheep are, too- once we perceive the link back to Ez. 34:17-22. They tread down the good pasture so others can't eat from it; having drunk clean water themselves, they make the rest of the water dirty by putting their feet in it; and the stronger sheep attack the weaker ones. This isn't how sheep usually behave! But these sheep are unusually badly behaved. And they are symbols of us, for whom this unusual shepherd gave His life. See on Lk. 15:5.

10:13 *He flees because he is a hired hand and does not care about the sheep-* Again the Lord is saying that the Jewish shepherds were motivated solely by money, their "hire". There may be here an allusion to Judas, who "did not care for the poor" (s.w., 12:6).



The Gospel writers three times bring out the point that people perceived that the Lord Jesus didn't "care" for people. The disciples in the boat thought that He didn't care if they perished (Mk. 4:38); Martha thought He didn't care that she was left in an impossible domestic situation, doubtless assuming He was a mere victim of common male insensitivity to women (Lk. 10:40); and twice it is recorded that the people generally had the impression that He cared for nobody (Mt. 22:16; Mk. 12:14). And yet the Lord uses the very same word here to speak of the hired shepherd who cares not for the sheep- whereas He as the good shepherd cares for them so much that He dies for them. I find this so tragic- that the most caring, self-sacrificial person of all time wasn't perceived as that, wasn't credited for it all. The disciples surely wrote the Gospels with shame over this matter. It points up the loneliness of the Lord's agonizing last hours. And yet it provides comfort for all unappreciated caregivers, as spouses, parents, children, servants of the ecclesia... in their suffering they are sharing something of the Lord's agony. The Lord's "care" for the sheep led Him to lay down His life for them; but people thought that He did not "care" for His sheep. Each time the Lord heard this accusation, He must have reflected that actually He cared so much for them that He was laying down His life. Love unperceived is one of the hardest things to live with, and discourages many from abiding in the life of love. In those moments of discouragement we can remember the Lord, whose love was likewise unperceived, and continues to be in millions of hearts to this day.

The Lord even saw the unconverted and the unreached as His potential sheep. He criticizes the "hireling" who has "no concern for the sheep" (Jn. 10:13) with the same expression as is used in Jn. 12:6 to describe how Judas was "not concerned for the poor". He parallels "the sheep" with the "poor" whom He and His group sought to help materially as best they could; He saw those crowds, whom we would likely have dismissed as just of the "loaves and fishes" mentality, as potential sheep.

10:14 *I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me-* Again the Lord is imputing righteousness and perception to His followers; for He lamented that although they had been with Him so long, they still apparently did not "know" Him (14:9). And yet 'knowledge' is being used in the Hebraic sense of relationship. His relationship with His sheep is mutual.

10:15 *Even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep-* His mutual relationship with the Father, the Hebrew sense of both sides 'knowing' each other, was to be reflected in His knowing His sheep and them knowing Him (:14- a theme developed at length in chapter 17).

There is and will be something dynamic in our relationship with the Father and Son. The Lord Jesus spoke of how He 'knows' the Father and 'knows' us His sheep in the continuous tense (:14,15)- He was 'getting to know' the Father, and He 'gets to know' us. And this is life eternal, both now and then, that we might *get to know* the one true God and His Son (Jn. 17:3). The knowing of God and His Son is not something merely academic, consisting only of facts. It is above all an experience, a thrilling and dynamic one. I am the good shepherd, and know (Gk. 'am getting to know', continuous tense) my sheep, and am known (*being known*) of mine. As the Father *knoweth* (is knowing) me, even so know I (I am getting to know) the Father". The relationship between us and our Lord will therefore be one of progressive upward knowledge, as He has with God. Thus a state of ultimate knowledge of God will not be flashed into us at the moment of acceptance at the judgment. For this very reason, the Kingdom cannot be an inactive state. God is dynamic. For us to grow in His knowledge will be a continuously dynamic process. It is pointed out in John's Gospel that those who will truly know God will not fully know Him now, in this life. Thus the blind man in 9:12 said that he did not know where Jesus was; Thomas likewise said that the disciples did not know where Jesus was going 14:5,7); in 4:32 the Lord Jesus said that He had meat which we do not know of. Those who said (in John's Gospel) that they *did* know Jesus, often found that they did not. Thus the Lord said that the Samaritans worshipped what they did not know (4:22), although they were convinced that they did. Nicodemus thought that he knew Jesus, when he did not (3:2); the Jews thought that they knew whence Jesus was (7:26); "now we know that you have a demon", they boasted (8:52); "we know that this man is a sinner" (9:34)- and how wrong they were. Those who accepted they did not fully know the Lord Jesus will spend eternity coming to know Him (17:3).

It was due to His *knowing* that the Lord gave His life. Knowledge, in its active and true sense of relationship, does have a vital part to play. Otherwise spirituality becomes pure emotion alone. To "follow after righteousness" is paralleled with "to know righteousness" (Is. 51:1,7). To know it properly is to follow after it.

10:16- see on Jn. 17:23.

*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock with one shepherd-* I suggested earlier that the Lord was saying these things standing by the court of the Gentiles, and the idea of the 'fold' is associated with that of the 'courts', for Jews, Gentiles and women. The Greek for "fold" is translated "court" in 18:15; Rev. 11:2. The true fold or court was only one, and entered into through the Lord Jesus. Instead of

threatening death to those who crossed into the wrong courts, the Lord was the door through which *life* was offered. *This* fold may have been said with a motion toward the inner court. The women, Gentiles, the unclean and outcasts were to be brought, in obedience to His voice, and moulded into one flock with only one shepherd. The 'bringing' preceded the 'hearing My voice'. It's not that the Lord has given us His written word and whoever figures it out becomes part of the flock. He brings people, called by grace; and then it is over to them whether they further 'hear His voice'. Revelation develops the idea where we have a vision of the Lord as a shepherd leading His flock, on account of being Himself a lamb. But that vision refers to the Kingdom age. It could be argued from the force of "they shall *become*..." that the Lord is working to bring together His sheep into one fold, but that final unity will only be achieved at His return. The present divided state of the flock is therefore envisaged, although the Lord works to bring down the barriers between sheep and sheep.

Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10). When the Lord spoke of His people as being raised up put of the stones, as living stones, He surely had Neh. 4:2 in mind- where the stones of Zion are described as reviving, coming alive, at the restoration. The second coming is to be the restoration *again* of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), as if the first restoration is to be understood as a type of that to come.

The way in which we are seen by God as if we are already saved on account of our being in Christ is also explicable by appreciating His timelessness. Rom. 8:29 says that the whole process of our calling, justification and glorification all occurred at the foundation of the world. In God's eyes, those of us in Christ are already saved and glorified. The Lord spoke of "other sheep I have" (Jn. 10:16) when at that time we never existed. Likewise in God's eyes there was only one resurrection, that of the Lord Jesus. The resurrected Lord is compared to the sheaf of first fruits (1 Cor. 15:20), as if those in him rose with him and were glorified together, in God's eyes. Perhaps the Lord Jesus had this in mind when he said: "I *am* the resurrection".

10:17 *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it again-*

The idea of Christ *giving* Himself for us refers to that final moment of giving up, yielding, laying down His breath for us. He did not die, as most men do, against their will, fighting for the continuation of life at all costs; in the words of Dylan Thomas, dying men "Go not gentle

into that good night / But rage, rage against the dying of the light". The Lord died by breathing out the last breath in His lungs, His spirit, toward His disciples. Paul was evidently moved by this; he marvelled at how Christ "*gave himself* for me" (Gal. 2:20), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 concerning him giving up His spirit. And we can enter into that sense or marvel and wonder. Paul again alludes to this in Eph. 5:2: "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath *given himself* for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour". That wondrous moment when Christ reached such self-control as to give His life for us, to breathe out His last breath for us as an act of the will, that moment was evidently deep within the mind of Paul. Because of it we should find ample inspiration to "walk in love" towards each other, to be so full of praise for this that we have no time to even speak about the sins to which earthly nature is so prone. These are high ideals indeed, yet in Paul (another sin-stricken human) they began to be realized. They *really can* be realized in our lives, we truly can begin to appreciate the intensity of that yielding up, that laying down of the life spirit of our Lord Jesus- and therefore and thereby we will find the inspiration to respond in a life of true love for each other.

The same word crops up later: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and *gave himself* for it" (Eph. 5:25). Now this is high, heavenly, indeed. Husbands are asked to consider the intensity of that moment when Christ, rigid with self-control, gave up His life for us, breathing His last as a controlled act of the will. And the Spirit through Paul asks husbands to reflect this in their daily lives, in the petty day by day situation of life. No wonder he asks wives to deeply respect their husbands if they at least try to rise up to this spirit (Eph. 5:33). Real meditation upon the implications of all this, the very height of the challenge, will surely do more good to a marriage than any amount of counselling and reading of human words.

The Father loved the Son *because* He laid down His life in this way; there was an upwelling of love within the soul of Almighty God as He beheld it (Jn. 10:17). And ditto for all those who try to enter into the spirit of laying down their lives after the pattern of our Lord's final moment. But well before His death, our Lord could speak of how "I lay down my life" (Jn. 10:17); His whole life was a laying down of His innermost spirit, His final out breathing was a summation of His daily attitude. He saw His death as the baptism with which He must be baptized (Lk. 12:50 cp. Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12, His 'baptism-unto-death' Gk.); and yet He spoke of the baptism with which He was being baptized in an ongoing sense (Mt. 20:22). In this same vein, Ps. 69:8,9 is a prophecy about the final sufferings of the Lord in crucifixion, and yet these verses are elsewhere quoted about the experiences of His ministry. And "they hated me without a cause" (Ps. 69:4) was true throughout the Lord's life (Jn. 15:25) as well as particularly in His death. The Lord spoke of the manna as being a symbol of His body, which He would give on the cross. He described the gift of that bread, that figure of His sacrifice, as not only bread that would come from Heaven but more accurately as bread that *is coming down*, and had been throughout His life (Jn. 6:50,51 Gk.). The spirit of life-giving which there was in His death was shown all through His life.

The fact the Lord died not just because events overtook Him and happened to Him is perhaps reflected in Paul's speaking in Rom. 6 of "the death that he died...the life that he liveth". He died a death; he Himself died it; and yet just as truly, He lived a life. He didn't just let events happen to Him. He was not mastered in His life by human lusts and selfish desires; He was in that sense the only ultimately free person. When He "bowed his head", the same Greek is used as in Mt. 8:20: "The Son of man has no place to lay / bow his head". It was as if He only lay His head down, giving out His life, when He knew it was time to rest from a day's work

well done. He lived a surpassingly free life, and freely gave that life up; it was not taken from Him.

That we should be called to imitate our Lord in this should truly fill us with a sense of highness, that we should be called to such a high challenge. 1 Jn. 3:16 takes us even further in this wondrous story, alluding to Jn. 10:17: " Hereby perceive we the love of God (cp. "For this reason the Father loves me", because he *laid down* His life for us: and we ought to *lay down* our lives for the brethren". So intensely was God in Christ on the cross that in a sense He too laid down His life for us, He bowed down for us, laid Himself before our feet as that palsied man was laid before (same word) Jesus. In that final cry from the cross we perceive God's love for us. We too, therefore, should not be put off from laying down our lives for each other because we feel our brethren are spiritually weak. This is the very essence of laying down our lives for each other; we are to replicate the laying down of the life of Christ for us *while we were weak* in our giving of our innermost being for our weak brethren. We are truly at the very boundary of human words to express these things. We must, we *must* respond in practice. And the wonder of it all is that in this final, supreme moment of self-giving, the Lord was identifying with apostate Israel, of whom it had been prophesied: "She hath given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she hath been ashamed" (Jer. 15:9- all crucifixion language).

*10:18 No one takes it away from me, but I lay it down myself. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it again. This command I received from my Father-* See on :17. He had the right ["authority"] to receive His life again, from the Father, for the Father raised the Son. The resurrection process means that the life we had before resurrection, in our mortal life, is that same life we shall live eternally. And the Lord was our pattern. In this sense we live the eternal life now, living the kind of life, spiritually, which we shall eternally live. Note that He spoke with arresting continuous tenses of how 'The good shepherd *is laying* down his life for the sheep... *I am laying down* my life of myself' (Jn. 10:11,18). He *would be* delivered up, but in principle He went through it in His daily life beforehand.

*10:19 Because of these words, again a division arose among the Jews-* The Lord's presence amongst men does cause division; that is quite a theme of the New Testament. Families divide, and even amongst the Jews there was division over Him. And yet as the New Testament clearly teaches and historically testifies, His presence amongst believers forges a unity of a unique nature, powerful enough to convert the world. This is all foreseen in the prologue, where the separation between light and darkness which occurred at creation is used as representative of the fundamental division which must occur between believers and disbelievers in the light. This principle affects who we marry, what we watch and think about, our associations on absolutely every level of thought and practical existence.

*10:20 And many of them said: He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to him?-* Madness was attributed to demon possession, and the language of casting out demons often effectively refers to curing mental

illness. But "has a demon and is mad" suggests two separate, if related, things. This group of accusers were not simply saying that the Lord was mad. They were implying that His supposed possession by a demon meant that He was on the side of the cosmic enemies they supposed existed- and therefore, His words were madness. "Listen" here implies listening favourably. Clearly amongst the Jewish leadership there were some like Nicodemus and Joseph with some level of belief in Him; but it is a theme of John's Gospel that men must come out for the Lord, and not simply hold a level of quiet, positive view of Him somewhere deep within their hearts.

10:21 *Others said: These are not the sayings of one possessed with a demon. Can a demon possessed person open the eyes of the blind?*- The Lord's miracles were used with economy, but they were necessary in order to demonstrate beyond doubt that the Lord was from God. This was especially necessary in a society where only a few % were literate, and there was no easy access to the Old Testament scrolls for personal study. And the miracles were self-evidently good; the suggestion that the Lord was an agent of some supposed 'Satan' or evil empire was absurd if He was using His supernatural powers to do good.

10:22 *It was the feast of the dedication at Jerusalem*- John's material almost exclusively records what the Lord did and said around the time of the Jewish feasts.

10:23 *It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple along Solomon's porch*- As noted earlier, the material which follows is seamlessly connected with the theme of shepherd and sheep earlier in this chapter. So I suggest that this is read as a general positioning statement for the material both before and after this point in the chapter. I have earlier pointed out the similarities between the idea of a "fold" and of the 'courts' of the temple, for women, Gentiles and Jews. The Lord was standing at the division between the courts of the Gentiles and Jews, and His language of creating only one fold, entrance to which was only through Him, must be read in this context.

The Bible does use (at times) the language of the day, contemporary with the time when it was first inspired. Jn. 10:23 speaks of "Solomon's colonnade", but as the NIV Study Bible correctly points out, this was "commonly but erroneously thought to date back to Solomon's time". But the error isn't corrected. The language of the day is used, just as it is concerning demons.

10:24 *The Jews surrounded him and said to him: How long do you hold us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly*- A theme of John's

Gospel has been that the Jews did know that the Lord was Messiah, but their dislike of the light, and all it demanded, meant they didn't believe in Him. Hence His answer to this apparent desire for plain clarification was that 'You do not believe' (:25). It's basic human psychology that we put off accepting truth under the smokescreen of needing more information. This is why some will apparently 'search for truth' all their lives- because they don't want to accept the truth they have found, as it demands too much of them personally.

The Lord's response was that their underlying problem was not with His language, but with the simple fact that they did not believe that He, the carpenter from Nazareth, was the Son of God. Is it going too far to suggest that all intellectual failure to understand the teaching of Jesus is rooted in a simple lack of faith and perception of Him as a person? See on Jn. 16:30.

He had indeed spoken plainly to them- the crowds use the very word in remarking that the Lord spoke plainly / boldly (7:26). He Himself reflected that He had spoken plainly to the Jewish world (18:20). But the disciples too seem to have felt that the Lord was not "plain" in His speech (16:25,29). The reason for 'not getting it' is not because the information has been presented in a hazy manner, or because the intellectual processing of it is too demanding for the hearer. The message of the Lord was plain. But it was the pre-existing sense of self-preservation, of keeping one's own way of life and thinking intact, which meant that the hearers complained about lack of clarity. The Lord predicted His death and resurrection in great detail, in language which could never have been plainer. But the disciples were slow of heart to believe it. The simple message of the Lord Jesus, as explained in the prologue, is light compared to darkness; and it demands our all. Every part of life and thought has to be surrendered to it. And so hearers usually choose to misunderstand, or beg off with excuses about 'not enough information'. John alludes to this issue of speaking plainly when he tells his converts that the Lord's plainness, boldness, is to become ours (1 Jn. 5:14). Life becomes so simple once we have surrendered to Him as the light, and wholeheartedly walk in it.

10:25 *Jesus answered them: I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, these testify of me-* See on :24. There was no unclarity in the Lord's message, and the miracles done were beyond question His authentication as having come from God. Of course, they'd have complained that He had *not* told them in so many words. His comment was that His "works", His life, His being, showed plainly who He was, His personality was "the [plain] word" which they were demanding. He was the word made flesh in totality and to perfection. See on Jn. 14:10. John uses *ergon*, "works", for far more than miracles; effectively

the term means 'way of life' in 3:19-21; 6:29; 8:39,41; 1Jn. 3:12). The Lord's being and person, as well as His miracles, was His testimony to men, just as ours should be. It is not publicly performed good works [cp. miracles] which have lasting power in their testimony, but the works of a life worked or done in the Lord.

10:26 *But you do not believe, because you are not of my sheep-* Belief was related to accepting the Lord's words (:27). Those words, His claims, were and are to be accepted without concrete proof [and there is no such thing as concrete proof or else faith would not be faith]. The claims of His person are presented as they are in the Gospel and clearly in the Gospel records. Once they are accepted, then we are His sheep, and are led further if we wish to follow further. It is not that there is something magic in the words of the book called the Bible which creates faith. For many read it and do not believe. The idea is that the words and salvation promises of the Lord Jesus are heard or read, and accepted. The leap in faith is taken. And then all starts to make sense. The Samaritan woman is a case in point. No miracles were done to back up the Lord's claims. She simply believed them.

10:27- see on Mt. 19:28.

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me-* The Lord takes the initiative in speaking His word to men, but they must still respond in following; and this is how He 'knows' them, in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship. The "voice" they hear is His words, the essence of Him; not the Bible in its entirety, but "My words". The Lord's references to "My words" in John must be understood as a reference to Him, the news about Him, His Spirit, the essence of Him as a person. Although His words were the words of God, for the word was God as explained in the prologue, that is not to say that "My words" refer to the Bible as a whole. That would be a confusion of category; rather like saying that Mercedes are cars; but not all cars are Mercedes.

The Hebrew word for 'hear' is also translated 'obey' (Gen. 22:18; Ex. 19:5; Dt. 30:8,20; Ps. 95:7). We can hear God's word and not obey it. But if we *really* hear it as we are intended to, we will obey it. If we truly believe God's word to be His voice personally speaking to us, then we will by the very fact of hearing, obey. The message itself, if heard properly and not just on a surface level, will compel action. We can *delight* to know God's laws and pray daily to Him, when at the same time we are forsaking Him and His laws; if we are truly obedient, *then* we will *delight* in God's law (Is. 58:2 cp. 14). We have a tendency to have a love of and delight in God's law only on the surface. John especially often uses 'hearing' to mean 'believing' (e.g. Jn. 10:4,26,27). And yet the Jews 'heard' but didn't believe. We must, we really must ask ourselves:



whether we merely hear, or hear and believe. For we can hear, but not really hear, if we lack the "obedience of faith".

The Lord knows His sheep according to whether they follow Him, i.e. whether they take up His cross and follow Him. The question of cross carrying therefore reveals a man to his Lord for what he is. And it also reveals the Lord to His would be followers for who He really is. His words, that which is seen and heard in Him, is a call to follow Him to the cross.

10:28 *And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand-* The gift of eternal life is in the present tense, in that the Lord gives His spirit to us, the kind of life we can eternally live. "They shall never perish" refers to the condemnation of the last day; if we continue living the Kingdom life now, we shall not be condemned. If the Spirit of the Lord Jesus abides in us now, that same Spirit shall energize our bodies after the power of an endless life (Rom. 8:11).

The eternal type of life being given is an ongoing process. Consider the repeated parallelisms in the Lord's teaching:

Labour / work, as Israel worked to gather manna, as the crowds walked around the lake to get to Jesus	For the food that gives eternal life
Believe in me	Receive eternal life
Eat me daily, eat / absorb my body and blood, the essence of My sacrifice; have this as your real food and drink in life	Receive eternal life
Come to me, having heard and learnt of the Father	Never hunger, never perish, receive eternal life
Behold the son, believe on him	Receive eternal life
"I am", God manifested in the person of Jesus	The bread that gives eternal life
The manna of Christ	Gives eternal life
Jesus came down from Heaven [i.e. manifested the Father]	Gives life unto the world

By Jesus doing God's will	I get eternal life for you ("the world" of believers)
By giving His blood to drink and flesh to eat	Gives eternal life
The Spirit and words of Jesus	Quickens / gives eternal life

The Spirit of Jesus, His disposition, His mindset, His way of thinking and being, is paralleled with His words and His person. They both 'quicken' or give eternal life, right now. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth [present tense]... the words that I speak unto you, they are [right now] spirit, and they are life... thou hast [right now] the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:63,68). Yet at the last day, God will quicken the dead and physically give them eternal life (Rom. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:22,36). But this will be because in this life we had the 'Spirit' of the eternal life in us: "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by [on account of] his spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).

This unreal shepherd not only dies for the sheep but gives them eternal life, making them eternal sheep (Jn. 10:28). We'd understand it more comfortably if He spoke of giving His life for people, and then them living for ever. But He speaks of giving eternal life to a sheep, who wouldn't have a clue what that really entailed. But that's just how it is with us, who by grace are receiving an eternal Kingdom, the wonderful implications of which are beyond our appreciation, due to the intrinsic limitations of who we are as sheep. See on Jn. 15:15.

The context of chapter 10 is the shameful treatment of the blind man by the Jewish shepherds in chapter 9. The Lord is assuring His flock that if they hear His voice, then He will preserve them from any robbers who seek to grab them for themselves.

10:29 *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand-* The gift of the sheep was before the Lord called the sheep with His voice / word, and they responded. This reference to the gift of the sheep surely speaks of the predestination, foreknowledge and calling which Paul cites in Romans as the parade example of God's grace. The Father being greater than the Son means that the Lord's assurances of *His* protection and eternal salvation are made yet the more sure, because the Father was greater than Him but upholding the same passionate desire for our preservation unto salvation.

10:30 *I and the Father are one*- The protective, saving hand of the Son is that of the Father, for they both have the same will and determination for human salvation. This is the context of their being "one", in purpose and function rather than in person and nature, as wrongly supposed by Trinitarian thinking. In chapter 17, the Lord envisages the unity between the Father and Son being that between all His people, and between themselves and the Father and Himself. Clearly, the unity spoken of is not any support for the confused theology of Trinitarianism.

10:31 *Once again the Jews took up stones to stone him*- This was anger on the spur of the moment; there had been no trial, no verdict issued; and the Jews could only recommend the death penalty for the Romans to carry out. I suggest that their excuse that He was blaspheming was a cover for the fact that their consciences had been pricked by the Lord's challenge that belief in Him meant they were the Father's sheep and would be protected unto life eternal. And if they didn't believe- they were not the Father's flock at all.

10:32- see on Jn. 9:36; 17:20.

*Jesus said to them: Many good works have I shown you from the Father. For which of those works do you stone me?*- I noted on :25 that "works" refer not only to the miracles but to the Lord's whole life. But here the reference appears to be to His miracles, and the Lord's logic appeals to those who had likewise concluded that a bad man could simply not do such wonderful miracles unless God was intimately with Him. The Lord's miracles were "shown to the Jews just as the Father had "shown" Him which works to perform (5:20 s.w.). The idea surely is that the Lord did not merely encounter human need and use His power to resolve it; for He offered walked by such need without intervening. Rather He was shown miracles to perform, and did them accordingly, in an attempt to show the Father to the Jews. However in 14:8,9 we see that the disciples had failed to perceive this 'showing' of the Father to them. Their belief and perception was very weak, but the Lord still worked with them to perfect what they had- just as He does with us.

10:33 *The Jews answered him: For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself as God!*- John's Gospel records many interactions between the Lord and the Jews. Every single time they misunderstand Him and wrongly interpret His words and positions, often intentionally in order to make an accusation against Him. And so it is here. Trinitarians have to assume that this time, they got it right- that the Jews correctly interpreted Him; whereas the Lord Himself stated that they did not understand His words (8:43). Not only would such a reading be quite out of step with the emphasis upon the Jews' misunderstandings of the Lord, but He Himself goes on to

demonstrate that their claim was inappropriate because men can be called "God", and He was only claiming to be the *Son* of God.

10:34 *Jesus answered them: Is it not written in your law: I said, you are gods?*- "Your law" is another example of how God's law had become their law; His feasts were now "feasts of the Jews". They had hijacked His way and turned it into their own religion. The Lord Jesus is really saying 'In the Old Testament men are called 'gods'; I am saying I am the *Son* of God; so why are you getting so upset?'. The Lord Jesus is actually quoting from Ps. 82, where the judges of Israel were called 'gods'. And yet the context is critical of those judges; to bear the name of 'God' didn't mean one was acceptable to God. And it is no accident that the Lord chose to quote an example of where Israel's leaders bear God's Name but are apostate. He was turning the tables on the Jewish leadership who were accusing Him of claiming to be God. It was in fact they who bore the name of God- and yet were to be condemned for not responding to the word / *logos* of God which had come to them.

10:35 *If he called those men gods, to whom the word of God came (and the scripture cannot be broken)*- As noted on :35, the apostate leaders of Israel were the ones who bore the Name of God. The word / *logos* of God had come to them in that as pictured in the prologue, the *logos* of God in Jesus of Nazareth had 'come' to Israel and they had rejected it. The word of God came to the Old Testament judges of Israel [the context of Psalm 82] in that they were to judge according to His word. The Lord may have in mind the LXX of 2 Chron. 19:6 where the judges of Israel are warned to judge rightly, because the *logos* of God is with them, had been given them, to judge rightly. The same idea is found in Dt. 1:17 where again the judges of Israel are warned in the LXX to judge according to the *logos* of God and not reject it in favour of human sympathies. In this sense perhaps Heb. 4:13 speaks of being judged by the *logos* of God. In the person of the Lord Jesus, the *logos* of God had come to the judges of Israel- and they were refusing to judge rightly because of their own agendas and personal investments.

The Lord adds that "the scripture cannot be broken" or dissolved / unloosed, quoting a common Rabbinical saying found often in the Talmud. The Lord didn't mean that 'the Bible doesn't contradict itself', because there are contradictory statements in the Bible, and God often teaches through paradox. And the Mosaic law part of Scripture has indeed been unloosed in Christ; the word is used by John of how the Lord unloosed the Sabbath legislation (5:18). The Lord had used the very same word in 7:23, arguing that in order not to break or unloose the Law of Moses, the Jews circumcised boys on the Sabbath- but thereby they broke or unloosed the laws about the Sabbath. So He is using their own misplaced

ideals, quoting their own maxim about Scripture not being broken, appealing to their claim that such paradoxes could not be countenanced. If indeed there was to be no possible contradiction between Scripture verses, then they were trounced. Logically, the case was watertight. Bible verses, Scripture, state that men carry the Name of God. And condemn such men, because the *logos* of God came to them and they did not judge according to it. And so there was no reason to stone a man, even if he claimed to carry God's Name. And further, the Lord was not stating that, rather was He claiming to be God's Son. And further; by not judging according to the word / *logos* which had come to them, it was they who were breaking or unloosing Scripture, leaving God's word broken by them, in that they judged by the outward appearance rather than by the word which demanded right judgment on their part. And if indeed Scripture could not be broken, they could not walk away from the fact the word had come to them. The passage of time would never take away their responsibility to respond to that word.

10:36- see on Jn. 17:20.

*Do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world: You blaspheme, because I said: I am the Son of God?*- As noted on :34 and :35, the Lord was not claiming to be God; the accusation was misplaced and a wilful misinterpretation. His claim was to be the Son of God. However, that claim is nowhere recorded. It was insofar as the word was made flesh that He proclaimed the Father in a way that only the begotten Son could do. His life was therefore effectively the statement that He was God's Son; but He never actually uses those words in any recorded speech in the Gospels.

We have here a brief and rare window into how the Lord perceived His life before age 30. The Lord Jesus says that He was "consecrated" [as a priest or High Priest], and then sent into the world, at age 30. That's how He looked back and understood those 30 years of mundane village life- a process of consecration, of purifying, of preparation. He saw that none of the multitude of daily frustrations was without purpose- it was all part of His preparation. And perhaps we'll look back on these brief years of our humanity in the same way. But the point is that the Lord's mundane life before 30 was actually an active preparation of Him for service.

10:37 *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not*- Here and in :38 the Lord seems to countenance and encourage a level of belief which was simply an acceptance that the Father was working through Him; even if they disliked Him personally, and His personality and Galilean background, or other trappings of His humanity, were simply too obnoxious to them. John's Gospel positively and generously reports that many "believed" in Him perhaps in this way. And yet John's Gospel also emphasizes the need to ultimately come out for Him, and to accept that He as a person, with all His humanity, was and is the only light of life. So

I would conclude that the Lord was eager for them to at least accept His "works" or miracles as being done from God; for He knew that with that level of acceptance, He could go further and work with them towards a higher level of commitment. His work with Nicodemus would be a case in point.

10:38 *But if I do them, though you do not believe me, believe the works; that you may know and understand, that the Father is in me and I in the Father-* See on :37 for discussion of this apparently lower level of faith being encouraged. The Lord had just quoted Psalm 82 about these men, implying they as the judges of Israel stood condemned. But He didn't want them to stay like that; He urges them toward at least some level of faith that the miracles He was doing were indeed from God.

This verse parallels knowing and believing, as in 17:8. Jn. 10:38 in the AV has the Lord Jesus beseeching men to "know and *believe*", whereas the RV/ NEV has "know and *understand*". Understanding was not therefore related to academic prowess in interpreting Scripture; the Lord was challenging their Jewish supposition that knowledge of itself was so critical. Instead He is saying that the real understanding or knowledge is belief in Him. To know Him is to believe in Him; that is the understanding required. And the illiterate masses could in any case not attain much academic understanding of Scripture at that time; but they could understand / know / believe in the Lord Jesus.

10:39 *Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands-* He wished to die at a specific point, at a Passover; and as stated in :17,18, He gave His life and it was not taken from Him. He therefore had the power to avoid arrest and stoning; the fact He used it at times like this underlines the fact that it was indeed His love and self-control which kept Him on the cross, rather than the nails. He could have come down from the cross and avoided it in the form it was. He had that power, and had exercised it at times like this. Truly He gave His life for us; it was not taken from Him.

10:40 *He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained-* Perhaps we see here the Lord's sentimentality, which is a legitimate part of human nature. He returned to the place where He was baptized, far from anywhere, to meditate. And again we note that "at the first", the beginning, is used in John for the beginning of the Lord's ministry, as made clear in the prologue.

10:41- see on Gal. 3:5.

*Many came to him. And they said: John did no miracle, but everything that John said about this man was true-* Several times during his ministry Elijah did spectacular miracles to confirm the validity of his message. The fact that "John did no miracle" is perhaps recorded in order to show that he was not the supreme fulfilment of the prophet who would come "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17), i.e. doing similar miracles to those of Elijah. John could have been the Elijah prophet in fullness, for in a sense he was Elijah; but Israel would not. We see here how potentials are set up, which may never be realized because of our weakness or that of others. The Holy Spirit was upon John from the womb; but he did no miracle. Here we see encouragement for us- that the activity of the Spirit in our lives, which John's Gospel continually alludes to, doesn't require that we perform miracles. It is very wrong to assume as Pentecostalism does that the Spirit = miracles; just as it is so wrong to assume that because the miraculous gifts are no longer available, therefore the Holy Spirit is not given to men today. Perhaps this observation about John doing no miracle is purposefully included in John's Gospel because he was writing at a time when the miraculous gifts were disappearing, but there was an urgent need to accept the Holy Spirit in the sense of the internal strengthening which is critical to the Christian life.

10:42 *And many believed in him there-* The fact many came to Him (:41) and believed is maybe another example of how the Lord went away to seek solitude, but the crowds still followed Him. Perhaps hearing Him speak at the spot where He had been baptized inspired the crowds to also believe and be baptized. This remains the abiding power of the example He set in being baptized Himself.

## CHAPTER 11

11:1 *Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha-* The 'sickness' is emphasized (:1,2,3,6). Presumably he had only recently fallen sick (the Lord heard about it at this time, :4,6). Otherwise, the question is raised as to why he had not been cured when so many other "sick" people had been cured by the Lord and His disciples. Lazarus is introduced as a sick man from Bethany, which was also the home town of Martha and Mary. Why not introduce him immediately as the brother of Mary and Martha? Here we have an example of where the Gospel writers operate as a cameraman, focusing on a particular aspect of a person. The focus is hereby placed upon the man Lazarus and his human situation, he stands as an individual in need rather than being presented as someone defined by his family members. This is of course how the Lord looks upon each of us- as independent individuals, even if society looks at us in terms of our being defined by our relatives and social situation.

11:2 *And it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick-* The anointing of John 12 is after this; so presumably it is the anointing by the "woman in the city who was a sinner" of Luke 7 which is in view. And that woman was Mary, a repentant prostitute. The fact the Lord and His men often stayed at her family home in a poor out of town dormitory settlement ["Bethany" = 'house of the poor'] would surely have elicited all manner of gossip. A very interesting picture of Mary emerges when the pieces of the Biblical jigsaw are put together.

11:3 *The sisters therefore sent to him, saying-* The "therefore" may refer to the fact that it was that Mary who had anointed the Lord (:2). They knew that He knew and recognized her love for Him and total devotion to Him. On that basis they feel confident to ask His action for a third party. For Lazarus himself could not pray to the Lord- but He is open, as today, to the requests of third parties.

*Lord, he whom you loves is sick-* This is *phileo*, whereas the Lord loved them with *agape*; see on :5. There was no request for specific action, just a statement of the problem. David's Psalms so often simply inform God of the situation, rather than suggesting specific answers. In this case, the Lord read their unspoken desire- that death would not triumph. Although they had not articulated it, verbalization isn't required. The Lord read their spirit and responded. And this is why the events of Jn. 11 are alluded to in Romans 8, where we read of the Lord's intercession for our groanings and unspoken desires through absorbing them into His own spirit.

11:4- see on Jn. 1:14; 13:32.



*But when Jesus heard it, he said: This sickness is not unto death-* But it obviously was, humanly speaking. Again we see how the Lord is using language and seeing things differently to those around Him. He was trying to get the disciples to perceive a difference between the death of a believer in hope of resurrection, and "death" in the sense of total, permanent loss of existence. For He goes on to say plainly that "Lazarus is dead". Through this apparent contradiction, the Lord was seeking to help them develop a realization that death is not ultimately death for those associated with Him. But as so often, the disciples failed to catch on. Yet later in the discourse, He again seeks to encourage Martha to believe that His promises of life beyond death actually have application in this life too.

*But for the glory of God-* The glory of the Son of God was and is the glory of God. The Lord stated that the sickness of Lazarus "is not unto death, but for the glory of God". That sounds like a predictive statement. But it seems to have been conditional. For one thing, that sickness did lead to the death of Lazarus. But notice the Lord's later comment to Martha when her faith wavered in the possibility of immediate resurrection for Lazarus: "Said I not unto you, that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn. 11:40). But the Lord isn't recorded as actually having said that. What He had said was that the sickness of Lazarus would reveal the glory of God, in a way as dramatic as an Old Testament theophany, when God's glory was literally revealed in visible terms. But He had intended Martha to understand the conditionality of that statement- i.e. 'If you can believe Martha, Lazarus can be saved from that sickness and its effects, and thus glory will be given to God'. But again, we see the Lord's grace. She didn't have that faith. She was concerned that even the taking away of the grave stone would release the odour of her brother's dead body. But Jesus didn't say 'Well Martha, no faith on your part, no resurrection of Lazarus, no glory to God this time'. By grace alone, He raised Lazarus. He overrode the conditionality. And so it must happen so often, and so tragically unperceived, in our lives.

*That thereby the Son of God may be glorified-* This is very much the language of the glorification of God's Son through His death and resurrection (Jn. 12:23; 13:31; 17:1). But the essence of His experience on the cross was worked out in His life before that time came. Perhaps this was why the Lord specifically waited two days where He was, knowing that the time it took to get to Bethany would occupy another day, so that Lazarus would be resurrected after three days in the grave wrapped in graveclothes, as He was to be. Perhaps His reference to "twelve hours" and walking through a day or night is to be understood as alluding to how far away they literally were from Bethany (:9). The "four days" in the grave of :17 could refer to two full days and two partial days. The Lord wanted to see Himself in Lazarus, and He arranged situations to that end; just as He desires to see Himself in us all, and allows suffering

and delays His responses to that end. This is the essence of Christianity- being made into the *morphe* or form / image of the crucified, resurrected and victorious Christ; being made conformable unto His death, that the power of His new life might be seen in us (Phil. 3:10).

11:5 *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus-* This is *agape*. The sisters had said that Jesus 'loved' Lazarus, using *phileo* (:3 "He whom you love"). They considered Him a friend with *phileo* love, but He actually loved them with *agape* love. We may consider the Lord Jesus to be on our side because He has fellowshipped with us and helped us out in times of need. But the essence of His love is *agape*, the love of the cross, so far above how we perceive His love for us in more material, earthly terms.

11:6 *When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he therefore stayed two days longer in the place where he was-* The "therefore" perhaps relates to His *agape* love for them introduced in :5. It was because of this love that He allowed Lazarus to die; because He had a longer term, loving plan for their ultimate salvation. Spirituality can affect third parties; in this case, Lazarus was raised because of Martha and Mary's faith. And so it can be that our prayers and intercessions for others can bring about some degree of salvation for them which otherwise wouldn't happen. We also see that the Lord can delay things, not least His second coming, because He is working along with human freewill in order to achieve a greater glory for the Father. His delay in responding to prayer and entreaty is not because of inattention or deafness; rather is it because He has a far wider purpose, to an even greater glory than providing instant response to our needs.

11:7 *Then after this, he said to the disciples: Let us go into Judea again-* He had specifically withdrawn from Judea because the Jews sought to kill Him, and His game plan was to die not then but at the Passover. Remember that He gave His life of Himself in His own time and of His volition (10:17,18).

Although the disciples marvelled at His miracles at the time He did them, they seem to have doubted at times whether He was really that super-human. When He said "Let us go up to Judaea again", they respond like He is crazy: "Goest *thou* [you singular] there again?" (AV), they respond. They feared the Jews would kill Him, even though they had seen Him walk through the Nazareth crowd who tried to throw Him over a cliff.

11:8 *The disciples said to him: Rabbi, only a few days ago the Jews wanted to stone you; and you want to go there again?-* The implication of how the disciples reason is that they were unaware that Lazarus was seriously ill. Perhaps the messenger delivered the message to the Lord Jesus alone. He didn't share the news with the disciples. They would've wondered what His game plan was, making them stay two more days where they were. We likewise don't know His full game plan with us, and

there are inexplicable delays and sitting around in the same place, in various ways; but one day we shall understand why this was. And even in this life, as in this case, we may come to understand later. Although they had seen the Lord walk through aggressive crowds and lynching situations, they feared that He would die. We see here how they had zoned out to the Lord's frequent predictions of His upcoming death. Rather should they have been wondering whether these words were the sign that the Lord's predicted death was now to happen. But like Peter in Matthew 16, they wish to discourage Him from death.

11:9 *Jesus answered: Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world-* The Lord is replying to the disciples' apparent concern that *He* is risking His life by going again into Judea. But His response challenges *their* fears, by assuring them that if they 'walk in the light', "the light of the world", they will 'not stumble'. All these ideas are used elsewhere in John concerning the walk of *the disciple* in the light of Christ, the light of the world. He thereby perceives that their concern about *His* suffering and death is actually because they are concerned about themselves. Elsewhere, Peter expresses concern about the Lord's prediction of His death, that "this shall not be unto you" (Mt. 16:22). But again the Lord's response is to encourage Peter to follow Him, carrying His cross. Our barrier in considering the physicalities of the Lord's crucifixion may likewise not simply be because we love Him and fear to see again His sufferings; but because unconsciously, we realize that His death is to be ours. And we would rather not focus upon His death, for it is to be ours. The Lord is encouraging them here that if they are focused upon Him, walking in the light of Himself, then they will not stumble spiritually, and can also confidently walk into Judea, to Jerusalem and even to death itself, knowing that most importantly, they will not spiritually stumble. No test will be so great as to make us fall spiritually: "God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

11:10 *But if a man walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him-* In John's letters, there are many allusions back to John's Gospel. This is an example. The reason for the connections is because the gospel of John is as it were a transcript of John's preaching of the Gospel; it became written down as a text for the basic instruction of John's converts. Once communities of believers had been baptized and established on this basis, John then wrote letters to them. And it is understandable that he would base his appeals for Christian living on the facts of the Gospel message which the converts had first learnt in the Gospel of John. The allusion to Jn. 11:10 is in 1 Jn. 2:10,11: "He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the

darkness, and does not know where he goes, because the darkness has blinded his eyes". The context of Jn. 11:10 is about a beloved brother, Lazarus, brother of sisters Martha and Mary. John is surely making the point that if the Lord and the disciples had not gone to raise Lazarus, because they feared for their own wellbeing, then this would effectively have been hating their brother. Here we see powerfully presented the full extent of sins of omission; to not respond to the need of Lazarus, citing fear of the Jews, would be to effectively hate that brother. And we all likely need such exhortation as to the real import of omitting to do what we could. The Lord walked those 12 hours to Bethany with the disciples following, willing if necessary to "die with Him". And the context in 1 Jn. 2 also alludes to this: "He that says he abides in him, ought also walk even as he walked" (1 Jn. 2:6).

*11:11 These things he spoke, and after this he said to them: Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep, but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep-* I suggest on :19 that the presence of "the Jews" at the funeral suggests Lazarus had not 'come out' for the cause of Jesus as he might have done. But the Lord still considered Lazarus as His "friend", a term used for those He accepted as His disciples (Jn. 15:13-15; 3 Jn. 14).

Jesus believed that He had already raised Lazarus back to life and so He was now asking him to come out of the grave. Presumably there were just seconds in it- He raised Lazarus, and then, invited Lazarus to come out. Jesus spoke to Lazarus as a person speaks to another living person. He didn't invite the immortal soul of Lazarus to reunite with the body. He raised Lazarus from the dead- that was the miracle. Jesus said that He 'awoke Lazarus out of sleep'- not reunited a 'soul' with a body.

*11:12 The disciples replied to him: Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover-* The Lord Jesus speaks of sleeping in death, and going to resurrect Lazarus; they understand 'sleep' as literal sleeping, which they think will cure Lazarus. Time and again, we sense how the Lord's thinking was out of step with those closest to Him. His mother asks Him to make more wine, and He replies that His hour [of death] has not yet come; she thinks of literal wine, whereas His thought is on the blood which wine represented. He tells Nicodemus to be born again, and the man thinks He means entering again into his mother's tubes. He tells the disciples that He has food to eat which they don't know about, referring to the work He was doing with the Samaritan woman- and the disciples think someone has brought Him literal food without their knowledge. As the Son of God, the Lord was of super high intelligence, and this was particularly acutely honed when it came to spiritual things. Those with above average IQ frequently experience frustration, angst and existential loneliness as they have to exist amongst the mass of smaller minded folk who comprise humanity generally. Yet the Lord clearly rose above all that, because despite this spiritual and intellectual distance, He was naturally attractive

to children and to the poorest and simplest of society. And in this He sets us an example, if we struggle with a sense of distance between ourselves and others. See on 11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly.*

11:13 *Now Jesus had spoken of Lazarus' death; but they thought that he spoke of Lazarus taking rest in sleep-* See on :12. Constantly, the figurative is taken literally by them, and they only think of the secular rather than the spiritual. This was just as the Jewish leaders did. So it is not that the disciples understood the Lord better than they did; they had the same misunderstandings as the Jews, but somehow believed in Him. This observation is proof enough that intellectual clarity of understanding is not the same as faith.

11:14 *Then Jesus said to them plainly: Lazarus is dead-* See on :12 *Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover.* Was there a sense of frustration in the tone of the Lord, that they hadn't 'got it' when He had spoken of Lazarus sleeping? I like to think not, but rather the gentleness of a parent explaining something a second time but in more simple language. It makes a good exercise to think what tone of voice the Lord spoke in whenever we read His reported speech. We also sense a relief amongst the disciples, that now their Lord was talking to them on their own level. We get the same feeling at Jn. 16:25,29: "These things have I spoken to you in figurative language. The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father... His disciples said: Now you speak plainly". John's Gospel records the Lord speaking in "figurative language", to the point that the Jews demanded He tell them "plainly" whether He was Messiah (Jn. 10:24); the other Gospels tend to focus on His 'plain speaking', and the same word is found in Mk. 8:32 for how Jesus "spoke plainly" (AV "openly"). In this sense, the Lord insisted that He had 'spoken plainly' to the Jewish world (Jn. 18:20). Higher critics like to imagine that the words of Jesus recorded in John were never spoken by Him because they are so different in tone to those recorded in the Synoptics. It could appear that we are being presented with two different personalities, the Jesus of John and the Jesus of the Synoptics. I don't accept this; rather does the evidence in John suggest that He spoke in two different styles, "figurative" [which John tends to record] and "plainly", and the disciples struggled to understand the "figurative" parts. Just as we do. But see on :16.

11:15- see on Lk. 8:27.

*And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe-* The Lord's joy was that the disciples would believe. So His joy was that He had not been there, because He knew that His resurrection of Lazarus would develop their faith. And He did this even though He wept for the loss of His friend Lazarus which was temporarily required for this.

So the Lord Jesus seems to have purposefully not gone to Lazarus immediately, knowing that the longer he remained dead, the greater would be the impression made upon the disciples when they saw the miracle He planned to do (Jn. 11:15). He was even glad that Lazarus died- even though He wept over the loss of His friend. Thus His joy, which He invites us to share, is not mere personal joy- it was the joy for the sake of others' spiritual growth.

The Lord knew that His love of Lazarus was such that had He been present, He would have stopped Lazarus from dying. We have here another insight into His humanity. He knew that His emotions would have led Him to do the cure. From a distance He still could have cured Lazarus, for distance was no barrier to His healings, His physical presence wasn't required (Lk. 7:7-10). So the Lord is recognizing that His human senses and emotions would have been such that He would have cured Lazarus, but because they were not exercised so strongly, by reason of His not being physically present, He therefore restrained Himself and allowed Lazarus to die. And He was "glad" about that, because the resurrection of Lazarus would result in their 'believing'. Again we see how there are levels of faith. The disciples already believed; but He saw that their faith would increment to another level on witnessing the resurrection of Lazarus. Martha knew that if Jesus had been physically present, her brother would have been healed: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (:21). We can understand this as meaning that she knew Him well enough to know that His pity would have been so deeply aroused by the sight of the terminally ill Lazarus that He would have cured Him. In this we see another insight into His humanity. His followers certainly didn't think He was God Himself. But see another possibility on :21.

*Nevertheless let us go to him-* The meaning of the "nevertheless" is hard to find, unless we follow the reasoning presented above about physical presence; see 11:15 *I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe*. Although the Lord's physical presence wasn't required for the miracle, nevertheless, He wanted to go there and raise Lazarus in front of them all- "so that you may believe". In this case, as often in the Gospels, the Lord was speaking a word more to Himself than to His listeners; the "nevertheless" was relevant to His own deep awareness that He could merely say the word, and Lazarus would rise from the dead. The language of "let us go to him" implies that His dead friend was alive; which is how He looks at all who have fallen asleep in Him. For all live unto God (Rom. 4:17,18).

11:16 *Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples: Let us also go, that we may die with him-* See on :14. There is no record that the Lord corrected the disciples' misunderstanding that He was going to commit suicide in order to "go unto" Lazarus. He let events

take their course and allowed the disciples to reflect upon the situation in order to come to a truer understanding of His words. He was willing to accept their simple devotion, despite their lack of understanding. And surely He looks at misunderstanding folk today in the same way; and that includes all of us in some ways.

When the Lord spoke of going to Lazarus, they thought He was going to commit suicide. They hoped He would redeem Israel in glory, there and then. But such was their devotion to Him as their Saviour, even though they didn't understand how He was going to work it out, that Thomas solemnly ordered them, as they huddled together out of the Lord's earshot: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (Jn. 11:16). I imagine dear Peter solemnly nodding in agreement, thinking of his wife and dear children back in that fisherman's cottage. But he was serving for nothing, for sheer love of his Lord. And he was prepared to die for Him, even if it meant receiving nothing of the present benefits he thought Jesus of Nazareth might bring for him. And yet the Lord demands such devotion from all of us. The tired servant can labour all day for Him, but immediately he returns, the Lord expects him to *immediately* prepare a meal, and doesn't expect to thank us. As it happens, He elsewhere intimated that He will praise us at the judgment, He Himself will serve us (Lk. 12:37). But the attitude of serving for nothing, for no thanks even, must be with us now, in this life.

"Let us also go, that we may die with him" is yet another example of the disciples being out of step with their Lord, understanding Him on a more human, literal level when He was speaking on another level. But John's Gospel was written, under inspiration, by John. By recording all these examples of the different levels between the Lord and His followers, he is expressing what the Synoptic writers state more directly- that the disciples did not understand. And this was and is a great comfort to those encountering the Gospel for the first time today. Complete understanding is not required of disciples, but rather simple faith. There is no record here that the Lord corrected their misunderstanding, indeed in most of the incidents where they misunderstand, He doesn't specifically correct them, but rather left time and the Father's further leading to clarify the point to those who were thoughtful and reflective. The same can be seen in His attitude to the language of demons.

11:17 *So when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in his tomb for four days-* "He found" could possibly suggest that He was unaware Lazarus had been dead so long. Perhaps He had intended to perform the resurrection three and not four days after the death of Lazarus, in order to encourage them all to believe that He too after three days would rise again. But see on :4 *That thereby the Son of God may be glorified.* The period could refer to two full days and two part days.

11:18 *Now Bethany was near to Jerusalem, about three kilometres away-* This is the reason why many of "the Jews" came to the funeral (:19), and confirms our suggestion under :19 that "the Jews" were the Jewish leadership, specifically the Jerusalem leadership.

11:19 *And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother-* "The Jews" refers to the Jewish leadership, and suggests that Lazarus had not been cast out of the Synagogue. Perhaps Lazarus had not stood up for Jesus as he might have done and was therefore still popular amongst the Jewish leadership; yet still the Lord loved him. Remember that the disciples feared going to Judea because "the Jews" sought to kill the Lord, and they only went to Bethany because they were willing to die with the Lord there.

11:20 *Martha, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him-* This is all very much the language of the Lord's second coming especially as described in Mt. 25:6: "Look! The bridegroom! Come out to meet him". John's Gospel continually repeats the Synoptic material, but presents it differently. And the similarity of language in this case leads us to think that the connection is intentional. That Mary 'stayed' would therefore appear to reflect badly upon her. The parable of Mt. 25:6 is about the response of different groups of *young women*, and both Martha and Mary were presumably young, unmarried women. Perhaps Mary simply plays the role of the foolish virgins who didn't respond immediately, but came later. The resurrection of Lazarus was clearly a foretaste of the resurrection at the last day: "Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again. Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live". The similarities with the last day judgment scenario are so many that it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that they are being consciously referred to.

*Jesus was coming-* Literally, "Jesus is coming". The present tense suggests this is to be read as reported speech. Again, the perspective of the Gospel writers can be seen to change very quickly.

*But Mary stayed in the house-* Luke notes the tension between Martha and Mary over domestic issues. She perhaps remained in the house because she wished to meet the Lord without her dominant sister. Or perhaps the whole incident is being recorded as a foretaste of the Lord's resurrection; some disciples ran out to see the risen Lord whilst some remained in the house.

11:21 *Martha said to Jesus: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died-* This level of faith, which required the literal presence of the Lord in order to perform healing, contrasts unfavourably with the faith of others, even Gentiles, who believed that the Lord's physical presence



was not required for His miracles to be performed. But the Gospel records present the key believers as having been weak in faith during the Lord's ministry- surely as encouragement to others to believe.

11:22 *And even now, I know that whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you-*

Martha understood the Lord's power to help, and she prayed to Him (Jn. 11:22 cp. 16:23). But she didn't make the obvious, blindingly desperate request which filled her heart: to bring Lazarus back to her. She simply stated that the Lord could do all things. And she knew He would read her spirit, and see what she wanted.

"Even now" hints that she did wonder if the Lord could even now raise him. Martha's hope that the Lord just might raise Lazarus was not based simply upon a vague whim that the Lord might just do her a favour this time, on this issue. "Even now", *kai nun*, was a phrase she had previously heard on the lips of the Lord as He sought to explain that the realities of His future Kingdom were also capable of some present experience: "But the hour comes *and now is* [*kai nun*], when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit" (Jn. 4:23). And most significantly Jn. 5:25: "The hour comes and *now is*, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live". So her vaguely expressed request was actually a result of her attention to the Spirit words of the Lord Jesus. And thus she was in harmony with the movement of the Spirit, and the Lord's Spirit was therefore aligned with her spirit in intercession before the Father- as Romans 8 makes explicit. The powerful lesson is that prayer is heard not because of how we verbalize things, the word choice we achieve- for that would be some kind of paganism, whereby certain words elicit Divine responses. As we read in this context in Romans 8, "we know not how to pray as we ought". "The Lord the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18 RV) looks upon the spirit, the deepest heart desires, and responds to them rather than to our clumsy attempts to formulate those deep desires as words and sentences.

She wasn't asking for a resurrection, she left it to the Lord to decide how best to respond; and in doing so reveals a parade example to us all. Clearly it was her unspoken, vaguely conceived and unverballed desire that the Lord would raise Lazarus immediately. And the Lord (as explained in Romans 8) took this unspoken desire of her spirit and revealed it to the Father. Romans 8 says that He does the same for us today.

"Whatever you shall ask of God, God will give you" are the very words the Lord elsewhere used urging *us* that whatever *we* ask will be *given* (Mt. 21:22; Jn. 16:23). Perhaps her emphasis was upon the word "you". Martha clearly felt an inadequacy in prayer. Like us, she wanted the Lord to do it all for her. The whole story reveals that such feelings of

inadequacy are unnecessary. Because her spirit, her deepest heart desires, were what the Lord would raise Lazarus, and this was indeed read by the Lord as prayer.

11:23 *Jesus said to her: Your brother shall rise again-* The Lord is purposefully ambiguous about the timing of the possible resurrection. He could have meant 'right away', or, 'at the last day'. That ambiguity was to elicit a response from Mary, to make her too wonder what His reference was to. And the Lord leaves things hanging at times in our interactions with Him and reading of His word- in order to exercise our own faith and reflection.

11:24 *Martha said to him: I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day-* First century Judaism generally believed in immortal souls, passage to Abraham's bosom etc. The fact Martha didn't believe this was surely due to her attention to the Lord's teaching about the resurrection of the body. She is quoting verbatim the Lord's laboured emphasis upon how He would "raise up" believers in Him "at the last day"- the same Greek words are used (Jn. 6:39,40,44,54). Perhaps Martha had been present at the incident in John 6, or probably the Lord repeated His teachings in different places, and she had heard this teaching and absorbed it into her deepest belief system.

But the Lord was perhaps hoping that His ambiguity would provoke her to state that she believed the Lord could raise Lazarus immediately. But she didn't quite get there, and so the Lord takes her there in :25 by speaking of how He *is* the resurrection.

11:25 *Jesus said to her: I am the resurrection and the life-* Here and in :26, the Lord seeks to develop the idea that the language of latter day resurrection and salvation at "the last day" is in fact applicable to life in Him right now. Under :22 *Even now* I suggested that Martha had heard the Lord's discourses on this theme earlier, and was even quoting from them. But now He asks her whether she really believes it- because if she does, then she may indeed entertain the idea that it was possible to raise Lazarus immediately.

*He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live-* A repeat of the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6:58 about how those who eat the Christ manna shall live and not die. Martha had already alluded to His teaching on that occasion in her reference to being raised again at the last day. Now the Lord is trying to take her further, as if to say: 'And what did I go on to say? I spoke later on in that same discourse about 'life' in Me as a present experience... that ought to confirm your hope and faith that I could raise Lazarus even now'. Likewise the Lord's description of Himself in this verse as "the life" uses a phrase only found in Jn. 6:51, where He speaks of His flesh giving "the life" to the believers. And this is how He seeks to work with us, always leading us on, and so patiently and in such hope that we

will 'get it'. We read or hear His word, and then we encounter another part of His word which is Him gently prodding us to reflect upon the word we previously heard or read. This all helps us understand why regular Bible reading and reflection on His word is such an important part of our daily walk with Him.

11:26 *And whoever lives and believes on me shall never die-* "Lives" therefore comes before 'believing'. Yet in the preceding verses, the Lord has spoken of 'living' as if He meant 'life at the last day as a result of resurrection': "... he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. But the eternal life, the kind of life we shall eternally live, can be lived right now. "Whoever lives" therefore refers to whoever has His life in them and continues that life of believing.

He is suggesting that this 'life' can be lived now, and if we have it, and continue to believe in Him, then we will literally "never die". Again, the Lord is encouraging Martha to believe that in some sense the resurrection life can be experienced now. And He is doing this, in the immediate context, to deepen her faith in the Lord's possibility to raise Lazarus to life- so that He could indeed raise Lazarus from the dead in response to her faith, rather than solely from the motive of His own personal compassion. And He works in this same multi-level way with millions of people simultaneously... the extent of His activity is breath-taking.

*Do you believe this?*- Is not the implication that Lazarus was raised partly because of *her* faith...?

11:27 *She said to him: Yes, Lord. I have believed-* Implying she had taken a one-time specific act of faith; the very specific confession of faith which John's Gospel was seeking to elicit in its audience.

*I have believed you are the Christ-* This is in answer to the question as to whether she believed that "He that believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live" (:25,26). She still dare not make the specific statement that she believes in life after death. On one hand, we could read her answer negatively, as if she fails to make the answer the Lord was trying to elicit- that yes, she believed in Him as the resurrection and the life, both now and at the last day. On another hand, we could read her answer positively, in that instead of saying she believed in a future gift of life, both in this life and the next, she simply says that she believes in Jesus as the Christ, making no presumption about getting any personal blessing out of that belief, and content with whatever He in His wisdom may give her. We noted this when considering how the sisters simply informed the Lord of Lazarus' grave sickness, without presuming to ask for His specific resolution of the issue (:3).

*The Son of God, He that is to come into the world-* Every believer likewise 'comes into the world' (Jn. 1:9- the same Greek words are used). There is

therefore no requirement to interpret this as meaning that the Lord Jesus personally pre-existed and literally came from Heaven to this earth. The Lord had spoken of how He 'came into the world' (Jn. 3:19; 9:39), and again Martha is quoting His words. Whilst Mary is framed as the one who loved hearing the Lord's words, clearly Martha likewise loved His words and based her faith upon them.

11:28 *And when she had said this, she went away, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Teacher is here-* Or, the Master. A nice insight into how the earliest disciples spoke of the Lord Jesus to each other when not in His presence.

*And calls you-* The same word is used for how the Lord 'called' Lazarus out of the grave (12:17). This develops the theme that the essence of resurrection happens in the Lord's interactions with those He calls to Himself. See on :25 and :26. The call to Mary was therefore in essence the same call to Lazarus, to come from death to life.

11:29 *And she, when she heard it, arose quickly and went to him-* As noted on :28, the response to the call in this life reflects our response to the call to life in the last day. Hearing the call, quickly responding and coming to the Lord immediately is surely being presented as a template for all John's audience to follow. The hearers would have been challenged by these words to themselves respond- just as we should be.

11:30 *(Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still in the place where Martha met him)-* All the communication being through messengers, privacy would have been hard to achieve. The Lord wanted to meet Martha and Mary alone, as far as possible, because He sought to develop their faith away from "the Jews" who were swamping the home. And He was also aware that "the Jews" sought to kill Him; that may have been another consideration, or at least, He was being sensitive to the fears of the disciples.

11:31 *The Jews then who were with her in the house and were consoling her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there-* This means that the tomb was located the same side of the village as where the Lord entered. He was therefore left waiting somewhere near the tomb. Therefore the question 'Where have you laid him?' (:34) was likely rhetorical.

11:32- see on Lk. 19:42.

*Therefore, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died-* She repeats the words of Martha, suggesting they had said this to one another in conversation beforehand. And she too

displays the limited faith that assumes only the Lord's literal presence could achieve miracles, and that healing from a distance was impossible. The way she repeats the same words as her sister, and with the same understandable anger / frustration with the Lord that He had not come quicker [for the messenger would have returned with the news that the Lord had not followed him back to Bethany immediately]... this all adds to the sense that we are indeed reading words actually spoken, and feelings really felt.

11:33 *When Jesus saw her weeping-* This is the same word used for the [same?] women weeping before the stone which covered the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:11,13). Clearly the Lord saw the whole scene as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection, and He sought to use the similarities to inculcate faith in His resurrection.

*And the Jews also weeping who had come with her-* The grief of "the Jews", even though they "sought to kill Him", still stirred parallel emotions within the Lord. For He had our nature, and such sympathetic response to others' grief is natural. And yet the Lord felt this psychological response even for His enemies; and in this we see the core love for them which was at His heart. His ability to respond even now to our emotions and tears, as He did toward Stephen at his time of dying, all makes Him a living Lord and matchless mediator.

*He groaned in the spirit and was disturbed-* Their weeping, just like ours, provokes a reflection deeply within the Lord. He groaned "in Himself" (:38); He took their grief deeply within Himself. This is again a reflection of His humanity; for it is normal to absorb the emotions of those we love deep into ourselves. But He is the Son of God, and Romans 8:26 clearly alludes to this incident by saying that "the Spirit" (a title of the Lord Jesus, "the Lord the Spirit" of 2 Cor. 3:18) intercedes even now with groanings which cannot be uttered. He is the same today as yesterday. The Greek translated "disturbed" is twice used in John of the Lord's feelings as He faced the cross (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). So clearly did He see the whole incident as pointing forward to His own death and resurrection. And it was an existentially lonely feeling, because He uses the same word to urge His followers: "Let not *your* [and this perhaps is where the emphasis was] be troubled" (Jn. 14:1,27). This deep troubling / disturbance was felt uniquely by the Lord. We need to be aware that the Lord knew what He would do- He knew that within maybe as little as ten minutes, the sisters would be ecstatic with joy as they met their resurrected brother. For me, this knowledge would have mitigated against entering into their emotions of grief. But His unity with them, His love, was such that He all the same wept for their tears. With us too, He knows that we shall eternally rejoice, relatively soon. And yet He still enters fully into our grief of the moment. Such is His love. Truly, man is not alone. God is with us, right now, through His Emmanuel.

11:34 *And said, Where have you laid him?*- Was this a rhetorical question, perhaps in order to focus them on the deadness of their brother as a prelude to the wonder of his resurrection? See on :31. Or is it a reflection of how the Lord had limited knowledge? The same word is repeatedly used of how the Lord's body was "laid" in the tomb (Mt. 27:60; Mk. 15:47; 16:6; Lk. 23:53,55; Jn. 19:41,42; 20:2,13,15). But the Lord also often uses the same word, at least in John, for how He 'laid down' His life (Jn. 10:11,15,17,18; 15:13). Again, the Lord is developing the idea that life is laid down both in death and during this mortal life; that the power of new life might break through into our mortal flesh, both now and through the resurrection of the body to the life eternal. Consciously or unconsciously, Mary uses the same original words in enquiring where the Lord's body has been laid (Jn. 20:2,13,15). Surely she must have seen the similarities, as the Lord intended. He knew she would one day soon be asking where *His* body had been laid, and He lovingly, gently sets her up for this.

*They said to him: Lord, come and see*- Again, the Lord is setting her up to see the similarities at the time of His resurrection; for in response to the same question, as to where the body had been laid, the same answer would be given by the Angel who represented Jesus: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Mt. 28:6). But it's all the other way around; the words of Jesus ("Where have you laid him?") become the words of Mary, and the words of the Angel who represented the Lord Jesus become Mary's words ("Come and see"). By so cleverly and profoundly setting this up, the Lord sought to demonstrate the connection between Him and her and all those who seek His body; His words become her words, her words become His words. He would soon make this explicit when speaking of how His words were to abide in His people, so that their will and His were the same, and therefore whatever they asked would be granted without needing His formal intercession (Jn. 15:7).

The Greek thinking minds who read the New Testament were sadly divorced from the Hebrew background which is the backdrop for God's revelation in the Bible. In the lead up to the AD381 Decree of Constantinople, which declared Trinitarianism as the only acceptable form of Christian faith, Gregory of Nazianzus preached a series of sermons in defence of the Trinity. He dealt with the two blocks of Biblical evidence as saying that e.g. in John 11:34, Jesus resurrected Lazarus by His Divine nature, and then wept in His human nature. Gregory utterly failed to appreciate Hebrew thought; he ended up splitting up the Lord Jesus effectively into two persons, rather than seeking to harmonize the two strands which there were within the one person of Jesus.

11:35 *Jesus wept*- He of all men knew the reality of future resurrection at the last day, and He knew what He was going to do. So why then did He

weep? He saw how unnecessary was their grief, how misguided. For He knew what He was going to do. And yet He wept with them because His heart bled for them, because He shared their grief (on whatever basis it was) to the extent that He too wept with them. And the love of Christ will constrain us to have His bleeding heart (2 Cor. 5:14). We may be tempted to think that our griefs and sorrows are too petty for the Lord to engage with. Our feelings are reflected in His, quite simply because He loves us.

11:36 *The Jews said: Look how he loved him!*- They perceived His love as *phileo* love, whereas the inspired record says that the Lord's love was of the *agape* quality (:5). The misunderstanding of the Lord's love was and is tragic. Some see this as evidence of a parallel between *phileo* and *agape*, but I would argue against that position. If they are interchangeable terms, then why use them both. Rather I suggest we see His *agape* as being misunderstood as the far lower level of *phileo* love.

11:37 *But some of them said: Could not this man, who opened the eyes of him that was blind, have also caused that this man should not have died?*- Here we see yet another point of connection with the Lord's crucifixion; for "the Jews" made similar accusation as justification for their demand that the Lord "come down from the cross". The line of argument they were presenting, introduced by the ominous words "But some of them...", suggests that they may have been sarcastic and cynical in saying that the Lord had opened the eyes of the blind man. But we see again some sort of division amongst "the Jews"; the Lord's grief was evidently genuine, indicating He has a good friend and good man (:36). But others chose to find any excuse to disbelieve Him.

11:38 *Jesus therefore again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave*- The whole process of mediation takes place within the Lord's mind, with the sort of groanings He had as He begged the Father to raise Lazarus (Rom. 8:26 cp. Jn. 11:38), and as on the cross He prayed with strong crying and tears for our redemption (Heb. 5:5 cp. Is. 53:12). The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today. That same passion and intensity of pleading really is there. This is why the state of our mind, our spirit, is so vitally important; because it is this which the Lord Jesus interprets to the Father. The Lord's Spirit struggles in mediation with crying and groaning (Rom. 8:26), as He did for the raising of Lazarus. There is a further connection with Heb. 5:5, where we learn that the Lord prayed on the cross with a like intensity. And this Lord is our Lord today. He can be crucified afresh, therefore He has the capacity for struggle and mental effort.

*And a stone lay across it*- The same word used about the stone that lay over the Lord's tomb (Jn. 20:1). The whole incident was to provoke faith in the Lord's resurrection after three days were fulfilled. But the disciples didn't 'get it', and John may be making that point- that they failed to

believe, to take the lesson from the resurrection of Lazarus which was clearly a foretaste of the Lord's. This is part of the wider theme of the Gospel writers emphasizing their own slowness and weakness of faith- which likely made them the more compelling and credible.

11:39 *Jesus said: Take away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, said to him: Lord, by this time the body stinks. For he has been dead four days-* Female concern about taking the stone away from the tomb was another point of contact with the Lord's resurrection. The Lord's body did not "see corruption" because of the huge amount of expensive spices placed upon it, but with Lazarus, the body was already decomposed. The contrast with the Lord's corpse was perhaps to make the point that *His* body did not "see corruption". And although our corpses do "see corruption", this is no barrier to resurrection.

11:40 - see on Jn. 11:4.

*Jesus said to her: Did I not say to you, that if you believed, you should see the glory of God?-* The Lord Jesus encourages us to see ourselves as Moses. This is without doubt an allusion to Moses' experience of seeing God's glory- an experience which in Jewish eyes marked Moses out as the greatest man who had ever lived. The veneration in which Moses was and is held in the Jewish world is hard for Gentiles to enter into. A glance through rabbinical commentaries on the Pentateuch will illustrate this well. And here was the Lord Jesus saying that through faith in him, we can share the experience of Moses, we can rise to the spiritual heights of the man who spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

We are being invited to be equal to Moses, seeing from the cleft in the rock the awesome majesty of the perfection of Christ's character; the full glory of God. But do we appreciate his righteousness? Paul likewise invites us to behold with unveiled face, as Moses did (2 Cor. 3:18 RV), and thereby, just from appreciating the glory of Christ's character, be changed into the same glory. Note too how in Rom. 11 we are each bidden "behold the goodness and severity of God"- a reference to Moses beholding all the goodness of Yahweh. We are in essence in his position right now (Ex. 33:19).

John's Gospel contains several references to the fact that Christ 'shows' the Father to those who believe in him, and that it is possible to "see the Father" and his glory through seeing or accurately believing in him as the Son of the Father (Jn. 11:40; 12:45; 14:9; 16:25). Moses earnestly wished to see the Father fully, but was unable to do so. The height which Moses reached as he cowered in that rock cleft and heard God's Name declared is hard to plumb. But we have been enabled to see the Father, through our appreciation of the Lord Jesus. But does an appropriate sense of *wonder* fill us? Do we really make time to *know* the Son of God? Or do we see words like "glory" as just cold theology?



Martha clearly believed Lazarus was now decomposed, and it would make a smell if the stone over his tomb was rolled away. "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" was the Lord's response (Jn. 11:40). Clearly she didn't have that faith. So, on one level, she shouldn't have seen God's glory revealed in the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:4). And yet we read straight away that then, Lazarus was raised- despite Martha's 'unworthiness' of it. Such was the Lord's love for them all.

11:41 *So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said: Father, I thank you that you have heard me-* The way the Lord characteristically lifted His eyes to Heaven to pray reflects His complete unity of spirit with the Father, with no barriers nor issues of guilty conscience standing between them. Even before the body of Lazarus emerged, the Lord knew that He had been heard. He had earlier spoken of doing the works / miracles which He had seen / been shown by the Father (5:20,36). We get the impression that the Father had shown the Lord this "work", and He was totally confident that it would be performed. It was of course a huge encouragement to the Lord that He too would emerge from the grave.

11:42 *And I know you hear me always, but because of the crowd that stands around I said it, that they may believe you did send me-* Said what? The past tense suggests the reference is not to His word of command to Lazarus to "come forth", for He had not yet spoken that. Was the reference therefore to His command "Take away the stone" (:39)? Was it to His "groaning"? But this was "in the spirit... within Himself", not publicly stated. I suggest that the "it" which He "said" was in prayer to the Father. The Father always heard Him, He did not need to ask for specific things in order to get them, for the Spirit was given to Him without measure. Perhaps He is saying that in this case, He had specifically prayed to the Father, and received a positive response- in order that the crowd might realize that indeed He had been sent by the Father. But there is no record of any prayer prayed publicly by the Lord in front of the watching crowd. Maybe He meant that He had already said "it" in prayer to the Father and been answered, and He was now going to say publicly "Lazarus, come forth"; but that also is hardly a public prayer to the Father. The GNB tries to avoid the problem by offering a more vague interpretation of the tense: "I say *this* for the sake of the people here". But this seems questionable in terms of the Greek grammar. My conclusion is therefore that the prayer to the Father was private, but the raising of Lazarus would have been seen by the thoughtful amongst the crowd as clearly an answer to the Lord's private prayer. Such resurrection could only come from God, and seeing it was done at the hands and word of Jesus, it followed that He had therefore prayed to the Father for it. In this way, the Lord demonstrated that the essence of prayer was within

the heart of the believer, whereas at that time prayer was generally conceived as a matter of public activity, with words spoken out loud. It's the same lesson as taught by Hannah's silent prayer. This is why the Lord *says out loud* in the audience of the crowd that He "said it" for the sake of the crowd. John's Gospel draws a distinction between "the crowd" and "the Jews", the Jewish leadership. The Lord's intention was that both groups would be converted (recall His desire that the cured leper made a witness to the priests), but the resurrection of Lazarus was aimed at converting the masses- "because of the crowd I said it". The Jewish leadership were not likely to reflect upon what the Lord had said and done, because their hearts were hardened. But "the crowd" contained at least some open minds.

So it seems to me that Jesus had asked / commanded / said to the Father to resurrect Lazarus. Jesus believed that this had happened. And so, in utter faith, he thanks the Father for raising Lazarus- even though Lazarus was still silent in the grave and there was at that point no actual physical evidence Lazarus had come back to life. But then Jesus says, believing so firmly the prayer had already been answered 'OK Lazarus, well, come out and see us then' [my paraphrase!]. The whole point was to demonstrate that "I am the resurrection and the life", to confirm Martha's faith that indeed there would be a resurrection "at the last day" (Jn. 11:24,25). It wasn't to demonstrate that Jesus could reunite 'soul' and body- it was to prove a resurrection.

*I know you hear me always*- Both David and Christ panicked when they felt their prayers weren't being answered; they felt that this meant they had sinned (Ps. 22:1-4; and consider too 17:15; 24:5; 27:4,8). Clearly they understood answered prayer as a sign of acceptability with God. The Lord knew that God *always* heard Him. When apparently God didn't hear His prayer for deliverance on the cross, He for a moment supposed that He'd sinned and therefore God had forsaken Him.

Lazarus had died, and the evident desire of Martha was to see her brother again, there and then. But she didn't go running to the Lord with this desire. She simply and briefly stated her faith in the Lord's limitless power to resurrect, and her knowledge that He could use the Father's power as He wished. He read her spirit, He saw her fervent desire. And He responded to this as if it had been a prayer. He groaned deeply within Himself, and wept- not the tears of grief, as the Jews mistakenly thought (note how throughout the record they misunderstand what is really going on), but the tears which go with the groaning of serious prayer (Jn. 11:33-39). Having done this, He comments: "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me *always*". Because His spirit, His mind, was in constant contact with the Father, His prayers /

desires were always communicated to Him, and always being heard. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me" could almost imply that the Lord prayed for something, and then, after some interval, the answer came. We have an exquisite insight into the Lord's mind and the highly personal relationship between Father and Son in the words that follow: "I knew (not 'I know') that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe". This almost certainly was not spoken out loud; this is a very rare and privileged glimpse into the unspoken communication between the Son and Father. The Lord seems to be adding this almost in half apology, lest it should seem that He prayed for Lazarus' resurrection, the answer came, and He then thanked the Father for it. It seems that this would be too primitive a sequence of events. He says that He *knew* that His request had been granted, and His utterance of thanks for the answer was for the peoples' benefit: that *they* might perceive that whatever the Son asked for, He received from God. But in reality, the Lord's thoughts to the Father seem to suggest, it wasn't a question of His prayers being accepted and answered. His Spirit, His thoughts, were one with the Father, and therefore it was not that His thoughts were considered, accepted and then God granted the request. What He thought was the prayer and it was the answer all in one. His 'mediation' for us is in the sense that He is the Lord *the Spirit*. There is no barrier (and was not any) between His mind and that of the Father.

11:43 *And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice-* Yet another connection with the crucifixion; for this was how the Lord ended His mortal life, crying with a loud voice (Mt. 27:46,50).

*Lazarus, come out!*- The Greek is only elsewhere used in the Gospels for the Lord calling men to come 'here' to Him and follow Him in service (Mt. 19:21; Mk. 10:21; Lk. 18:22). This was also His personal intention for Lazarus. Again we have the hint that Lazarus may not have been a full believer at the time (see on :19). And the miracles were not done simply to meet human need as the Lord encountered it- for He walked past so much of it, without addressing it. The intention was that those cured or assisted would come to Him in faith. Our good works and social welfare outreach should therefore likewise be intimately connected to evangelism and not done for their own sake.

11:44 *He that was dead came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: Loose him, and let him go away-* "Grave clothes... napkin" are all yet again reminiscent of the Lord's burial and release from death; the same word for "napkin" is used in Jn. 20:7. His emergence, when so tightly bound, was also of itself a miracle; and it may have been an encouragement to the Lord Jesus, who may likewise have been interested to know how He would emerge from bound graveclothes. The command

to "loose him" also had a deeper hint within it; "the Jews" were to release people like Lazarus and allow them to come to the Lord and walk thereafter in freedom. But it was ultimately the Lord who not only healed and resurrected, but also loosed men from bondage to what which was associated with death- the Jewish system. The same word is used for unloosing the Jewish legislation in 5:18 and 7:23.

11:45 *Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to Mary-* I have tried to demonstrate in this exposition that "the Jews" referred to the Jewish leadership, and "the crowd" are mentioned separately to them in John's Gospel (the definition of "the Jews" begins in Jn. 1:19). The Lord had intended this miracle to specifically convert some from "the crowd" (see on :42). But it appears that His expectations were proven wrong, for actually it was some from "the Jews" who believed. He was after all of human nature. Likewise we noted on Jn. 4:44 that the Lord had expected no response from His own "country" but actually there was response. If even the Lord found that some responded whom He didn't expect to, we must surely approach our own witness in a spirit of mere sowing, not attempting to foresee the response.

*And saw what he did, believed in him-* Faith of course is ideally believing without visual evidence (Heb. 11:1), and the Lord lamented that many wanted to 'see' before believing (Jn. 4:48). The example of Thomas, demanding to see before he believed, is surely recorded in a negative light (Jn. 20:25), leading the Lord to pronounce blessing on those who have not seen yet believe (Jn. 20:29). But all the same, such lower level 'belief' is still counted to folk, by the Lord of all grace who is so enthusiastic to notice human faith on whatever level. This serves as an encouragement to us, to view positively those with apparently weak faith; and also, to not think that our faith is so weak that our Lord doesn't notice it. So again we see evidence that some of "the Jews" believed in the Lord- but would not 'come out' for Him until after His resurrection. The thousands baptized a few weeks later on Pentecost were all devout Jews "dwelling in Jerusalem", and we wonder whether these were those who at various times in John are described as having 'believed in Him' but had not openly confessed Him. Public baptism was an ideal way to do so. It would also explain why they were converted so quickly, and clearly were struggling with conscience issues.

11:46 *But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done-* Again and again, the Jews were divided by the Lord's work. Even resurrection from the dead would not persuade them; perhaps it was to the resurrection of Lazarus that the Lord referred in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:31). There are some for whom the opinion of others, especially religious leaders, is paramount. They can be shown the clearest truths, such as the resurrection of Lazarus, or the clear teaching of Scripture- and it means nothing, because

they have elevated their religious leaders to an absolute position. We read these things in the Bible because we encounter the same psychologies today.

11:47 *The chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said: What will we do? For this man does many miracles-* The idea in the Greek is that if He is 'doing' so much, then what are we 'doing' in response. Again the Jews have to admit the Lord was indeed doing miracles, as Nicodemus stated at the start of the Gospel. We learn from this that miracles alone will not convict a person of faith; but we also see that clearly they were responsible toward God now that they had seen them. The most aggressive people, in a given context, are those who know they are wrong and are desperately seeking to destroy the evidence which is too inconvenient for them. And so those who encounter the Lord have to either capitulate to His claims, or go away as did the Jews in bitterness and wild attempts to destroy the evidence and inconvenient truths- no matter how much they disguise all that beneath nice speak.

11:48 *If we leave him alone, all men will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation-* Like so many, they resisted the powerful claims of the Lord upon them because of their own petty vested interest. Just as so many will not sacrifice their family relationships or business or living place for the Lord's sake. Their *topos*, "place", could be the Jerusalem temple; but their essential fear was that they would lose their own "place". They recognized that belief in the teaching of Jesus meant that no priesthood or religious leadership such as theirs was in fact necessary. Which means that to return to such a system is to not follow the true teaching of Jesus. Yet they disguised all this under the excuse that the Lord's miracles would get Him a mass following, which would lead to a revolution which the Romans would crush, resulting in their loss of all their vested interests. This kind of logic is so typically human. If this respecting Jesus of Nazareth... then A could happen, then B might happen, and then the unthinkable might happen- I lose my "place" in society and the eyes of men. This is why the New Testament records the Lord's claims being acted upon immediately, with believers being baptized straight away. Response to the Lord needs to be quick, before the mind of the flesh kicks in with its delaying tactics and endless chains of 'what if...'.

11:49 *But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them: You know nothing at all-* The Mosaic High Priest did the job for life, but the work had been reduced by Judaism into a much coveted position which was shared each year. The thrust of the argument seemed to be that they 'knew nothing' of the real threat posed- which was the whole Jewish nation "perish" in some terrible holocaust which would aim to destroy every Jew within Palestine. Caiaphas argues that they "knew nothing at all" compared to what really could happen; not just *they* would

lose their place, but every Jew in Palestine would be murdered by the imagined Roman response to a Messianic revolution. This was taking their 'what ifs' to the ultimate moment. It was extremely unlikely that the whole Jewish nation would perish because of any Roman response. And the Old Testament promises would surely not allow that to happen; although Caiaphas had no faith in them to reason like this. He was of course leading up to his decision that one man must die so that Jewry did not perish completely.

11:50 *Nor do you take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, so that the whole nation does not perish-* The paradox of course was the Lord's death was so that all who believed in Him, the new Israel, would "not perish". Caiaphas seems to be arguing that they had not even considered the idea of killing the Lord in order that the Jewish people "not perish". "Expedient" is the same word used by the Lord in saying that His death was "expedient" in order that the Holy Spirit be sent and God's people be saved (16:7). So whilst the reasoning was that of Caiaphas, the words came out in a way which spoke clearly of the Lord's death.

*That one man should die for the people-* Adam Clarke claims that "This saying was proverbial among the Jews"; it was an allusion to the scapegoat slain on the day of Atonement. It was the High Priest's duty to slay the scapegoat; and here he says that the Lord's death was to be seen as just that.

*Not perish-* The same Greek phrase is used by the Lord about how faith in Him will mean that individuals will "not perish" (Jn. 3:15,16; 6:39). He saw salvation on an individual level, whereas Judaism and Caiaphas wrongly thought of salvation as being a concept applicable only on a *national* level. And yet the death of Jesus was primarily for Israel; and that whole nation need not have perished, due to the cross. Here we see the depth of grace; their rejection of Him, their doing of their Saviour to death, was actually the means for their salvation. We would have made it the basis of their condemnation, were we in the Father's position. But potentially, it was the means of their salvation. But such grace was incomprehensible to them. The whole nation, or many of them, *did* perish. And thereby we learn that the extent of the Lord's victory is dependent upon our response to it; so much was made possible through it, but human response is still required. John evidently intended us to see the connection with his earlier comment that the Lord was lifted up *that whosoever believeth on Him* should "not perish" but have eternal life.

11:51- see on Jn. 5:4.

*Now this he said not of himself-* An example of where the power of inspiration is such that men were moved to speak far beyond their own personal understanding or intention.

*But being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation-* The terms he used and the logic followed was all as it were put in his mouth. But "the nation", the true Israel, was thereby redefined as those who believe in the Lord and accept His death for them.

11:52 *And not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad-* This may have been added by John. Or perhaps it was the vision of Caiaphas that the Lord's death would enable Judaism to rally their troops as it were, and the diaspora Jews would return to Jerusalem as the Rabbis taught, and establish an independent Kingdom in Palestine.

The Lord Jesus died as He did in order that all who benefit from His cross should show forth the love, the glory and the Name of the Father and Son, and thus have an extraordinary unity among themselves- so powerful it would convert the world (Jn. 17:20-26). This theme of unity amongst us played deeply on His mind as He faced death in Jn. 17. He died that He might gather together in one all God's children in that His death would enable the giving of the Holy Spirit within the hearts of His people; and the result of spiritual mindedness would be unity between persons. Those who advocate splitting the body, thereby showing the world our *disunity*, are working albeit unwittingly against *the most essential intention of the cross*, and declare themselves to not have received the Holy Spirit. And in this, for me at least, lies an unspeakable tragedy. The atonement should create fellowship. His death would create a new synagogue- for "gather together" translates *sunago*. But it would be a meeting of minds, based around Him and His cross; rather than in a building cantered around a religion and human priesthood.

Do we find a true unity with our brethren impossible? He died *that* He might gather together into one all God's children. Before His cross, before serious and extended personal meditation upon it, all our personal differences will disappear. A divided ecclesia is therefore one which is not centred upon the cross. Whether or not we must live our ecclesial experience in such a context, the barriers which exist within us personally really *can* be brought down by the humbling experience of the cross, and the way in which we are forced to see how that death was not only for us personally. The wonder of it was and is in its universal and so widely-inclusive nature. Again, the basis of our unity is a sustained, individual appreciation of the cross.

*The children of God that are scattered abroad-* The Lord uses the same word in predicting that initially, His death would result in His sheep being

"scattered abroad" (Mt. 26:31; Jn. 16:32). Response to His death therefore involves a scattering, in order for each man to individuate; and then a coming together in the profoundest unity of the cosmos. We see this in the experience of Paul, who spent three years in the wilderness after his conversion, out of contact with the big name brethren of the time; and then became the most passionate preacher of unity in Christ.

11:53 *So from that day forward, they took advice how they might put him to death-* AV "Took counsel together". The element of 'together' is implied in the Greek. But Jn. 18:14 uses the same word to say that "Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people". One individual gave the advice or 'counsel', but the decision was formally taken by a committee under his influence. This is how apparent 'democracy' so often works in religious groups; the voice of a dominant individual speaks through an appearance of group speak, supposed peer review and joint 'decision making'. Comparing the two passages, it would seem that Caiaphas indeed played a hugely significant role in the Lord's death. This would therefore justify him being called the "prince of this world" and the significant adversary / satan who is associated with the Lord's death.

11:54 *Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but departed from there into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there he stayed with the disciples-* The Lord gave His life of Himself, it was not taken from Him. We therefore see Him here consciously acting in a way which took control over the timing of His death.

*Ephraim-* "Fruitful". The blessing on Ephraim spoke clearly of the acceptance of Gentiles through him: "The younger brother shall be greater, and his seed shall become the fullness of Gentiles" (Gen. 48:19 Heb., cp. Rom. 11:25). This is in the context of :52, which speaks of how Gentiles also would be gathered together by the Lord's death.

11:55 *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand; and many from the countryside went to Jerusalem to purify themselves before the Passover-* This would have included the Lord's family from Nazareth. The Jewish ritual of purifying oneself before Passover is alluded to by the requirement to 'examine ourselves' before breaking bread, the Christian equivalent of the Passover feast. Again, Passover is no longer a feast "of Yahweh", but "of the Jews". They had hijacked God's law and turned it into their own religion.

11:56 *They looked for Jesus, and spoke one with another, as they stood in the temple: What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?-* Every male should come to the Passover; so they wondered whether He would break the Law because He was clearly going to be arrested and



maybe killed. They were apparently assuming the Lord would enter the temple, and so they were watching as to whether He would enter it.

*11:57 Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, they were to inform them, so that they might arrest him-* Yet, remarkably enough, nobody did perform such a betrayal. Except one of those in the Lord's very inner circle... The fact nobody else apparently did so is surely a reflection of how the Lord was deeply respected- up until the moment of His refusal to give people the Kingdom now.

## CHAPTER 12

12:1 *Therefore, six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead-* The "therefore" is significant. We are each called to witness; and there is no way out. That witness flows out of our deeply personal experiences. If we won't make that witness, then God will work in our lives to bring us to a position where we have no choice but to do so. This was how the Lord worked with the family of Lazarus. The Jews had commanded "that if any man knew where he was, he should shew it" (Jn. 11:57). And "Jesus *therefore...* came to Bethany" (Jn. 12:1 RV). He purposefully attracted attention to His connection with the Bethany home. And so it was that "much people of the Jews learned that he was there" (Jn. 12:9), and the context makes it clear that this was a source of witness to them (Jn. 12:10,11). The Lord sought to expose their secret discipleship, to take the bucket off their candle. And He will do likewise with us. *Therefore* Jesus came to Mary and Martha's home. Why? So that they could no longer keep secret their faith in Him. The meal they put on was not just female, standard hospitality. It was, in this context, a brave public declaration of their identification with this wanted man. And the way in the last week of His life the Lord chose to sleep there each night was surely done for the same reason: to lead them to open identity with His cause and His cross. "Much people therefore of the Jews knew that he was there" (Jn. 12:9). And so with us, the Lord brings about circumstances so that our light can no longer remain under a bucket.

The anointing recorded in Mark 14 is clearly the same as that here in Matthew 26. But the anointing in Luke 7 appears to have occurred in the house of a Pharisee called Simon somewhere in Galilee. The anointing recorded in John 12 is very similar, but occurred six days before the Passover and one day *before* the triumphal entry (Jn. 12:12), whereas the anointing recorded here in Matthew and Mark occurred *after* that. There are other differences, too. In Jn. 12:3 Mary uses "a pound of spikenard" whereas the anointing in Matthew seems to emphasize the use of spikenard as a liquid, in an alabaster flask that had to be broken to release the liquid. The spikenard was worth *more* than 300 pence (Mk. 14:5), whereas that of Jn. 12:5 was worth 300 pence; it was used to anoint the Lord's *feet* (Jn. 12:3), whereas that of Mt. 26:7 was used to anoint His *head*. In Jn. 12:4 it is Judas who complains at the apparent waste of the money, whereas in Mt. 26:8 it is the disciples. Mt. 26:11,12 record the Lord's word about "You will always have the poor with you" and goes on to record His explanation that the woman had done this for His burial; whereas in Jn. 12:7,8 these two sayings are the other way around. The wiping of His feet with her hair is stressed in Jn. 12:3, but Matthew and Mark are silent about this. Jn. 12 clearly identifies the woman as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus; whereas Matthew and Mark are careful to preserve her as a nameless "woman" who "came unto Him" (26:7). I therefore have no doubt that Jn. 12 and Mt. 26 / Mk. 14

speak of two separate anointings, both in Bethany, separated from each other by four days. The anointing in Luke 7 is clearly framed as a similar incident, also in the house of a man called Simon.

The question, of course, is why these three anointings are described in such similar language. Higher critics immediately speak of textual dislocation and mistakes made by the writers in their chronology of events. These kinds of approaches arise from a focus upon the text before our eyes, rather than having a wider perspective on Scripture earned by years of careful Bible reading of the entire Bible text. Those who read the entire Scriptures over a period of time cannot fail to be impressed by the repetition of situations and events. The way Joseph is called out of prison to interpret a King's dream and is then exalted to rulership in a pagan land is clearly the basis for the language used about Daniel's experience in Babylon. This is not to say that text got dislocated, that Daniel was Joseph or vice versa. Rather do we perceive a single Divine mind behind the production of the Bible as we have it; and God's intention was clearly to show that circumstances repeat within and between the lives of His people. And the language He uses in recording history seeks to bring out those repetitions. This is why the lament of Jeremiah in depression is so similar to that of Job in his depression. And of course we are free to assume that Biblical characters were aware of and took inspiration from those who had gone before them. I suggest that this is what we have going on in the records of these three anointings of the Lord by despised and misunderstood women. They were inspired by each other- for the Lord comments that what the women did was to be told worldwide. This was a command, and it was surely obeyed. Mary of Bethany was inspired by the woman of Luke 7, and the anonymous woman of Matthew 26 was inspired by Mary's anointing of four days previously. Mary had given spikenard worth 300 pence; this woman used even more expensive ointment. And in this is our lesson- to be inspired by the devotion of others to their Lord. Heaven's record of our response is as it were recorded in similar language, in recognition of the inspiration provided by earlier acts of faithfulness by those we know or who have gone before us.

The similarities between the anointing record in Lk. 7 and those of Jn. 12 etc. require an explanation. Could it not be that the Gospels are showing us that the intensity of Mary's faith and love at first conversion was held by her until the end of the Lord's ministry? We need to ask ourselves whether the fire of first love for Him has grown weak; whether over the years we would do the same things for Him, feel the same way about Him, cry the same tears over Him... or have the years worn our idealism away?

12:2 *So they made him supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat and ate with him-* Given the obsession of Martha with serving in an earlier incident (Lk. 10:40), we can assume she continued

doing what she liked doing, but with a more spiritual attitude than before. The Gospels several times use eating as a proof of resurrection; perhaps to prepare us for the idea of eating at the Lord's table in celebration of His resurrection. His ongoing eating with us at the communion service is likewise a testament to His resurrection.

12:3 *Then Mary-* RV "Mary therefore". In gratitude for the resurrection of Lazarus, "Mary therefore" anointed the Lord 'for his burial'. It was as if she perceived that the resurrection of Lazarus was only possible on account of the resurrection of Jesus which was soon to come. But after the Lord's death, her faith in His resurrection seems to have taken a nose dive. Mary's response to 'the gardener' reveals that despite it being the third day after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene wasn't apparently open to the possibility that the Lord had risen. Yet surely she had heard Him specifically, categorically predict His death and resurrection. One can only conclude that she was so consumed by the feelings of the moment that she like us failed to make that crucial translation of knowledge into felt and real faith. As with us as we sit through Bible studies and revel in our own perception of Scripture, her so fine and correct understanding was suddenly without power when reality called.

*Took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair-* Peter's letters are packed with allusions back to the Gospels. When he writes that to us, the Lord Jesus should be "precious" (1 Pet. 2:7), he surely has in mind how Mary had anointed the Lord with her "very precious ointment" (Jn. 12:3 RV). He bids us to be like Mary, to perceive "the preciousness" (RV) of Jesus, and to respond by giving up our most precious things, mentally or materially, in our worshipful response to Him.

The question arises as to why Mary anointed the Lord's feet, when anointing is nearly always of the head. The only time the foot of anything was anointed was in Ex. 40:11, when the pedestal / "foot" of the laver was anointed in order to consecrate it. This pedestal was made from the brass mirrors donated by repentant prostitutes (Ex. 38:8 = 1 Sam. 2:22). In this there is the connection. Mary the repentant whore wanted to likewise donate way she had to the true tabernacle and laver, which she perceived to be the Lord Jesus. Her equivalent of brass mirrors was her pound of spikenard. And it could be that she had been baptized at her conversion, and saw the Lord as her laver. And this was her response- to pour all her wealth into Him. She anointed him for His death- for she perceived that it was through death that the Lord would fulfil all the OT types of the laver etc.

*And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil-* Yet every one of the 11 OT references to a house being filled refers to the temple being filled with the Shekinah glory (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chron. 5:13,14; 7:1,2; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:3,4; 43:5; 44:4). John's sensitive use of language is

surely seeking to draw a parallel. She was glorifying the Name by her gift, senseless as it may have seemed in the eyes of less spiritual people. There is a definite connection between spikenard and what incense was made from. What may seem to have no practical achievement in the eyes of men can truly be a sweet smelling savour to God. We need to remember this at times in bearing with our brethren's efforts for Him. To judge them in a utilitarian way is to fall into the same error as the disciples did. The efforts of others are described later in the NT in the same language- the same word for "odour" occurs in Phil. 4:18 to describe the labour of believers which is "well pleasing to God". The way Mary anoints the Lord with spikenard is surely to be connected with how earlier she had washed His feet with her tears. The spikenard was "precious" (Jn. 12:3 RV), not only in its value materially, but in the way Mary used it in some kind of parallel to her tears. She perceived the preciousness of her tears, her repentance, her grateful love for her Lord. And any tears we may shed in gratitude of forgiveness are likewise so precious in His sight

*12:4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, the one that would betray him, said-* The other Gospels say that it was some of the disciples who said this. The disaffection of one disciple to this day so easily influences others, to the point that their words are effectively the words of the disaffected, bitter individual who stands behind them.

*12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?-* This kind of secular approach to spiritual devotion is of the flesh and not the Spirit. What is done with money and how it is done is all on one level; the essence is of devotion to the Lord. A denarius was the penny paid for a day's hard work (Mt. 20:2). The figure of 300 denarii may therefore be a round figure referring to the money earned in a year. The implication is that the disciples had a common fund from which they donated to the poor; such almsgiving was common in first century Palestine, and for the Lord to have pointedly not given alms would have been controversial. We note that He had the power to totally heal the sick, provide food and transform the material lives of people. But He used a great economy of miracle. He must have allowed this small scale poor fund to continue for the sake of developing the attitudes of the donors amongst His disciples- rather than for the sake of what the donations would achieve. There are many principles which arise out of reflection on these things, living as we do in a grossly unequal world.

*12:6 Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it-* The Lord evidently knew how Judas was taking money out of the bag. As the Son of God He was an intellectual beyond compare, and sensitive and perceptive beyond our imagination. And He noticed it; and yet said nothing. He was seeking to save Judas and He

saw that to just kick up a fuss about evident weakness wasn't the way. If only many of our brethren would show a like discernment. As noted on :5, the whole existence of this Poor Fund was not because it was effective in alleviating human need [the Lord had the power to achieve that by direct intervention]- but in order to develop the attitudes and devotions of the disciples.

Judas' lack of "care" for the poor uses the same word as recently used in 10:13 about the false shepherds who cared not the flock. So the point is being made that the Lord's disciples were now the shepherds of the new Israel- but there was a bad shepherd amongst them as there had been amongst Israel of old. And those poor beggars, requiring alms, were the Lord's "flock".

12:7- see on Mk. 14:53.

*Jesus replied: Leave her alone* - This translates a Greek phrase which essentially means 'to forgive', and it is usually translated like this. The Lord isn't just saying 'leave off her, let her be as she is'; He is saying 'Let her be forgiven', which is tantamount to saying 'let her express her gratitude as she wants'. The root for her gratitude was her sense of forgiveness. This heightens the connection between Mary and the woman in the city who was a sinner of Lk. 7.

*She intended to keep it for the day of my burial*- But Mary's beloved brother Lazarus had only recently died, and been embalmed. Yet she had not used her precious possession for that, but rather kept it for her Lord's burial. Mary Magdalene's understanding of the Lord went far beyond that of anyone else at the time. The record of Mary after the crucifixion has many links back to the woman of Luke 7. She *came to the sepulchre*, to wash the dead body with her tears, for she *went to the grave, to weep there*, and to *anoint it with the ointment* she had prepared. It's as if in her anointing of the Lord she really did see forward to His death and burial. And yet her initial motivation in doing it all was gratitude for what He had done for her through enabling her forgiveness. The Lord's power to forgive was ultimately due to His death, resurrection and ascension (Acts 5:31; Lk. 24:46,47). Yet Mary believed there and then that all this would happen, and thus she believed in His forgiveness. Her second anointing of the Lord has within it the implication that she somehow perceived that her adoration was motivated on account of the death that He was to die. "It was right for her to save this perfume for today, the day for me to be prepared for burial" (Jn. 12:7 New Century Version). The RV of Jn. 12:7 gives another suggestion: "Jesus therefore said [in response to Judas' suggestion she sell the ointment and give him the money to distribute to the poor], Suffer her to keep it against the day of my burying". Mary Magdalene had kept the precious ointment to anoint Jesus with when He died; and yet Judas was pressurizing her to sell it. And yet she used at

least some of it then. This would indicate that she perceived Him as good as dead; she alone it seems perceived the frequent implications in His teaching that He was living out an ongoing death. She fully intended to pour the ointment on His dead body, but she did it ahead of time because she wanted Him to know right then that she understood, and that she loved Him.

The argument of Judas for efficiency, central administration etc. is contrasted most unfavourably with her personal, simple and deeply felt emotional response to the Lord's death. She did it at supper time (Jn. 12:2). In Jewish culture of the time, a meal together had religious significance. It could be that she so dwelt upon the Lord's teaching in Jn. 6 that she perceived the broken bread of the meal to be symbolic and prophetic of His upcoming death. Her generosity and totality of response to His death was therefore inspired by what we would call a breaking of bread, which made real to her yet once again the endless implications of His self-sacrifice.

12:8 *The poor you have always with you, but me you do not have always-* We note the Lord's grace and wisdom in not confronting Judas about his petty theft. Rather did the Lord focus upon protecting the dignity of Mary. His allusion is clearly to Dt. 15:11: "For the poor will never cease out of the land, therefore I command you, saying, You must surely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and to your poor". The context of this statement is that if Israel were obedient, then there would be no poor in the land (Dt. 15:4), but because of their disobedience which Moses foresaw, there were commandments about being generous to the poor. So perhaps there was a hidden message here to Judas, if he perceived it. If he were to be obedient, then he would not be poor, he would be blessed, and there would be no need for petty theft. The Dt. 15 passage also has the context of urging generosity to the poor, and not in any way seeking to get around it, nor begrudging any gift to them: "You must surely give to him, and your heart must not be grieved when you give to him" (Dt. 15:10). This was precisely what had happened- Judas and all the disciples were grieved at Mary's generosity. But clearly "the poor" was Jesus Himself personally. We see here not only an insight into the Lord's personal poverty, but also into how He perceived Himself as the poor in spirit. For Biblically, "the poor" refers not simply to the financially hard up, but to the depressed, the poor in spirit. The Messianic Psalms feature David describing himself as the "poor man", although the context of many of them doesn't refer to material poverty but to David's poverty of spirit at the time. We see therefore that the Lord of the universe can totally identify with the feelings of "the poor". Though He was rich, He made Himself a pauper for our sakes (2 Cor. 8:9 Gk.). That doesn't seem true in financial terms, for the Lord was never at any point financially rich (although one can speculate as to what happened to the gifts of the

magi), but rather is the reference to the Lord's poverty of spirit and depression.

*12:9 The common people of the Jews learned that he was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead-* This confirms the contrast in John between "the Jews", referring to the Jewish leadership, and "the common people". Another possibility is that John uses it specifically for those who were inhabitants of Jerusalem. Perhaps it was the literal smell of the powerful perfume which brought the people to the knowledge of the Lord's presence in that home. The resurrected Lazarus would have been a hugely powerful exhibit in favour of the Lord's power and message of life in Him.

*12:10 But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus also to death-* This is the classic response of those who refuse to capitulate; they try to destroy or nullify the evidence and all the inconvenient truths. Those who don't wish to believe in the Father and Son are full of such desperation. Jealousy and fear of losing position, converts and vested interest leads to a crazed attempt to denigrate and deny the validity of another's faith or witness. Lazarus had done nothing wrong- he was simply the subject of a resurrection. The fact the highest leaders of Judaism wanted to give him a death sentence simply reflects how corrupt they were.

12:11- see on Jn. 12:42.

*Because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus-* The idea of the Greek is that they 'withdrew'; understanding "the Jews" as the Jewish leadership, there is no evidence they actually did this at this stage, but rather that they secretly believed. If as suggested on :9, "the Jews" refers to the Jerusalem Jews; then these people would have been amongst those who came out openly for the Lord at Pentecost. Perhaps here we see how inspiration records the weak faith and commitment of others in generous, positive terms (e.g. the disciples 'sleeping for sorrow'). The tragedy is that the Jewish leadership condemned the Lord to death when 'many' of them believed in Him. This is a classic feature of human beings once they get into groupings together; a group position is upheld even when the majority are against it, and even when the position is the most terrible of all, in this case, the killing of God's Son. Again we note how the Lord had thought that some from "the crowd" would be converted (see on 11:42), when what happened was the opposite; the crowd, of whom we read in 12:12 (RV and some manuscripts "*the crowd*"), were those who violently turned against Him, and the converts were made from within the Jewish leadership. The Lord was human, and misplaced hopes and inaccurate



suppositions of the immediate future are all part of being human.

*Many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus-* The chief priests wanted Lazarus put to death simply because "many of the Jews went away" from the synagogue because of him, and it would have meant the tithes were lost or at least put in jeopardy. And this cannot be ruled out as a major factor why they wanted Jesus out of the way too, and why they persecuted the early church so fiercely, seeing that thousands of tithe-paying members were being turned against them.

*12:12 The next day, a great crowd that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem-* On the triumphal entry, see on Mt. 21:1-8. John's chronology suggests that the triumphal entry took place once there were gathered together a mass of people who were pro-Jesus, because of the witness made by the resurrection of Lazarus. I have repeatedly emphasized that events did not overtake the Lord; He used His own planning and awareness of human psychology, as well as the Father's direct power, to orchestrate things so that He gave His life precisely when and how He did. It was not taken from Him, He laid it down (see on 10:17,18). So it could be that the Lord raised Lazarus, knowing that such a spectacular miracle would provoke support for Him and also the desire to kill Him at all costs. And He orchestrated the triumphal entry in order for it to be a total come down and dashing of Messianic expectation for all who apparently supported Him, so that they would turn against Him and empower the Jews to crucify Him.

*12:13 Took the branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, and cried out: Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!*- It has been so often pointed out that the crowd who welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna!" were the very people who days later were screaming "Crucify him!". It's been suggested that the crowds were comprised of two different groups; those who shouted "Hosanna!" were those who had come up from Galilee, and the Jerusalem crowd shouted "Crucify Him!". But Jn. 12:13 and Jn. 19:14,15 seem to encourage us to make a connection between the two scenes, for "the crowd" *shouts* both times- firstly "Hosanna!", and then "Crucify Him!". Personally I am convinced it was the same basic crowd. They were a classic witness to the fickleness of human loyalty to God's Son. And remember that only a few months after Jerusalem slew Him, the leaders of the Jews feared that "the people" would have stoned them if they acted too roughly with the followers of Jesus (Acts 5:26). Popular opinion had swayed back the other way again. And a while later, it was to sway against the Christians again, when "there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). But this leads to questions, questions which aren't answered by a simple acceptance of humanity's fickleness. Why this *anger* with Jesus, a man who truly went about doing good, caring for little children, impressing others with the

evident congruity between His words and His person? How could it have happened that the anger of His people was so focused against Him, leading them to prefer a murderer as against a Man who clearly came to give life, and that more abundantly...?

*Branches of palm trees-* They welcomed Him into Jerusalem with the waving of palm fronds. These were a symbol of Jewish nationalism- hence the palm appeared on the coins of the Second Revolt (AD 132-135). Back in 164 BC when Judas Maccabeus rededicated the temple altar, palms were brought to the temple (2 Macc. 10:7); and Simon Maccabeus led the Jews back into Jerusalem with palm fronds in 1 Macc. 13:51. The crowd were therefore welcoming Jesus, expecting Him to announce His Messianic Kingdom there and then. The "Hosanna!" of Jn. 12:13 was used in addressing kings in 2 Sam. 14:4; 2 Kings 6:26. It meant literally "Save now!". They wanted a Kingdom there and then. His whole interpretation of the Kingdom, extensively and so patiently delivered for over three years, had simply failed to register with them. It seems that only after the crowd had started doing this, that the Lord consciously dashed their expectations by sitting on a donkey.

12:14 *And Jesus, having found a young donkey, sat upon it- as it is written-* The Lord sat upon the donkey, to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Israel's King would come to them "humble, and riding upon a donkey"- not a warhorse. And, moreover, Zechariah says that He would come commanding peace [and not bloodlust] *to the Gentiles*, with a world-wide dominion from sea to sea, not merely in Palestine. Those who perceived the Lord's allusion to Zechariah 9 would have realized this was what His acted parable was trying to tell them- the Lord Jesus was not out to destroy Rome but to bring peace to them as well as all the Gentile world. A humble, lowly king was a paradox which they could not comprehend. A king, especially the Messianic King of Israel, had to be proud and war-like. The crowd must have been so terribly disappointed. He purposefully abased Himself and sat upon a donkey. This Jesus whom they had liked and loved and hoped in, turned out to totally and fundamentally *not* be the person they thought He was- despite Him so patiently seeking to show them who He really was for so long. He had become an image in their own minds, of their own creation, convenient to their own agendas- and when the truth dawned on them, that He was *not* that person, their anger against Him knew no bounds. The Russian atheist Maxim Gorky commented, in terrible language but with much truth in it, that man has created God in his own image and after his own likeness. And for so many, this is indeed the case. The image of Jesus which the crowds had was only partially based on who He really was. Some things they understood right, but very much they didn't. And they turned away in disgust and anger when they realized how deeply and basically they had misunderstood Him. They angrily commented: "Who is this son of

man?" (Jn. 12:34). In that context, Jesus had not said a word about being "son of man". But they were effectively saying: 'What sort of Messiah / son of man figure is this? We thought you were the son-of-man Messiah, who would deliver us right now. Clearly you're not the type of Messiah / Christ we thought you were'. All this would explain perfectly why the awful torture and mocking of Jesus in His time of dying was based around His claims to be a King. The crown of thorns, the mock-royal robe, the 'sceptre' put in His hand, then taken away and used to beat Him with, the mocking title over His body "This is the King of the Jews", the anger of the Jewish leaders about this even being written as it was, the jeers of the crowd about this "King"- all this reflects the extent of anger there was with the nature of His 'Kingship'. All the parables and teaching about the true nature of His Kingship / Kingdom had been totally ignored. The Lord had told them plainly enough. But it hadn't penetrated at all... The Lord was not only misunderstood by the crowds, but His very being amongst men had provoked in them a crisis of conscience; and their response was to repress that conscience. As many others have done and do to this day, they had shifted their discontent onto an innocent victim, artificially creating a culprit and stirring up hatred against him. Their angry turning against Him was therefore a direct outcome of the way He had touched their consciences. Such tragic misunderstanding of persons occurs all the time, to varying intensities. One frequently finds married couples with such anger against each other that it seems hard for an outsider to appreciate how two such nice people could be so angry with each other. The source of that anger is often traceable to a misunderstanding of each other during courtship. Each party built up an idealized or simply incorrect image of the other; and once they really got to know the other, in the humdrum of daily life, there was a great release of anger- that the spouse was not the person the other partner had imaged. The goodness of who they really goes unperceived and is readily discounted- simply because they don't live up to the mistaken image which the spouse had of them in other areas.

12:15 *Fear not, daughter of Zion! Look, your King comes, sitting on an donkey's colt-* The colt would not have been broken in; it would have careered all over the place in a most unseemly way. It would be like a president elect driving through the streets of his capital city in an old, backfiring two door economy car- rather than a brand new Mercedes. But this humility was the special sign that was to be looked for ["Look...!"]. It was the sign that the faithful remnant ["the daughter of Zion"] would take encouragement from. Those who looked only for immediate Messianic blessing would be bitterly disappointed and let down; but that was the Lord's design.

12:16- see on Jn. 14:29.

*These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified-* This is associated in John with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 7:39). The suggestion is surely that the Holy Spirit enabled them to understand the significance of events during the Lord's ministry. The Comforter was promised to enable them to do this, and in this sense the Comforter brought about the Lord's glorification (Jn. 16:14; Acts 3:13). In a sense, the Lord was glorified in the events of the cross (Jn. 13:31,32 "Now is the Son of Man glorified"). And yet the perception of that glory was only achieved by the disciples some time later.

*Then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him-* The Comforter brought things to their attention and helped them see the significance and meaning in the Lord's words and actions. For it was after all His personal presence in the hearts of the disciples. That same power and gift of the Spirit is for all time, and can have the same effect upon us.

The purpose of prophecy such as Zechariah 9 is that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear, not that we shall be able to predict the future:

- The disciples did not expect the Lord Jesus to enter into Jerusalem "sitting on an ass's colt" in fulfillment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16).

- "I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe" (Jn. 14:29).

- Likewise with prophecies such as "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord's own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, "his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said" (Jn. 2:17-22).

12:17 *The crowd that was with him, when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, made testimony-* As noted on :12, I would say that the Lord psychologically orchestrated the flow of events which would lead to His death. "The crowd" who were the basis of His triumphal entry, who were stirred up in wanting Him to "save now" ["Hosanna!"], were the crowd who had been motivated by their experience of Lazarus' amazing resurrection. It was their manic enthusiasm which led the Jews to panic and seek to murder the Lord at all costs. When their expectations were dashed by the whole style of the triumphal entry, this same crowd then turned violently and disappointedly against the Lord, and this fitted in perfectly with the Jewish plot to kill the Lord without problems from the masses. Yet the whole thing was orchestrated by the Lord- for He gave His life, when and how He wished; it was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:18 *For this cause also the crowd went and met him, for they heard that he had done this miracle-* As noted on :17, John is stressing that the crowd so manic for the Lord to "save now!", who welcomed Him into Jerusalem, was the crowd motivated by the resurrection of Lazarus. This was all planned by the Lord; He was winding them up to a peak of popularist support for Him, and then through the triumphal entry being the very opposite of their hopes, in fact a mocking of traditional Messianic expectation... He was setting them up to then turn against Him. See on :12 and :17.

12:19 *The Pharisees complained to one another: You see that you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him-* As noted on :12 and :17,18, the Lord intended His miracle to have this effect. He intended the Jewish world to momentarily turn after Him whilst their leadership became the more committed to murdering Him at all costs; so that if He then disappointed the masses of the Jewish world, then His demise would be brought about. In all this we see the Lord scheming to give His life for us, because He loved us. It was not taken from Him (see on 10:17,18).

12:20 *Now there were certain Greeks among those that went to worship at the feast-* These were presumably proselytes, like the Ethiopian eunuch, who had travelled to Jerusalem in order to keep Passover as far as they could. Perhaps the Ethiopian eunuch was present at this time amongst them. This would explain why Philip was sent to baptize him, for this group approached Philip at this time (:21).

12:21 *These went to Philip, who was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him: Sir, can we see Jesus?-* The Gentiles perhaps approached Philip because he was known to be from an area which was mocked as being largely Gentile. When men asked "We would see Jesus" (AV), He responded by giving a prophecy of His death (Jn. 12:21)- just as the broken bread *is* Him; His death is the essence of Him. To know Him crucified was and is to know Him. He continues by saying that if a man lost his life for Him, then that man would be with Jesus where He is. Those who want to know where Jesus is, to see Him, have to die His death (Jn. 12:25,26). The fact the disciples did *not* appreciate His death meant, therefore, that they didn't really appreciate *Him*. And they so openly stress this in their Gospels.

12:22 *Philip went and told Andrew, and then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus-* Andrew and Philip occur together in Jn. 1:45; 6:7,8; Mk. 3:18. Such friendship between two of a group of twelve is normal, and is another evidence that the Gospel records are true to reality accounts.

12:23- see on Rev. 7:9.

*Jesus told them: The hour comes that the Son of Man should be glorified-* It can be inferred from :23 that the Lord perceived that His hour had come to lay down His life when He was told that there were Gentiles who wanted to "see" [Johannine language for 'believe'] Him. It was as if this were the cue for Him to voluntarily lay down His life. The conversion of the whole world was a major reason for the Lord's death; and thus there is the inevitable connection between His death, and the need to take the knowledge and power of that death to the whole planet.

Through John's Gospel, the Lord inspired an awareness that the *essence* of His coming, the day of judgment and the future Kingdom was in fact to be realized within Christian experience right now. John's Gospel brings this out clearly. The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion. In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in John becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now. As John Robinson put it, "the Last Assize is being accomplished in every moment of choice and decision... Judgment Day is a dramatized, idealised picture of every day".

The Synoptics record several references to "the day of the Son of Man" as the day of His second coming. But in John, this becomes the time when the Son of Man is glorified- which refers both to His death, and to the subsequent glorification through the giving of the Spirit into the hearts of the believers. For this was the effective 'coming' of the Lord to the believers, as they await His literal return. This is only one of many examples of where the language and events of Matthew, Mark and Luke are alluded to and expressed by John in more spiritual and abstract terms. Here are some examples:

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The Synoptic Gospels	John's Gospel
Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom	Jn. 20:21,23
the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus	Jn. 1: 1-14
The great preaching commission	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV

Lk. 16:31	"If you believe not (Moses') writings, how shall you believe my words?" (Jn. 5:47). This is John's equivalent of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which concluded with the same basic point (Lk. 16:31).
The transfiguration	Whilst there is no account of the transfiguration in John, he repeatedly stresses how the Lord manifested forth His glory and was glorified. For John, the Lord's whole life was in a spiritual sense a form of the transfiguration experience which the synoptics described.
The Synoptics all include the Lord's Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead-in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord's discourse in the upper room. "The day of the son of man" in the synoptics becomes "the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified" (Jn. 12:23). "Coming", "that day", "convict / judge the world" are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter's 'confession', shortly before Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain.	In John's gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas' confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?
The need for water baptism The account of the breaking of bread	Jn. 3:3-5 John's version is in John 6:48-58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and blood symbolize. It

<p>The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.</p> <p>The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.</p>	<p>seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.</p> <p>John expresses this in more abstract language: "The word was made flesh" (Jn. 1:14).</p> <p>John's Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but "became flesh" when He was born of Mary.</p>
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The transfiguration is recorded in the synoptics, and their records include the idea that it happened "after six days" (Mk. 9:2). John speaks of the same theme of Christ manifesting God's glory, but he sees it as happening not just once at the transfiguration, but throughout the Lord's ministry and above all in His death. Interestingly, John's record also has the idea of the Lord manifesting the Father's glory after six days. The Gospel opens by describing events on four successive days (Jn. 1:19,29,35,43), and then we read that "the third day" [i.e. six or seven days after the story has begun], Jesus "manifested his glory" (Jn. 2:1,11). Again in Jn. 7:37, it was on the last great day of the feast of Tabernacles, i.e. on the 7th day, that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself. Perhaps too we are to pay attention to the six days mentioned in Jn. 12:1, after which the Lord was crucified and manifested the Father's glory.

12:24- see on Mk. 14:35.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: Except a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* - Gk. 'The grain'. Vine observes that this was spoken to some Greeks (:20); it was "addressed to Greeks, familiar with the Eleusinian mysteries... the risen Dionysus in the freshness of his second life was conducted from Athens to Eleusis in joyful procession. An ear of corn, plucked in solemn silence, was exhibited to the initiated as the object of mystical contemplation, as the symbol of the god, prematurely killed, but, like the ear enclosing the seed-corn, bearing within himself the germ of a second life". Here we have an example of the Lord speaking to people in terms which they could relate to. He of course didn't believe the Eleusinian mysteries were true, just as He didn't believe in demons, but He alludes to their incorrect



ideas in order to realign their thinking towards God's power in Himself. We likewise are to engage with this world in their own terms and language, in order to lead them to the better way.

In the parable of the sower, the Lord likened the preaching of the Gospel to a seed falling onto various types of ground, good, stony, etc. In all the synoptics, the account of the sower parable is recorded at length; and within that parable, the Lord emphasizes this falling of the seed onto the ground. Likewise He likens response to the Gospel message to "a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth... but when it is sown..." (Mk. 4:31,32). But the Lord clearly understood the image of a seed falling into the ground as prophetic of His forthcoming crucifixion (Jn. 12:23-25). The connection in His mind is surely clear- the preaching of the Gospel is a form of death and crucifixion, in order to bring forth a harvest in others. Through preaching, we live out the Lord's death for others in practice, we placard Him crucified before the world's eyes. We are not simply "Him" to them; we are Him crucified to them. The honour of this is surpassing.

*It abides alone-* The Lord Jesus died a lonely death. Loneliness is a part of sharing in the crucifixion life. The Lord hinted at the loneliness of the cross in saying that the seed falls into the ground and 'dies' "alone"- but then brings forth much fruit as a result of that alone-ness (Jn. 12:24). The High Priest entered alone into the Most Holy place with the blood of atonement (Heb. 9:7). Any stepping out of the comfort zone is an inevitably lonely experience, just as the crucifixion life of Jesus was the ultimately lonely experience. For nobody else knows exactly how you feel in e.g. turning down that job, giving away those savings, quitting that worldly friendship, quietly selling something...

*It bears much fruit-* He mused that if He didn't allow Himself to fall to the ground and die, no fruit could be brought forth (Jn. 12:24). The fact He did means that we will bring forth fruit. It could be that the reference in Jn. 7:39 to the Holy Spirit being given through the Lord's death (His 'glory'), as symbolized by the water flowing from His side, means that due to the cross we have the inspiration to a holy, spiritual way of life. It is not so that His death released some mystical influence which would change men and women whether or not they will it; rather is it that His example there inspires those who are open to it. We have been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus, and yet therefore we must be reconciled to God, and take the message of reconciliation to others. What has been achieved there in prospect we have to make real for us, by appropriating it to ourselves in repentance, baptism and a life of ongoing repentance (2 Cor. 5:18-20 cp. Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).

The fruit brought forth depends upon our freewill bringing forth of that fruit: "I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit [s.w. 12:24], and that your fruit should remain" (Jn. 15:16, as in the parable of the

sower, Mk. 4:8). The more fruit we bring forth, the more His work and death is glorified. And the language in 15:16 of *going* and bearing fruit is surely John's version of the great preaching commission recorded in the Synoptics.

Here the Lord assumes that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should *go* [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross, as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit. Likewise the Lord had earlier linked the life of cross carrying with bearing witness to the world around us (Lk. 9:23,26). As His witnesses we bare His cross as well as share His glory. See on Jn. 17:20.

12:25 *He that loves his life*- "Life" translates *psuche*, "soul". This is surely the Gospel of John's equivalent of the parable of the rich fool, who so loved his own soul but lost it: "I will say to my soul: Soul, you have many goods..." (Lk. 12:19). But here in John we see that the Lord half spoke that parable to Himself; if He refused the cross, He would be loving His own soul, trying to be briefly rich for himself in this world.

*Loses it*- As so often, the Lord was clearly half talking to Himself here. For in the immediate context, it was His life which was to be lost, or could be temporarily kept if He were to refuse the cross. We are right now losing our lives if we love ourselves. The final judgment is likened to a winnowing process. But right now, according to Ps. 139:3 RVmg., God winnows our path [our daily living], all day ("my path") and every evening (at my "lying down"). "The Lord sat as king [in judgment] at the Flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever" (Ps. 29:10 RV); He is just as much sitting in judgment now as He was at the flood, which is a well-known type of the judgment to come. He speaks of our death in the context of His death. Baptism is a statement that we are prepared to identify with His death as the guiding principle for the rest of our eternal existence.

*He that hates his life in this world, shall keep it to everlasting life*- The Lord carefully doesn't speak of 'losing' life and then receiving it. Instead, He speaks of keeping life and that life becoming everlasting. As He made clear in the events and teaching of the resurrection of Lazarus in Jn. 11,

death for Him was not death. The important thing was the kind of life we now live; for He is often recorded by John as teaching that we can live the eternal life right now. We can live the kind of life we shall eternally live. Note that we 'keep' our current spiritual life eternally; we will eternally be who we are spiritually today. In this lies the paramount and eternal importance of spiritual mindedness and character development.

12:26- see on Lk. 9:54,55.

*If anyone desires to serve me, he must follow me-* Whoever serves [Gk. 'is a deacon of'] the Lord Jesus must follow Him, and the idea of following Him is usually connected with His walk to death on the cross (Jn. 12:26). We are all asked to follow Him, it is all part of being His disciples, and so we are all asked to be 'deacons' in this sense. Our service is of *each other*; to walk away from active involvement because of personality clashes etc. is to walk away from true, cross-carrying Christianity. In unfeigned humility, let us by love serve one another, and in so doing know the spirit of the Lord who served, and thereby share together His exaltation.

I have suggested that John's Gospel record had a missionary intention and background. It was the transcript of how John preached the Gospel to a particular Jewish interest group, and he backed it up by his three letters which are full of allusion to the Gospel. The Greek for "serve" here is elsewhere translated "use the office of a deacon". There could well be a specific localized point being made to the Johannine community of converts- any desiring to be a deacon in the church community must be aware that such service is all about sharing in the spirit of the Lord's cross. Truly, "If anyone serves me [as a deacon, in this initial context], the Father will honour him". Honour is what church servants receive (1 Tim. 5:17)

*He must follow me-* "Follow me" is usually used by the Lord in the context of taking up the cross and following Him. True service is cross-carrying. It cannot be that we serve, truly serve, in order to advance our own egos. It is all too easy to "serve" especially in an ecclesial context without truly carrying the Lord's cross.

*And where I am, there shall also my servant be-* Where He was right then was at a place where He saw so clearly the cross beckoning, and desperately wished there might be another way. When there was not. We can know something of the spirit of His cross. We can be where He was and where He is, in spirit. The life of cross carrying, devotion to the principles of the cross, will lead us to be with Him always wherever He leads us. In John 12:24-26 losing life as the Lord lost His, serving Him, following Him, being "where I am" are all parallel. "I am" can legitimately be read as an allusion to the Yahweh Name, and this was manifested supremely in the Lord's death. The sense is therefore that where "I am"

would be, i.e. on the cross, to there those who follow the Lord will also come.

*If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him-* It makes an interesting exercise to compare all the Lord's references to "My Father" and to "The Father". So much of what He says about His relationship with "My Father" He says about our relationship to "The Father". He was seeking to inculcate an awareness of what He finally states in so many words in Jn. 20:17- that His Father is our Father. His relationship with the Father can be replicated in ours with the same Father, through the spirit of adoption which makes us His dear sons too.

12:27 *Now is my soul disturbed-* The same word used about the Lord's disturbed soul at the death and resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11:33). He saw in the death and resurrection of Lazarus a foretaste of His own, hence His groaning in spirit.

*What shall I say?-* This is often read as the Lord meaning: 'Shall I say 'Save Me from this hour?', as if He is going through various options of possible prayer. But He does indeed ask to be saved from the hour. Therefore I see this as Him wondering how to find the right words with which to verbalize His emotions. The language of the Lord's intercession with groanings which cannot be spoken (Rom. 8:26,27) clearly alludes to His groanings at the resurrection of Lazarus and now as He faces His own death. In that very context, Paul says that we [too] know not how to pray as we should (Rom. 8:26). The Lord also was at that place.

*Father, save me from this hour?-* Jesus seems to have prepared His words before praying them. But it appears He decided against praying that. The question mark isn't required by the Greek. The sense is 'save me *out of* this hour', and we read in Heb. 5:7 that the Lord prayed this and was heard because of His groanings in prayer. So this was not just a prayer He contemplated praying. He prayed it, and it was answered in His resurrection.

12:28 *Father, glorify your name-* The Lord Jesus struggled in Gethsemane between "save me..." and "Father, glorify Your name". The glorifying of the Father's Name meant more to him than his personal salvation. Likewise Moses and Paul [in spirit] were prepared to sacrifice their personal salvation for the sake of Yahweh's Name being glorified in the saving of His people (Ex. 32:30-34 cp. Rom. 9:1-3).

When He addressed God as *abba*, 'dad', the Jews would have been scandalized. But this was the experience He had of God as a near at hand, compassionate Father. He purposefully juxtaposed *abba* with the Divine Name which Jews were so paranoid about pronouncing: "Abba, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28). This was nothing short of scandal to

Jewish ears. And we are to pray as the Lord prayed, also using "Abba, father" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Seeing it was unheard of at the time for Jews to pray to God using 'Abba', Paul is clearly encouraging us to relate to God and pray to Him as Jesus did (cp. Jn. 20:17). The Lord made a big deal of calling God 'Abba', even forbidding His Jewish followers to use the term about anyone else (Mt. 23:9).

The Lord Jesus prayed out loud: "Father, glorify Your name". A voice came from Heaven saying that God had already done this and would do it again. And the Lord told the listeners that this response came not for His sake, not really as an answer to His prayer, but for their sakes, that in the apparent 'answer' to His words, they might see the power of prayer and the extent of the Father's relationship with the Son (Jn. 12:28-30). But He knew that the prayer had already been answered before it was prayed. And even with us, answers can come not necessarily for the sake of the answer, but to demonstrate other principles. Likewise the Lord asks us to pray for the Kingdom to come, not because this means that a certain number of prayers will change the date, but surely because the process of petition for the Kingdom is for our benefit.

"Father, glorify your name" could have been a request for the whole crucifixion and resurrection event to start there and then. It would only be natural for any genuine human to wish for it to start and be done with. There is good reason to understand that in those wretched hours of crucifixion, God was especially manifested to the world. There was a matchless, never to be surpassed partnership between Father and Son on the cross. God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). There the Lord Jesus manifested and declared the Father's Name, His essential character, to the full (Jn. 12:28; 13:31,32; 17:5,6,26). The Lord's references to 'going to the Father' referred to His coming crucifixion. That was where the Father was, on the cross. In the very moment of His death the observing Centurion gasped, twice: "*Truly* this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46). There was something so evidently Godly in that death. God was so near.

"Hallowed be your name" isn't merely an ascription of praise- it's actually a request for God to carry out all the implications of His Name in practice. When we sing praise to God's Name, we ask for it to be glorified- and here is where praise isn't mere painless performance of music. Once we bring the Name of God into it, we're actually asking for action in our lives. Jesus Himself prayed that part of His model prayer- "Father, glorify your name" (Jn. 12:28)- and soon afterwards He could comment that in His death, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified" (Jn. 13:31). Thus in the Lord's case, a request to glorify God's Name lead Him ultimately to the cross.

The continuity of personality between the human Jesus and the now-exalted Jesus is brought out by meditation upon His "glory". The glory of God refers to His essential personality and characteristics. When He 'glorifies Himself', He articulates that personality- e.g. in the condemnation of the wicked or the salvation of His people. Thus God was "glorified" in the judgment of the disobedient (Ez. 28:22; 39:13), just as much as He is "glorified" in the salvation of His obedient people. God glorified Himself in redeeming Israel, both in saving them out of Babylon, and ultimately in the future. Thus He was glorified in His servant Israel (Is. 44:23; 49:3). There are therefore both times and issues over which the Father is glorified. He was above all glorified in the resurrection of His Son. Each of these 'glorifications' meant that the essential Name / personality of the Father was being manifested and justified. The glory of the Lord Jesus was that of the Father. He was glorified in various ways and at different times within His ministry (e.g. Jn. 11:4); but He was also glorified in His resurrection and exaltation (Jn. 7:39). As the Lord approached the cross, He asked that the Father's Name be glorified. The response from Heaven was that God had already glorified it in Christ, and would do so again (Jn. 12:28). At the last Supper, the Lord could say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (Jn. 13:31). And yet various Scriptures teach that the Son of man was to be glorified in His death, in His resurrection (Acts 3:13), at His ascension, in His priestly mediation for us now (Heb. 5:5), in the praise His body on earth would give Him, in their every victory over sin, in every convert made (Acts 13:48; 2 Thess. 3:1), in every answered prayer (Jn. 14:13), and especially at His return (2 Thess. 1:10)... So the glorification of the Lord Jesus wasn't solely associated with His resurrection, and therefore it wasn't solely associated with His nature being changed or His receiving a new body. In each of these events, and at each of these times, the Name / glory / personality of the Father is being manifested, justified and articulated.

*I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again-* The Name was glorified in the Lord's perfect life, and would be supremely in His death. There, in the nakedness, blood and spittle of the cross, the Name of God was declared. And yet the Name is glorified in that the characteristics of God are declared in the willing response of people ("Who shall not fear You and glorify Your Name?", Rev. 15:4 s.w.). But here, God speaks of how He will glorify His Name; the revealing of His characteristics in people is not only over to them to achieve; God through the Spirit will do His part in bringing this about.

12:29 *The crowd that stood by and heard it-* They heard the "voice" from Heaven (:28). Significantly, Jn. 3:29 has spoken of John the Baptist as 'standing and hearing' [same Greek words] the Lord's voice. The voice came for their sakes (:30), so we are led to imagine this crowd as containing believers, perhaps prepared by John the Baptist's preaching.

"The crowd" had heard God's voice; to turn away from His Son was to totally deny His personal appeal to them. And yet this "crowd" were the very group who soon were to turn against the Lord and cry for His crucifixion, because their expectations of Messiah had been dashed.

*Said that it had thundered. Others said an angel had spoken to him-* This is all the language of Old Testament theophany, especially to Moses. The Lord is clearly being established as greater than Moses, and they are being called to be a new Israel obedient to a new covenant.

12:30 *Jesus responded: This voice has not come for my sake, but for your sakes-* To hear the actual voice of His Father might seem the ultimate encouragement to the Lord. After all the years of abstraction, of praying to the Father and reading His voice in His written word... to finally hear His actual voice would seem to be a case of faith gloriously and triumphantly turned to sight. But the Lord emphasizes that hearing the Father's actual voice was not for His sake. It did not as it were encourage Him. We are reminded of Elisha being so sure there were Angels surrounding him that he asked for only the eyes of his servant to be opened to behold them (2 Kings 6:17). And so we are set up for the momentous teaching about the Comforter which is to come in chapters 14-16. Physicalities like seeing or hearing a person are on a very low level. The presence of the Comforter in our hearts will actually be more significant than having the Lord's literal presence. And likewise, the manifestation of the Father in the Son is far more than hearing His literal, physical voice. This is a huge challenge to us. To read the Bible and have the Spirit operative in our hearts, and the Lord's presence there, as of the word made flesh, is *more than* actually hearing the voice of God almighty.

12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world-* The coming of the voice was to encourage that crowd that the Lord was indeed of God, and that the Jewish world which had such a pull on them [against Him] was actually under judgment, just as He had proclaimed. The Lord plainly described His death as "the judgment of this world". Because there was "no judgment" in the ultimate sense as there was no justice, therefore the Lord Jesus died on the cross (Is. 59:15,16). This was the ultimate judgment of this world. There the Lord God, through His Son, acted as judge in condemning sin (Rom. 8:3).

*Now shall the prince of this world be cast out-*

The "prince of this world" is described as being "cast out", coming to the Lord Jesus, having no part in Him and being "judged", all during the last few hours before Christ's death (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11). All these descriptions seem to fit the Jewish system as represented by the Law, Moses, Caiaphas the High Priest, Judas and the Jews wanting to kill Jesus, and Judas. Note that "the prince of this world" refers to Roman and

Jewish governors in 1 Cor. 2:6,8. At the Lord's death the Mosaic system was done away with (Col. 2:14–17); the "bondwoman", representing the Law in the allegory, was "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). "The prince of this world" is described, in the very same words, as being "cast out" (Jn. 12:31).

## **Caiaphas?**

Wycliffe in archaic English renders Mt. 26:3: "Then the princes of priests and the elder men of the people were gathered into the hall of the prince of priests, that was said Caiaphas". The "world" in John's Gospel refers primarily to the Jewish world; its "prince" can either be a personification of it, or a reference to Caiaphas the High Priest. Caiaphas' equivalent name in Hebrew could suggest 'cast out'; his rending of his priestly clothes at Christ's trial declared him "cast out" of the priesthood (see Lev. 10:6; 21:10). "This world" and its "prince" are treated in parallel by John (12:31 cp. 16:11) – just as Jesus, the prince of the Kingdom, can be called therefore "the Kingdom" (Lk. 17:21). Colossians 2:15 describes Christ's ending of the Law on the cross as "spoiling principalities and powers" – the "prince" of the Jewish world being "cast out" (a similar idea in Greek to "spoiling") would then parallel this. The Jews "caught" Jesus and cast Him out of the vineyard (Mt. 21:39) – but in doing so, they themselves were cast out of the vineyard and "spoiled" by Jesus (Col. 2:15).

If indeed "the prince of this world" is a reference to Caiaphas, then we have to face the fact that this individual is being singled out by the Lord for very special condemnation, as the very embodiment of 'Satan', sin and its desires, all that was then in opposition to God. This is confirmed by the Lord's comment to Pilate that "he that delivered me unto you has the greatest sin" (Jn. 19:11 Gk. – "greater" in the AV is translated "greatest" in 1 Cor. 13:13; Mk. 9:34; Mt. 13:32; 18:1,4; 23:11; Lk. 9:46; Lk. 22:24; Lk. 22:26). It was Caiaphas and the Jews who "delivered" Jesus to Pilate to execute (Mt. 27:2,18; Jn. 18:30,35 s.w.). But the Lord speaks as if one person amongst them in particular had delivered Him to Pilate – and that specific individual was Caiaphas. If Caiaphas had the "greatest sin" in the crucifixion of God's son, we can understand how he is singled out by the Lord Jesus for such description as the "prince of this world". A number of expositors have interpreted "the Devil... that had the power of death" in Heb. 2:14–17 as an allusion to Caiaphas.

## **Judas and "The prince of this world"**

There are points of association between "the prince of this world" and Judas; I suggest, because Judas was the agent of Caiaphas and the Jewish world. After Judas left the upper room we get the impression that Jesus started to talk more earnestly and intensely. Immediately after Judas went out Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified... Little



children, yet a little while I am with you... Hereafter I will not talk much (longer) with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (Jn. 13:31,33; 14:30). Because He knew Judas would soon return with his men, Christ wanted to give the disciples as much instruction as possible in the time that remained. This would explain the extraordinary intensity of meaning behind the language used in John 14–17. After He finished, "Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, *cometh*..." (Jn. 18:3); "The prince of this world *cometh*", Jesus had prophesied, epitomized in the person and attitude of Judas. Christ had told the disciples that "the prince" "hath nothing (cp. no part) in Me" (Jn. 14:30). Not until Judas appeared with the men would the disciples have realized that he was the betrayer (see Jn.18:3–5). Jesus knew this would come as a shock to them, and would lead them to question whether they themselves were in Christ; therefore He warned them that Judas, as a manifestation of "the prince of this world", had no part in Him any longer. For "the Devil" of the Jewish authorities and system, perhaps Caiaphas personally, had put into the heart of Judas to betray the Lord (Jn. 13:2). The whole Jewish leadership were the "betrayers" of Jesus (Acts 7:52) in that Judas, the one singular betrayer, was the epitome of the Jewish system and the agent of Caiaphas. The prince having nothing in Christ suggests a reference to Daniel 9:26: "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, and shall have nothing (A.V. margin – i.e. have no part): and the people of the prince that shall come (the Romans) shall destroy the city and the sanctuary". Thus it was the Jewish world as well as Judas which had nothing in Messiah, and the system they represented was to be destroyed by another (Roman) "prince that shall come" to replace the (Jewish) "prince of this world". The occurrence of the phrase "prince" and the idea of having nothing in Messiah in both Daniel 9:26 and John 14:30 suggest there must be a connection of this nature.

Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus because he was bought out and thus controlled by the Jewish 'Satan'. The fact that Judas was "one of the twelve" as he sat at the last supper is emphasized by all the Gospel writers – the phrase occurs in Matthew 26:14; Mark 14:20; Luke 22:47 and John 13:21. Thus later Peter reflected: "he was numbered with us (cp. "one of the twelve"), and had (once) obtained *part* of this ministry" (Acts 1:17), alluding back to Christ's statement that "the prince of this world" ultimately had *no* part in Him. Similarly 1 John 2:19 probably alludes to Judas as a type of all who return to the world: "They went out from us, but they were not of us" (cp. "Judas, one of the twelve"). Judas is described as a Devil (Jn. 6:70), and his leaving the room may have connected in the Lord's mind with "the prince of this world" being cast out. Those who "went out from us" in 1 John 2:19 were primarily those who left the Jewish ecclesias (to whom John was largely writing) to return to Judaism, and they who left were epitomized by Judas. 2 Peter 2:13,15 equates the Judaizers within the ecclesias with Balaam "who loved the

wages of unrighteousness". The only other time this latter phrase occurs is in Acts 1:18 concerning Judas.

### **"Cast out"**

Apostate Israel are described in the very language of the adversaries / Satans of God's people. Because they acted like the world around them, from which they had been called out, they were ultimately judged by God as part of that world. Consider all the times when God's apostate people are recorded as acting in terms of their Arab cousins; thus apostate Israel and the Jewish system were to be "cast out" (Jn. 12:31) just as Ishmael had been (Gen. 21:10).

"Cast out" in the Old Testament at times refers to Israel being cast out of the land for their disobedience (cp. Lk. 19:45). This was what was to happen to the first century Jews. The Law itself was to be "cast out" (Gal. 4:30). The idea of being cast out recalls the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. The Lord commented concerning the end of the Mosaic system: "The servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever" (Jn. 8:35). The description of apostate Israel as being "cast out in the open field" with none to pity them except God must have some reference to Ishmael (Ez. 16:5). Galatians 4:29-30 specifically connects the Law with Hagar, and the source of this passage in Isaiah 54:1-7 concerning the calling again of a forsaken young wife who had more children than the married wife has similarities with Hagar's return to Abraham in Genesis 16. After Hagar's final rejection in Genesis 21, she wandered through the Paran wilderness carrying Ishmael - as Israel was carried by God through the same wilderness. The miraculous provision of water for Israel in this place is a further similarity, as is Ishmael's name, which means 'God heard the cry' - as He did of His people in Egypt. Thus Hagar and Ishmael represent apostate Israel, and both of them were "cast out". Romans 9:6-8 provides more confirmation: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel... but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God". Paul's reminder that the seed was to be traced through Isaac, and that the apostate Israel of the first century were not the true Israel of God but the children of the flesh, leads us to identify them with Ishmael, the prototype child of the flesh. In the same way, Jeremiah describes wayward Israel as a wild ass (Jer. 2:24), perhaps inviting comparison with Ishmael, the wild ass man (Gen. 16:12).

12:32- see on Jn. 3:14-21; 19:13.

*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself-* The Lord's lifting up on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah's prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection

between the Lord's lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment. See on Jn. 19:37.

The Lord foresaw that if He were lifted up, He would *thereby* draw all men [men of all types, of all nations and languages] unto Him in truth (Jn. 12:32). And a brief reflection upon the effect of the cross in human lives will reveal that this has indeed been the case. The cross was an instrument of torture; yet it inspires men to write hymns of praise about it [e.g. "When I survey the wondrous cross..."]. Men have never written hymns of praise to the guillotine or hangman's rope. Nor have men made small relics of an electric chair and glanced towards them for inspiration at hard times.

*From the earth-* Gk. *out of* the earth. The reference is not only to the lifting up in crucifixion, but to the lifting up in resurrection and then ascension glory.

*All men-* "All men" would be drawn together unto the crucified Christ (Jn. 12:32). There is a theme in John's Gospel, that there was disunity amongst the Jews whenever they rejected the message of Christ crucified (7:43; 9:16; 10:19- which implies this was often the case). Conversely, acceptance of His atonement leads to unity. The crucified Son of Man must be lifted up by our preaching before the eyes of all, so that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (Jn. 3:14,15). "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32)- but we draw men by our spreading of the Gospel net, preaching to "all men". Thus the extent of the Lord's achievement on the cross depends upon our preaching of it.

*Whenever* we come into contact with Him, or reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment. Indeed, *any* meeting of God with man, or His Son with men, is effectively some kind of judgment process. The brightness of their light inevitably, by its very nature, shows up the dark shadows of our lives. In the cross we see the glory of the Lord Jesus epitomised and presented in its most concentrated form. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, He Himself foretold that His death would be "the judgment of this world". And He explained in the next breath that His being 'lifted up from the earth' (an Isaiah 6 allusion) would gather all men unto Him (cp. "all men" being gathered to the last judgment, Is. 49:22; 62:10; Mt. 25:32). When He was lifted up, then the Jews would know their judgments (Jn. 8:26-28).

The whole congregation (LXX *ekklesia*) of Israel were "gathered together" before the smitten rock, which "was Christ" crucified (Num. 20:8 cp. 21:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). The "ensign", the pole on which the brazen serpent was lifted up, would draw together the scattered individuals of God's people (Is. 11:2); and as stricken Israel were gathered around that pole, so the lifting up of the crucified Christ brings together all His people (Jn. 12:32 cp. 3:14). See on Jn. 17:21.

12:33 *But this he said to signify by what manner of death he should die-* The Lord intended to die by crucifixion. "Should", *mello*, has a strong flavour of intention and self-purpose. This was the manner of death He chose. He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross; and yet that death was also of His own device. This gives even more significance to "the cross"; for it was His own intention to die that way. He could have legitimately sacrificed Himself in many ways; for He gave His life totally of Himself and it was not taken from Him. But He chose this cruellest and most public form because He so wanted to appeal to men and women to repent. May we respond to it and not shrug and walk on by.

12:34- see on Jn. 12:13.

*The crowd asked him: We have heard out of the law that the Christ abides forever; and how do you say: The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?-* This same "crowd" had been enthused by the resurrection of Lazarus and were welcoming the Lord as Messiah on the basis that He would establish an eternal Messianic Kingdom there and then. As explained on :12 and elsewhere, the Lord purposefully deflated their expectations. They were in love with an image of Him and not He Himself; and when He brought that to their attention, saying that He had come to die and not start a political Kingdom; it had the desired effect. They turned against Him. "Who is this Son of Man?" can imply 'We don't need a Son of Man Messiah of *this* kind'. A crucified Messiah was anathema to them, so much so that they actually went and got Him crucified.

12:35 *Jesus replied to them: Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while you have the light, so that darkness does not overtake you. He that walks in the darkness does not know where he goes-* He had earlier spoken of Himself as the light of the world, meaning a torch lifted up, just as the snake was lifted up on a standard pole. And He had spoken this in evident anticipation of the manner of His death. Yet He speaks as if He was in His life the light of the world, by which men must walk; the prologue introduces this theme. His life exhibited the spirit of His final death. And this is the light, lifted up, by which we must live. There can be no sense of direction to life unless it is guided by the principles of the cross- we will know not whither we go. For those whose lives seems a long tunnel, through reason of their jobs or family burdens, let His cross enlighten our darkness. The light of His example was literally

only to be with them a few more days before He would die. The darkness which could overtake them was that of Judaism, according to the prologue; and John's letters define that darkness as hating our brother. For those Jews to not accept the Lord as their Messiah and to crucify Him, and then persecute His followers, is all not living in love towards our brother. This is to live in darkness.

*12:36 Believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light-* Our belief in any statement of faith should be just that- a statement of our living faith, rather than a mere statement of our intellectual, academic, theoretical opinion. Our lives and personalities above all are our individual statement of faith. The doctrine of the cross, of the Gospel, of the man and Lord Christ Jesus, is to be the centre of not merely our mind and reason, but at the core of our actual life and conscience. For we become like what we believe in- if we believe in the light, we become children of light (Jn. 12:36). The Lord had stated that "you are the light of the world", just as He was "the light of the world". If we walk by His light, we shall in turn become light in the darkness- which in John's first context referred to the darkness of the Jewish world.

*12:36 While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become sons of light-* This is an intensely urgent appeal to the crowd who had apparently believed in Him. The Lord had set them up to turn against Him (see on :12) but all the same, He begs for them to not do the psychologically inevitable- and to believe in Him.

John's later interpretation of this is in 1 Jn. 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin". The light is ultimately God, but we see His light reflected in the face of the Lord Jesus. Walking in the light refers to the Lord's desire that they make the most of every minute of His mortal company. Soon the light would be taken from them, in that He would die. He urges His followers the same way in Jn. 11 . By walking with Him in the light, believing in Him, walking as He walked, they would become sons of light, true believers. But 1 Jn. 1:7 is saying that we who never met the Lord Jesus can walk in the light as much as those who walked with Him in Palestine two millennia ago. And that is indeed the promise of the Comforter- that although He was to be taken from the disciples in death, the ministry of the Spirit would mean that He was as real to believers as He had been to the disciples who literally touched and watched Him. This is quite the challenge to us all. That man is not alone; God with us, in Christ, walks that close, as if literally with us.

*Jesus spoke these things, then he departed and hid himself from them-* He had just spoken of Himself as the light of the world, which must be viewed and walked in, but having said that, He hides Himself. The idea is

that He is the light to those who seek Him, who find where He is 'hidden'; the metaphor of light doesn't mean that He is shining like the sun, obvious to all. He is- but in the spiritual world and heart of the believer.

*12:37 But though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him-* This was the identical experience of Moses, described in just the same language (Num. 14:11). And this was despite His desperate appeal to the crowd to truly believe in Him (see on :36).

*12:38 So that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, when he spoke: Lord, who has believed our report?-* The prophecies of Isaiah 53 had fulfilment in the Lord's life as well as in His death. His crucifixion in that sense was the essence of His life. His whole life was a being acquainted with grief (Is. 53:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. "Who has believed our report?" (Is. 53:1) was fulfilled by the Jewish rejection of Him in His life, as well as in His death (Jn. 12:38). "He bore the sin of many" (Is. 53:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, the Lord Jesus bore the sin of the world. He was glorified in His death (although the world didn't see it that way), as well as in His life (Jn. 12:23,29). The Jews refused to believe in Jesus whilst He was still alive- and yet by doing so, John says, they fulfilled Is. 53:1: "Who hath believed our report". But the "report" there was clearly the message of the cross. It's as if John applies a clear prophecy about the cross to people's response to Jesus during His lifetime.

Jn. 12:38 parallels our preaching or "report" of the Gospel with the Lord Jesus, the "arm of the Lord", being 'revealed' through us. The body of Christ thus witnesses to itself by simply *being* Christ to this world. This is the essence of our calling and of our lives- to manifest / reveal the Christ.

*And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?-* "The arm of the Lord" is the Father's operation in human individuals and society. Only those who accept the crucified Messiah will perceive that. For it is through the crucified Saviour that God works in hearts and minds and whole groups of people. But that is only revealed to believers in the cross. Those who 'believe the report' about the crucified Lord Jesus see the arm of the Lord revealed.

*12:39 Because of this they could not believe, because Isaiah also said-* In Jn. 12:39-42 we find John quoting the words of Isaiah about how Israel would not believe the message of Jesus: "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again, He hath blinded their eyes... *nevertheless* even of the rulers many believed on him" (RV). "Nevertheless" shows the wonder of it all; despite clear prophecy that they would not believe, some of them did. The Lord's hopefulness paid off. And so can ours. It is not that God doesn't want people to believe;

but those who refuse His voice, who will not see with their eyes, are blinded so that they will not see. They are confirmed in their attitudes.

Here the Lord combines quotations from Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6, applying them to His cross. There He was lifted up in glory, with the power to both convict Isaiah of his sinfulness and also inspire his service of the Gospel. Yet Is. 53:1 also applies to Israel's refusal to hear the "report" of the Lord's miracles. The Lord saw His death as summing up the message of all the "works" of miracles which He had done, at least those recorded by John. This opens up a fruitful line of investigation of the miracles; they all show something of the spirit of the cross, and find their final fulfilment in the cross. In 4:34 [see notes there] He had spoken of His death as the final, crowning "work" of His ministry. If men understand the cross, then they see with their eyes, understand with their heart, and are converted.

*12:40 He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts, and turn, so that I should heal them-* As noted on :39, this blinding of Israel is not because God wanted to. It was because He was confirming them in attitudes they had themselves adopted. Seeing / understanding is paralleled with believing; the understanding in view is simple belief in the Lord Jesus. This would then lead to the Lord's healing- which speaks in the context of a healing of hearts, the kind of thing spoken of in the beatitudes. So belief / understanding / seeing leads to the Lord's action on the heart, in the healing of human hearts or minds. This speaks of the work of the Spirit in the hearts and psychology of the believer. "Turn" is 'be converted / turned'. The work of turning a heart around is a matter of the spirit, and happens when one believes. We see here a difference between initial belief, and the process of conversion / turning and healing of the heart which is done by the Lord in response to belief. Note that these words of Isaiah are quoted five times in the New Testament (Mt. 13:13; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; Acts 28:26). This is a major teaching which we need to give due weight to.

*12:41 These things said Isaiah, because he foresaw his glory, and he spoke about him-* The hour of glory was the hour of crucifixion. The son of God, naked, covered in blood and spittle... was the Son of man glorified. And likewise when we are fools for Christ's sake, then we know His glory. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord's crucifixion. So it is established that Is. 6 is a vision of the crucified Lord Jesus, high and lifted up in glory in God's sight, whilst covered in blood and spittle, with no beauty that man should desire Him. The point is, when Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness: "Woe is me, for I am undone...". And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to

Israel of God's grace. Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord "high and lifted up", with the temple veil torn (Is. 6:4 cp. Mt. 27:51), and was moved to realize his sinfulness, and vow to spread the appeal for repentance (Is. 6:1,5). The high, lifted up Lord whom he saw was He of Is. 52:13- the crucified Lord. And yet He saw Him enthroned in God's glory, as it were on the cross. John links the visions of Is. 6 and 52/53 as both concerning the crucifixion (Jn. 12:37-41); there the glory and essence of God was revealed supremely. Jn. 12:38-41 draws a parallel between being converted, and understanding the prophecies of the glory of the crucified Christ. To know Him in His time of dying, to see the arm of Yahweh revealed in Him there, is to be converted.

Isaiah's vision of "the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1) connects with the description of the crucified Lord high and lifted up (Is. 52:13). This vision, John tells us, was of Christ in His glory. And John combines his citation of this passage with that of Is. 53 concerning the cross (Jn. 12:41,42). The Lord, high and lifted up in glory, was the crucified Lord. There He was enthroned, in God's eyes, in His throne of glory. When He comes again and sits in the throne of His glory, He will be repeating in principle the glorification of the cross. The very vision of the lifted up Lord convicted Isaiah of his sinfulness, and steeled his faith in forgiveness (Is. 6:5-8). See on Jn. 19:37.

12:42- see on Rom. 10:9.

*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue-* Why then did they turn so quickly against Him? The answer, I suggest, lies in the way that they misunderstood Him. They liked Him; the Jewish authorities despaired even just prior to His death that "the world is gone after him", because so many of the Jews were [apparently] "Believing in him" (Jn. 12:11,19); His popularity seems to have resurged to an all time high on his final visit to Jerusalem. The crowds liked some aspects of the idea of this man Jesus of Nazareth; they are described in John's Gospel as "believing on him", and yet John makes it clear that this was not the real belief which the Lord sought. John makes this point within Jn. 6:14,26: "When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world... Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves, and were filled". The crowd appeared to respond and perceive the significance of the sign-miracles; but the Lord knew that they had not properly understood. They apparently "believed", but would not confess Him before men (Jn. 12:42)- and such 'confession' is vital for salvation (Rom. 10:9,10 s.w.). For all their liking of Jesus and some of the things that He stood for, they willingly closed their hearts to the radical import of His essential message of self-crucifixion, of a cross before the crown, of a



future Kingdom which inverts all human values, where the humble are the greatest, the poor in spirit are the truly rich, the despised are the honoured...

Any who openly confessed Jesus as Messiah were put out of the synagogue (Jn. 9:22). The chief rulers are described as believing on Christ (Jn. 12:42), even though their faith was such a private affair at that time that it was hardly faith at all. The positivism of Jesus counted them as believers. Perhaps Jn. 1:12 alludes to them: "*Whoever* accepts him, those who believe in his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God". The "whoever" would then be implying that even if their faith was so weak that they would not publicly confess it, all the same they were counted as God's children. Yet we could read Jn. 12:42 the other way- belief alone is not enough, there must be public confession. It could be that we are to see a parallel between not confessing and not believing. We were called and converted *so that* we might give light to others. These Jewish leaders who believed wanted praise / glory of men (:43), and this desire to receive praise from men was exactly what led men *not* to truly believe (Jn. 5:44). The expositional choice before us is purposefully ambiguous- was the 'faith' of these leaders accepted, or was it nullified by their refusal to 'confess'? The ambiguity is to exercise our own consciences, as we naturally look within to enquire whether we have simply believed but not confessed... for we all will have a tendency to do this. In any case, there was a terrible outcome of not confessing their faith publicly- the condemnation and crucifixion of God's Son. Whether or not their faith was counted as acceptable, this was the outcome of not confessing it. And it is John who demonstrates how Joseph and Nicodemus 'came out' publicly after the Lord's death. See on 12:46 *So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness.*

Note the grace reflected in the record here, where we read that some Jews were credited with having believed in Jesus, even though they did *not* confess Him (Jn. 12:42), presumably because those who confessed Jesus as Christ were excommunicated from the synagogues (Jn. 9:22). Those who will not confess Jesus are antichrist (1 Jn. 4:3)- and yet the inspired record is so eager to note that these weak 'believers' were still believers, and their weak faith appears still to have been credited to them. This is a comfort to us in the weakness of our faith- and yet also a challenge to us to accept weak believers as believers. It seems that the record is prepared to accept that some achieved a valid faith in Jesus, even though they didn't confess Him. And yet there are abundant reasons for understanding that unless we witness to our faith, it isn't a faith that's worth much. And yet the record still accounts these who didn't testify as they ought to have done as 'believers'. This is a comfort for us in those times when we know we chose a far lower level than we should have done, and simply kept quiet about the wondrous hope within us. Perhaps

the idea was and is that an initial belief can be worked upon by the Lord, in order to bring it to open confession. We see several examples of this in John's Gospel, e.g. Nicodemus. And perhaps multitudes of these secret believers 'came out' in baptism on the day of Pentecost a few weeks later.

12:43- see on Jn. 4:14.

*For they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God-* The cause of unbelief and refusal to see / understand is not because a person doesn't 'get it' intellectually, or they fail to rightly process the information received. Disbelief is here blamed upon pride; a desire for glory to themselves from men, rather than as men giving glory to God, and seeking His glory above all. No amount of clever intellectual argument or accommodation with the latest science will elicit faith. Unbelief is not because of not being able to answer academic arguments. It is because of human pride.

12:44 *And Jesus cried and said: He that believes on me does not believe on me, but on him that sent me-* The crying out of the Lord was a reflection of His earnest desire that they should believe. He knew that those who had welcomed Him with cries of "Hosanna!" would turn against Him. And He urges them to really believe, and to realize that their rejection of Him was a rejection of God. Not because He was God Himself, but because the Father was manifest in the Son.

12:45 *And he that sees me, sees him that sent me-* Again, seeing is used to mean understanding and believing. To see God was instinctively known by all Jews to be impossible. But as noted on :30, such physical seeing of God or His Son, or literally hearing His voice, is irrelevant. The spiritual 'sight' of Him and sense of the Son's presence through the Spirit is worth far more than that. And to see the Son was and is to see God; not literally, but because the Son manifests the Father.

12:46 *I have come into the world as light-* This is how the prologue opens the Gospel, with the Lord personally represented as light shining in the darkness of the Jewish world. His 'coming into the world' was insofar as He revealed the light, and that only happened at the start of His ministry at age 30. This was when He came into the world. He was not the light of the world as a new-born baby desperate only for milk. His point of 'coming' into the world is defined as when He was the light of the world, which was at the beginning of His ministry. As He was sent into the world, so are we sent; and there is no question in our case that we were sent literally from Heaven to earth. Trinitarian thinking is very shoddy when it comes to verses such as these.

*So that whoever believes in me may not remain in the darkness-* What in practice does this mean, to have Jesus as our light, and not to be remain

in darkness? John's letters allude to this and in clear practical terms inform us that not loving our brother is abiding in darkness (1 Jn. 2:9,11). We cannot claim to believe in Jesus, to have Him as a merely intellectual light of correct theory- and not love our brother. Perhaps this explains the question raised in the commentary on :42 as to whether the unconfessed, very private and theoretical 'faith' of many of the leaders was acceptable. Because it was not confessed, it resulted in their condemning and crucifying God's Son- the deepest depth of not loving our brother.

12:47 *And if anyone hear my sayings and keep them not, I judge him not. For I came not to judge the world but to save-* For judgment He came into this world (Jn. 9:39), although He Himself came not to judge so much as to save (Jn. 12:47; "not" is also used in the sense of 'not so much to... but rather to...' in 2 Cor. 7:12: "I did it not [so much] for his cause ....but that our care...". Likewise in Mk. 10:45, the Lord came not *so much as* to be ministered unto, but to minister. He was and is ministered unto, but His focus is upon *His* ministering to us: Mk. 1:13,31; 15:41; Col. 1:7; 1 Tim. 4:6). God said He judged His people 'according to their way... according to their judgments I will judge' (Ez. 7:27 LXX). A man's way, freely chosen, is his judgment. We truly 'make the answer now'. The Saviour came more to save than condemn (Jn. 12:47); it is men who condemn themselves as inappropriate to receive eternal life. It is *their* words, not His, which will be the basis of their rejection.

12:48- see on Lk. 14:18; Jn. 3:13.

*He that rejects me and receives not my sayings has one that judges him. The word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day-* Our conscience is not going to jump out of us and stand and judge us at the day of judgment. There is one thing that will judge us, the word of the Lord (Jn. 12:48), not how far we have lived according to our conscience. They crucified Him because they rejected the words He spoke from God (Jn. 12:48). The language of rejection is used both about the Jews' crucifixion of Christ (Lk. 17:25; Mk. 12:10) and their rejection of His words. Thus Heb. 6:5,6;10:28,29 connect despising the word with crucifying Christ afresh. As the prologue explains, He was the word made flesh. To not receive His sayings [*rhema*] meant that His *logos* ["word"] would judge them. His teachings had an essential *logos* to them. And that singular word is spoken of in :49 and :50 as God's singular "commandment"- the offer of eternal life in His Son (see on :50).

12:49 *For I spoke not from myself, but the Father that sent me, He has given me a commandment, what I should say and what I should speak-* Just as the Lord's miracles were revealed to Him by the Father ahead of time (5:30), so were the words which He should teach. To reject the Lord's words was to therefore reject God's word; and as the prologue states, "the word was God". To reject His words is to reject Him. Judaism

was so deeply into theism, it was so God centred, that such ideas were repugnant to them. But this is what they were doing by rejecting His word as it was in His Son. The "commandment" is singular, and parallels the singular *logos* or word of :48.

12:50 *And I know that His commandment is everlasting life. The things therefore which I speak, even as the Father has said to me: So I speak-* "The commandment" is surely put for all that the Lord said and spoke (:49). It was His *logos* (see on :48). His words and person were an imperative to respond to; He was in Himself a command to be obeyed in following Him in total surrender. To believe in Him was the everlasting life. The commandment, the *logos*, was and is to believe in Him and receive everlasting life, in the sense of allowing Him to live in our lives. All He spoke was summed up in that. To refuse that eternal life meant therefore to remain in eternal death, and that would therefore be the outcome of the final judgment (:48).

## CHAPTER 13

13:1 *Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that his hour had come-* I argued on 12:12 and throughout chapter 12 that the Lord arranged the exact point of His death; for He gave His life, it was not taken from Him (10:17,18). He wanted to die at that particular Passover feast, which explains why John records how at other feasts, the Jews tried to kill Him but He somehow avoided them. The implication here in 13:1 is that the coming of Passover meant that the Lord knew His hour of death and glory had come.

*That he should depart out of this world to his Father-* The Lord saw His death as an exodus, as He had been taught at the transfiguration. And He saw the whole process of death, resurrection, 40 days on earth and ascension as a going to the Father. His prayer that the Father not take His disciples "out of the world" could be understood as asking that their lives, for the time being, be preserved; they should be "kept from the evil" (Jn. 17:15). For He understood departing out of the world as a reference to His death. And yet the word for 'departing' is used of how believers in Him depart or pass from death to life, right now (5:24; 1 Jn. 3:14). The essence of His experience becomes ours if we walk in the light of life we have seen and known in Him.

The language of departing from this world to the Father is a quotation from a common Rabbinic claim that these were the words of Moses before he died (Targum on Song of Solomon i. 1, 7, Bereshit Rabba, sect. 96. fol. 84. 1. and Debarim Rabba, sect. 11. fol. 245. 2). The Lord clearly understood Himself as the greater than Moses (Dt. 18:18). Without any doubt there is also reference to the well-known [at the time John was writing] Jerusalem Targum on Dt. 32: "And when the last end of Moses the prophet was at hand, that he should be gathered from the world...".

*Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them to the end-* His love for His own during His ministry is part of His final love for them unto the end. The essence of His self-giving for them throughout His life was seamlessly continued in His death. "His own" is another allusion to the prologue, where the Lord comes to "His own" and they do not receive Him; but others do (1:11,12). Israel becomes redefined; no longer are "His own" His own kith and kin of Israelites, but those who receive Him.

The 'love to the uttermost' here can of course be applied to the crucifixion. But the Lord at this point felt He had now departed from this world (17:11 "I am no longer in the world"), and so it could be that the following account of the foot washing is to be understood as a preview of the Lord's death on the cross. The grammar of the whole verse implies that "Before the feast of the Passover... He loved them to the end", as if the 'love to the end' was before the feast, before His death. When did He love them to the end? Before the Passover. That is the idea. The last

supper therefore becomes the love feast, the exemplification of His love unto the end; and it is to be felt like that by us as we partake to this day.

The Lord's conscious attempt to develop the twelve appears to have paid off to some extent, even during His ministry. For there was evidently some spiritual growth of the disciples even during the ministry. There are indications that even before the Lord's death, the disciples did indeed progressively grasp at least some things about Him. John's Gospel is divided into what has been called 'The book of signs' (Jn. 1:19-12:50) and 'the book of glory' (Jn. 13:1 and following). In the book of signs, the disciples always refer to the Lord as "rabbi" or "teacher"; whereas in the book of glory, they call him "Lord". We have seen in other character studies how spiritual maturity is reflected in some ways by a growth in appreciation of the titles used of God. Although Jesus was not God Himself, so it seems was the case in how the disciples increasingly came to respect and perceive the Lordship of Jesus.

In the New Testament, we see the love of Christ directly, openly displayed. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond. He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, "that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (Jn. 17:26). "Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us (in that) he hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.).

13:2- see on Lk. 22:3.

*And during supper, when the Devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him-* "Supper" is literally 'a supper'; not 'the feast' as we would expect if this was indeed the Passover feast of 14 Nissan. It was a Passover supper, but kept earlier and perhaps in a slightly different way. The whole style in this section suggests that when certain conditions were fulfilled, then the Lord could die on the cross. I have suggested on 12:12 that the Lord arranged the entire scenario, as He gave His life as He did of His own choice of time and place. The account here reads as if the Lord knew that Judas had in his heart to betray Him, and so knowing this, He acts out the essence of His future service for others on the cross by washing the disciples' feet. He knew this would offer Judas the chance to repent, but if he would not, then it would be the psychological trigger for Judas to go off and hand Him over to the Jews. And that is indeed how it worked out.

"The devil" in the New Testament, including in John's writings, refers to organized, systemic opposition to the Lord's person and work, and in the

first instance refers to the Jewish opposition. I have exemplified this at length in *The Real Devil* especially section 2-4, 'The Jewish Satan'. The thought to betray the Lord had been put into the heart of Judas by the Jewish opposition, who were the great 'satan' [adversary] and false accuser ['devil'] with regard to the Lord and His work. This explains why when 'satan entered into Judas', he goes to the Jewish leadership to arrange the betrayal (Lk. 22:3-6). It could even be that "the devil" here is to be paralleled with "the prince of this [Jewish] world" whom I have suggested on 12:31 had specific reference to Caiaphas the High Priest, who is presented as the one who came up with the specific scheme to kill the Lord (see on 11:49).

The reference to "Simon's son" would be appropriate if the reference is to the Simon the Pharisee of Lk. 7:40, in whose house Mary Magdalene had previously anointed the Lord. I noted on 11:2 that the woman who was a sinner who anointed the Lord in Simon's house was Mary Magdalene. The fact she had access to the meal table suggests she was a close relative. And Judas was the son of Simon. We therefore can conclude that Judas was a relative of Mary, Martha and Lazarus; perhaps even their brother. This would explain his anger at her wasting of family wealth by anointing the Lord in chapter 12 (see on Mt. 26:14). If the family had Pharisee connections, then this would explain why "the Jews" came from Jerusalem to their home in Bethany, as they were relatives.

*13:3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God-* This may seem axiomatic, but the text seems to be saying that as He sat at supper, the Lord had a deep sense of utter certainty that He was from God and was going to successfully accomplish what lay before Him, and this 'go to God'. The "all things" refer to the believers (Eph. 1:22); He had earlier spoken of the Father having given Him the sheep, who were safe in His hands (10:28,29). He was deeply aware that we were in His hands, and He must now go and die for us.

*13:4 Rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel-* He dressed Himself as He would for the crucifixion, naked but for a loincloth, with His outer clothing taken away, as John's crucifixion account emphasizes. Phil. 2 seems to allude to the descriptions here of the Lord progressively setting aside all human trappings in order to humble Himself to serve and thence to actually die the death of the cross for us. "Laid aside" is the same term used for the Lord's giving over of His life (10:11,15,17,18; 15:13; 1 Jn. 3:16).

*13:5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded-* This was the work of the lowest slave, and Phil. 2 alludes to this in saying that the Lord took upon Himself the form of a slave- not in adopting human nature, but in His mental attitude in the lead up to the cross, and in His

final death there. The record is as it were zoomed up close upon the Lord, with every action recorded. This action of foot washing is seen as highly significant; it was the essence of his death. And it was, as suggested on :1, the epitome of love unto the end. The usage of water could look forward to baptism, but the idea is that He does something to the disciple- His death was not just something to be emulated. It is His action upon us; as a result of it, the Spirit was to be given, whereby He would cleanse / sanctify the disciples. But the outpouring of water is used as a figure for the outpouring of the Spirit which would come as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39). John's crucifixion record notes how the Lord's death resulted in water issuing from His side toward the disciples; and here, the towel from His side is used to wash the disciples' feet. The gift of the Spirit is in view, and connects with the frequent references to our sanctification or being made clean by the Spirit. The mention of the basin is perhaps to recall the Mosaic rituals whereby blood and water were taken from a basin to sanctify the priests. This motley crew of mixed up men were being declared the priesthood of the new Israel, and the prayer of chapter 17 is full of allusion to the theme of sanctification. This, it must be emphasized, is something done to a willing person, and not done by themselves. This is the picture of the Lord's activity in our lives through the Spirit.

13:6 *When he came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him: Lord, are you going to wash my feet?*- The Lord had taught that when one was invited to a feast, they should take the lowest seat. It seems that at the last supper, Peter did just this. There would likely have been petty jealousy over who sat next to Jesus, and there may have been a desire to sit closest to Him as a sign of faithfulness to their beloved teacher. John was clearly sitting next to Jesus, as he was able to have his head on Jesus' breast. And the fact the Lord dipped in the dish at the same time as Judas may imply that Judas was also next to Him. It's tempting to imagine John at Jesus' right hand and Judas at His left. But it seems Peter was the last to have his feet washed. Jesus "came to Simon Peter" to wash his feet, and when he had done so, He commented that now, all His men were clean (Jn. 13:6). This implies to me that Peter was sitting at the end of the couch, furthest away from Jesus. He certainly wasn't that close to Jesus, because he had to signal [Gk. 'to nod'] to John to ask the Lord who the betrayer was (Jn. 13:24). So I conclude from all this that Peter took the lowest seat at that feast- in conformity to what the Lord had taught them earlier. And I imagine it would have been especially difficult, as the order of seating at the Jewish Passover was a classic opportunity to demonstrate a pecking order within a group of friends or family. But despite taking the lowest seat, Peter's pride objected to the Lord washing His feet. The Lord had taken more than the lowest seat at the table; He had shown Himself to be the lowest slave who was present but not seated even at the table.



13:7 *Jesus answered and said to him: What I am doing you do not comprehend now, but later you shall understand-* This would appear to be an allusion to how the Comforter / Holy Spirit would give them understanding of the Lord's words and ministry. The Holy Spirit was not yet given (7:38,39), so the sense of His work would still be not fully understandable.

13:8- see on Jn. 3:5.

*Peter said to him: You shall never wash my feet! Jesus answered him: If I do not wash you, you have no part with me-* The critical importance of washing could speak of how baptism is connected to salvation. But "no part with me" is surely alluded to by Paul in writing that if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is "none of His" (Rom. 8:9). The sanctifying work of the Spirit is clearly in view, bearing in mind that "wash", *nipto*, has ceremonial associations; it spoke of sanctification for priestly service. And to accept that sanctifying work of the Spirit requires a humility which Peter initially struggled with. Resistance to the idea of the internal work of the Spirit is likewise associated with pride and self-confidence in the flesh.

13:9 *Simon Peter said to him: Lord, wash not only my feet but also my hands and my head-* Peter got the Lord's drift, and wanted not only cleansing of his feet, his path in life; but of his actions [hands] and head [thinking].

13:10 *Jesus said to him: He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you-* This is surely suggesting that all baptized believers ("washed") were like the priests, who firstly washed their bodies and then their hands and feet, before entering on service (Ex. 30:21). "He who has bathed" could be about the only discernible hint that the disciples had been baptized. But they needed to be born of water and of the Spirit as well. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread and acceptance of the sanctification of the Spirit which Peter seemed to want to avoid.

"You are clean" is developed in 15:3, where the Lord teaches that we are clean by the word He spoke. But here, the cleansing is on account of His death and sacrifice. His death and work of saving is His "word" to us. His "word" is not therefore necessarily a reference to His actual sayings, but is used as it is in the prologue, for His whole being and message which was lived out in His person; for the word was made flesh in Him, supremely in His death on the cross.

The importance of self-examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at here. This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord's meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same. Whilst forgiveness itself is not mediated in any metaphysical sense by the memorial meeting, it is nonetheless a vital part of the life of the forgiven believer. When Peter didn't want to break bread, the Lord reminded him that he who has been baptized / washed is indeed clean, but needs periodic feet-washing. This, surely, was a reference to the breaking of bread (Jn. 13:10). The same word for 'wash' is found in Jn. 15:2, where we read of how the Father washes / purifies periodically the vine branches. Could this not be some reference to the effect the breaking of bread should have upon us?

13:11 *For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said: Not all of you are clean-* The cleansing was not therefore simply a question of being baptized; for Judas had presumably been baptized along with the others. But he had not allowed the sanctifying work of the Spirit within him, and was therefore not cleansed or sanctified within.

The Lord Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him; and yet He went through the pain, shock and surprise of realizing that Judas, his own familiar friend in whom He trusted, had done this to Him (Ps. 41:9; Jn. 6:64; 13:11). He knew, and yet He chose to limit that foreknowledge from love. This is in fact what all human beings are capable of, seeing we are made in the image of God. Thus Samson surely knew Delilah would betray him, and yet his love for her made him trust her. And we as observers see women marrying alcoholic men, wincing as we do at the way their love makes them limit their foreknowledge. There is an element of this in God, as there was in His Son as He faced the cross. Thus we read of the Lord Jesus being silent before His slaughterers, being led out to death as a sheep (Is. 53:7). But this idiom is used about Jeremiah to describe his wilful naivety about Israel's desire to slay him: "I was like a lamb or an ox that is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me" (Jer. 11:19). In this Jeremiah was indeed a type of Christ.

13:12 *So when he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and sat down again, he said to them: Do you comprehend what I have done to you?*- The putting on of His clothes speaks of His resurrection after the death on the cross which His washing their feet spoke of. The sitting down would then correspond with His sitting down at the right hand of the Father after His work had been accomplished (Heb. 1:3; 10:12). "Do you comprehend...?" was presumably asked with the implication that 'No, you do not- because if you did, you would be on your knees washing each other's feet (:15)'. If we comprehend the Lord's work, we shall do likewise, living out the essence of His cross for others.

13:13 *You call me teacher and lord, and you say well; for so I am*- The Lord reasons that He is no mere teacher of ideas and doctrine, as the Jewish rabbis were. He was their teacher by example, and they therefore ought to fall to their knees in washing each other's feet (:15). He was the word made flesh; His word was not just what He spoke, but His example and very being (see on :10). To call Jesus 'master' and 'Lord' was meaningless unless the pupils *did* what He said; so closely were His words associated with action, a word made flesh. See on Mt. 7:22.

13:14 *If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet*- His teaching was therefore not so much by spoken words but by example. He was His word made flesh. His example was to be taken as His word to His disciples. Because Jesus is Lord and Master, and because He is our representative in every way, therefore all that He did and was becomes an imperative for us to follow. They called Him "Lord and Master", but *wouldn't* wash each other's feet. Like us so often, they had the right doctrinal knowledge, but it meant nothing to them in practice. They failed to perceive that "my word" referred to His whole being and personality rather than the words which came from His mouth in teaching sessions. To know Him as Lord is to wash each other's feet, naked but for a loincloth, with all the subtle anticipations of the cross which there are in this incident. "Wherefore [because of the exaltation of Jesus] [be obedient and] work out your own salvation with fear and trembling [i.e. in humility]" (Phil. 2:12).

We would so dearly wish for the suffering Christ to be just an item in history, an act which saved us which is now over, an icon we hang around our neck or mount prominently on our study wall- and no more. But He, His cross, His 'last walk', His request that we pick up a cross and walk behind Him, the eerie continuous tenses used in New Testament references to the crucifixion- is so much more than that. If He washed our feet, we *must* wash each other's. Everything He did, all He showed Himself to be in character, disposition and attitude, becomes an imperative for us to do and be likewise. And it is on this basis that He can

so positively represent us to the Father: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16).

13:15 *For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you-* The 'doing' of the Lord was to die for us in service (14:31). The height of the challenge is so high- to have the cross as our pattern, and not just something to be looked to with thanksgiving. This challenge transforms all departments of human thought and action. The immediate context of course was the Lord's attitude to His brethren at the last supper; and this should be reflected in our attitude to others at the breaking of bread. That so many of His disciples have lost their way here is tragic, for closed table policies and exclusion of His people from the table is the very opposite of His example.

13:16 *Truly, truly, I say to you: A servant is not greater than his lord, neither is one sent greater than he that sent him-* To act as if the Lord's attitude at the last supper and on the cross is *not* our example is effectively to consider ourselves greater than Him. If our Lord and master acted and thought as He did- we His servants can do nothing else; we are to be as the Master (Mt. 10:24,25; Lk. 6:40). If we do not emulate the spirit of feet washing and death on the cross, then we are pronouncing ourselves greater than Him. The logic requires an urgency in seeking by all means to follow His example. The apostles were those sent; and the Lord frequently refers to Himself as the One sent, and the Messianic servant. He as the sent One was therefore also living out the essence of the Father who sent Him. To have acted otherwise would have suggested He was greater than the One who sent Him, the Father. See on :20.

13:17 *If you know these things, and if you do them, you will be blessed-* The Lord sensed the tension between knowing and doing. To know but not do would not lead to being happy / blessed. And this is the root cause of a lack of joy amongst many believers; they know but do not do. The doing, of course, is radical- to be the lowest servant, to wash the feet of others, living out the spirit of the cross. To know this but not do it is to not attain happiness. The only path to Christian joy is to surrender all in the emulation of the Lord's spirit in these ways. The Lord had concluded the sermon on the mount with a similar challenge, to do what we know (see on Mt. 7:22). The "things" immediately in view here in John 13 were the spirit of foot washing, of radical servanthood, and death on the cross. But these were all a fulfilment in practice of the various principles outlined in the sermon on the mount.

13:18 *I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen; but the scripture must be fulfilled: He that eats my bread lifted up his heel against me-* I have suggested on 12:12 and elsewhere that the Lord arranged the entire scene in order to die by crucifixion at that Passover. It

could be that He means here that He knew Judas whom He had chosen; and He chose him to perform the role of betrayer which He knew was necessary in order to bring about the intended final scene. But that is not to say that Judas had no choice in the matter; he did, and the Lord urged him against his path. But He also knew the outcome, and in that sense knew the betrayer whom He had chosen for this role. He was led to plan things as He did by Scripture, which required that one who ate His bread would then betray Him. And so He set things up so that an offended Judas would be present at the last supper, and then do the act of betrayal.

The implication is that Judas had a heel to crush the Lord with, as if Judas was the seed of the woman and He was the seed of the serpent due to His close association with sin and sinners. However, it has also been pointed out that "To show the bottom of one's foot to someone in the Near East is a mark of contempt"- E.F. Bishop, *Evangelical Times* Vol. 70 p. 331. The non-violent resistance to evil and the message of grace led Judas to despise the Lord; and the outpouring of the precious ointment upon Him appeared senseless to the materialistic Judas. His despise of the Lord was therefore a factor in his betrayal.

Ps. 41:9,10 is quoted from the LXX in Mk. 14:18,21. Yet Jn. 13:18 quotes the same passage from the Hebrew text, with a slight difference. Which was inspired? Surely, both sources of the original were accepted as worthy of quotation. So from this evidence alone we should be wary of concluding that the differences between LXX and the Hebrew text are mutually incompatible. See on Acts 15:16.

13:19 *From this time forward I will tell you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe that I am he-* This refers to the Lord's prediction of Judas' betrayal. He knew that later, they would reflect on all things and perceive that the Lord was master of the whole situation. He had set up the entire stage, including with one of His disciples betraying Him, in order to bring about the end which *He* intended- that He would be crucified that Passover. His total mastery of the scene (see on 12:12) was a declaration of the Yahweh Name, "I am", and a sign of His identity with the Father.

We also see here the intention of prophecy- not in order to predict the future in detail, but so that when things happen, we perceive that they were exactly foretold. This needs to be remembered- for so many attempts to foretell sequences of political events heralding the Lord's return have been proven wrong, and have ended up damaging faith rather than building it up. Bible prophecy is not, therefore, to be appealed to in order to support faith, unless we are pointing out how predictions or required scenarios have already been fulfilled.

13:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: He that receives whoever I send receives*

*me, and he that receives me, receives Him that sent me-* The Lord has just reasoned that if He has washed their feet, and they are sent by Him, then they are to do likewise (:16). In doing as He did, their witness was a manifestation of Him. And more than that, of the Father who had sent Him. See on :16. In this sense, God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world to Himself. The 'receiving' in John's writings speaks of receiving a message. The assumption is that the message we preach will be "Him", centred upon and about Him. Those who accept the Lord Jesus at our word thereby receive the Father too. So much hinges upon our witness. We represent so much- even God Himself.

13:21 *When Jesus had said this, he was disturbed in his spirit, and testified: Truly, truly, I say to you: One of you shall betray me-* The Lord has just spoken of how His followers are representatives of Him and thereby of the Father; and attitudes to Him are attitudes to the Father. Perhaps this was why He was so upset, remembering that what Judas was doing to Him was in effect to God, and there would be such terrible judgment for it.

The Lord was able to attract all kinds of sinners to Him, when those who are spiritually marginalized tend normally to steer away from those who exude righteousness but no humanity. He was real, He really was who He appeared to be, there was total congruence between His words and actions; and He encouraged others in the same spirit to simply face up to who they were. And He would accept them at that. Yet He was real and human; although there was this congruence between His words and actions, consider how His spirit was "troubled"; "now is my soul troubled" (Jn. 12:27; 13:21). Yet He goes on to use the same word to exhort the disciples hours later: "Let not your heart be troubled" (Jn. 14:1, 27). Was this inconsistency, "Do as I say, not as I do"? Of course not. The strength and power of His exhortation "Let not your heart be troubled" was in the very way that His heart *had been troubled* but He now had composed Himself in calm trust in the Father. And Peter remembered that, as he later in turn exhorted *his* flock to not be troubled nor afraid under persecution (1 Pet. 3:14).

13:22 *The disciples looked at each other, wondering of whom he spoke-* We see here the ability of Judas, as of all men, to disguise real motives. The others had absolutely no inkling that Judas would betray the Lord. This stands as a warning for all time not to attempt to judge who is sincere and who is not amongst the Lord's people. We cannot judge not least because we *cannot* judge. They were so unable to do this that having looked at one another, wondering who it was, they concluded that it might be them- for after trying to decide which of them it was, they began to ask Him "Is it me?" (Mk. 14:19). We simply cannot tell the wheat from the weeds.

"He spoke" is a continuous present tense- 'Of whom He is speaking'. This change of tenses in the Gospels is to enable to us to relive the situation, playing as it were Bible television with the record.

13:23 *There was at the table reclining on Jesus' chest one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved-* John's Gospel is the personal testimony of the beloved disciple (Jn. 19:35; 21:24). Not that John was loved any more than the others- his point is surely that 'I am one whom Jesus so loved to the end'. He describes himself as resting on Jesus' bosom (Jn. 13:23); yet he writes that Jesus is now in the Father's bosom (Jn. 1:18). He is saying that he has the same kind of intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus as Jesus has with the Father. Yet John also records how the Lord Jesus repeatedly stressed that the intimacy between Him and the Father was to be shared with all His followers. So John is consciously holding up his own relationship with the Lord Jesus as an example for all others to experience and follow. Yet John also underlines his own slowness to understand the Lord. Without any pride or self-presentation, he is inviting others to share the wonderful relationship with the Father and Son which he himself had been blessed with. John knew his Lord. He repeatedly describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (Jn. 13:23; 20:2; 21:7,20). Doubtless John was aware that Jesus loved all His people; but John is surely exalting in the fact that the Lord loved him personally.

13:24- see on Jn. 13:6.

*Simon Peter motioned to him, and said to him: Tell us who it is of whom he speaks-* This all has the ring of truth to it. He would not have called across the table to John, but could easily have motioned with his eyes and other non-verbal language. We have an example here of non-verbal communication being counted as words- for the motioning was in effect saying to him the words. This is significant because the references in John to the Lord's "word" or "words" are not necessarily referring to His literally spoken words; but to all the other communication from Him that went on. For He as a person and character was His word, as the prologue begins by explaining.

13:25 *He leaning back, as he was on Jesus' breast, said to him: Lord, who is it?-* As noted on :23, John saw his own intimate relationship with the Lord as reflected in how close the Lord was to His father (1:18). We could infer from 21:20 that John's close access to the Lord was a cause of jealousy for Peter.

13:26 *Jesus answered: It is he to whom I gave the morsel of bread after I dipped it. When he had dipped the morsel, he had given it to Judas the son of Simon Iscariot-* The motive of the question had surely been 'Tell us who it is, and we shall stop him forcibly'. But the Lord is saying that they were too late; He had chosen Judas to do this job. And yet the "morsel" may refer to the prized portion of the bread which a father would give to

a favoured child at the Passover feast. It could be read as a sign of the Lord's special love and care for Judas. He so wanted him to repent. But it was the sign of the Lord's extreme love for him, to the point of apparent favouritism, which made Judas then go out into the darkness and betray the Lord. This was all according to the Lord's plan, but there was still the absolute possibility for Judas' repentance. The Lord's psychology was superb; He knew the things of the human spirit. He realized that the special exposure to His love would make Judas either collapse in repentance, or harden him in his fell purpose. And this is true throughout John's Gospel; encounter with the Lord as the only light of the world made men either live in that light, or recoil deeper into their darkness. And Judas was the parade example.

13:27 *Then after Judas had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him-* As noted on :2, the devil and satan, the false accuser and adversary to the Lord's cause, refers in the immediate context to the Jewish system. It could be that a representative from "the satan" entered into the upper room, and Judas went out with him, as if doing some errand. This would make good sense in the context of :29. Or it could be that as elsewhere, "satan" refers to the great adversary, sin within. And in the face of the Lord's supreme and special love for Judas, Judas was faced with the choice to accept it or be hardened by sin, personified as the great satan / adversary to all human spiritual endeavour.

The breaking of bread brings us face to face with the need for self-examination and the two paths before us. It is a T-junction which reflects the final judgment. Judas' reaction to the first memorial meeting exemplifies this. The Lord took the sop (of bread) and dipped it (in the vinegar-wine, according to the Jewish custom), and gave it to Judas. This was a special sign of His love and affection, and one cannot help wondering whether Peter and John observed it with keen jealousy. Yet *after taking it*, after that sign of the Lord's *especial* love for him, "satan entered into" Judas and he went out and betrayed the Lord of glory (Jn. 13:27). In that bread and wine, Judas was confronted with the Lord's peerless love for the very darkest sinner and His matchless self-sacrifice; and this very experience confirmed him in the evil way his heart was set upon. And it also works, thankfully, the other way. We can leave that meeting with the Lord, that foretaste of judgment, that conviction of sin and also of the Lord's victory over it, with a calm assurance of His love which cannot be shaken, whatever the coming week holds.

*Jesus said to him: What you are about to do, do quickly-* I somewhat doubt that the Lord meant 'Please, get it over with quickly, don't draw out the agony for Me'. That seems out of character with the Lord, and certainly with the nature of John's highly spiritual record. So we can assume that the Lord wished for Judas to repent, and He urged him to do



so quickly, knowing that human nature ever seeks to procrastinate, and thus lose the power of decision against the flesh. In this case, "you are about to do" would suggest that Judas was on the verge of repentance, and the Lord urges him to go all the way with it quickly. But it could be that the Lord perceived that Judas had sold himself completely to the evil he had allowed to develop within him; and He is now encouraging Judas in the path he had embarked upon.

13:28 *Now no one at the table knew for what reason Jesus spoke this to Judas-* This is an open admission from John that they did not understand at the time, but now they did- all confirming the truth of the Lord's promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to bring all things to their remembrance and understanding.

13:29 *Some thought because Judas had the money bag, that Jesus said to him: Buy what things we have need of for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor-* This supposition would rather support the idea suggested on :29 that a member of the Jewish 'satan' came into the upper room, requesting Judas' attention. We can maybe infer that Judas had gone out with the money bag in his hand. For we know that he kept the money bag, from which the group made donations to the poor. So we imagine Judas leaving the room clutching the bag, hence the supposition that he was going to buy something or donate to the poor. The association between Judas and money is very clear; although his motivations were multi-factorial, Mt. 26:15 is clear that Judas went to the priests and asked what they would give him if he betrayed the Lord to them. It may seem incredible that a man would do such evil for money; but we constantly see the power of covetousness and materialism leading men to throw away life eternal. The power of these things is great indeed.

13:30- see on Mk. 14:68; Lk. 22:62.

*He then having received the morsel went out immediately into the night-* There seems an echo of how Esau "for one morsel of meat sold his birth right" (Heb. 12:16). The immediate and the visible is so powerfully attractive, so powerful that it can lead men to throw away their spiritual birth right and betray God's peerless Son. "Went out" is a term later used by John to describe all those who went out from the community of John's converts- back into the darkness of Judaism, just as Judas did (1 Jn. 2:19). Judas is not, therefore, any special case. He is representative of an entire class of people, indeed, all those who turn away from the Lord's love.

13:31- see on Jn. 12:28.

*When he was gone, Jesus said: Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him-* With Judas gone, the Lord sensed that all those gathered around Him were to be ultimately and eternally saved by the sacrifice He was about to make. That was the final glory to God which He sought. In this we see the importance of all preaching and pastoral work; this shall climax in the glorification of the Father in the Son.

But the Lord had in view the way that He was about to die. This would be to the glory of God, just as the death and resurrection of Lazarus had been to the glory of God in His Son. The Lord knew that the exit of Judas to the Jewish 'satan' was now going to set in process the final train of events which would lead to His crucifixion.

13:32 *And God shall glorify him in Himself, and will glorify him immediately-* The second stage of the glorification was presumably in the events of the resurrection. However the idea may simply be as in GNB: "Now the Son of Man's glory is revealed; now God's glory is revealed through him. And if God's glory is revealed through him, then God will reveal the glory of the Son of Man in himself, and he will do so at once". The idea is that the glory of the Son is that of the Father and *vice versa*, God Himself would glorify the Son just as the Son had Himself glorified the Father; even though both Father and Son have their own glory.

"In Himself" could be translated "by Himself"; and the "immediately" may mean that the time was soon coming when this mutual glorification was going to happen, in a spiritual intercourse between Father and Son which was the most sublime moment of all time and space. No wonder the translation is difficult, for the ideas are the profoundest to ever be expressed in language. The mutual glorification of Father and Son speaks of the Lord's death and resurrection; the mutual quality and nature of it is hard to plumb and express, hence the difficulty in both translation and interpretation at this point.

The Lord Jesus had that "glory" in what John calls "the beginning", and he says that he and the other disciples witnessed that glory (Jn. 1:14). "The beginning" in John's Gospel often has reference to the beginning of the Lord's ministry. There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father's personality, it's not a mirror personality, but it's the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God's glory as being the Son's glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah's vision of God's glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son's glory (Jn. 12:41). The glory of God is His "own self", His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from

the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title "God of glory" is applied to the Lord Jesus, "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God's* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God's glory, because He is the express image of God's personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God's glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the "Father of glory", the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father's glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him". What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only "one glory" of God. That glory refers to the essential "self", the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been "glorified", and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons (note that- *to be persons!*) who reflect and 'are' that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror. The outline of God's glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. The essence of who we are now in our spiritual man, how we reflect it, in our own unique way, is how we shall always be.

13:33- see on Jn. 7:33; Mt. 18:6.

*Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You shall seek me, but as I said to the Jews, where I go, you cannot come. So now I say to you- "As I said to the Jews" [as well as to you] suggests they were far more influenced by the Jews than they should have been. The Lord has explained the deep spiritual intercourse and mutual glorification between Father and Son which was to be achieved on the cross. And there, into that profound mutual unity with the Father, they could not go. It was a communion unenterable by the disciples at that time.*

13:34 *A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. Even as I have loved you, you also love one another- "As I have loved you" is another example of how the Lord spoke of His impending sacrifice as if He*

had already achieved it in His life. Having loved His own, He loved them unto the end in His death (13:1). 15:12-13 says the same: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". Only the cross can be a strong enough power to inspire a love between us quite different to anything known in previous times; a love so powerful that it in itself could convert men and women. The newness of the commandment was to love as the Lord loved us.

The Greeks had various words for love, *agape* (a rather general word, used in the LXX); *eros* (referring to the physical aspect) and *phileo*, referring (for example) to the love of parents for children. These terms had loose definitions and are almost interchangeable in their OT (LXX) and NT usage. But then the Lord introduced a whole new paradigm: "A new commandment I give unto you, That you love (*agape*) one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). To love as the Lord loved was something fundamentally new, and He chose one of the available terms and made it into something else. He chose a rather colourless word in the Greek language: *agape*, and made it refer specifically to the love of God and Christ towards us, and also to the love which their followers should show to each other. 'This is *agape*', He says: 'This is My redefinition of that word, which must enter your new vocabulary'. It is true that *agape* and *phileo* are apparently interchangeable in some places; but the Lord's redefinition of love, His placing of new meaning into old words, still stands valid. Not only does the Lord give 'love' a new flavour as a word. He above all showed forth that quality of love. He turned man's conception of love on its head. Thus He plugged in to the Pharisee's debate about who could be identified as their neighbour- by showing, in His Samaritan parable, that we must make ourselves neighbours to others.

13:35- see on Acts 4:13.

*By this shall all men know you are my disciples- if you have love for one another-* The Lord has just redefined "love" as the love He was showing by dying for them, epitomized in the foot washing incident. If His followers could do this for each other, then the witness would be made to "all men". Christian love must be distinctively different from any other profession of 'love' made by others. That is a great challenge; and it is only capable of fulfilment by being motivated by the Lord's love. It will be a witness powerful enough to convert the world. Indeed, this is John's version of the great commission- see on Lk. 22:32. The Lord's death was to result in a unity between us that would lead the world to understand Him and the love the Father has for Him (Jn. 17:21,23); and yet through the loving unity of believers, the world knows *them*, that they are His disciples (Jn. 13:35). We are an exhibition to this world of the relationship between the Father and Son. Hence our behaviour is so crucial. For if we

are divided and unloving, this is the image of the Father and Son which we are presenting. It is also therefore sadly true that if all men do not see love for one another, then we are in fact not the Lord's disciples. This makes so many forms of cranky denominationalism self-condemned as non-Christian.

13:36- see on Jn. 21:18,19.

*Simon Peter said to him: Lord, where do you go? Jesus answered: Where I go, you cannot follow now, but you shall follow afterwards-* As noted on :32 and :33, the Lord was going to the cross, but to an unenterable mutual intercourse between Father and Son which would be to the profoundest glory of them both. This was unenterable by the spiritually immature disciples at that stage. The Lord was indeed telling Peter that he was not yet able to die for Him, but He would do so ultimately. But the essence of "Where I go" was to this intimate unity with the Father which was unenterable by the disciples at that stage. But the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would mean that the Lord's prayer of chapter 17 could and would come true- that the depths of His unity and mutual glorification with the Father would become true for them too.

The question is "Where are you going?", in the context of the Lord going to the cross. Yet later, the Lord pointed out that "Not one of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" (Jn. 13:36; 16:5). Clearly enough the Lord's point was that Peter had enquired about the cross, but not really enquired. Peter took 'Where the Lord is going' as referring to a literal place, or His death. But as noted on :32 and :33, where the Lord was going, as He understood it, was the most profound unity between Father and Son. And is it that same with us? That we wish to know of the cross, but we are not *really* enquiring as to it, as the personal and spiritual implications are too great for us? It wasn't that Peter was unaware of the cross and the Lord's teaching about it; it was rather that he [and we] failed to let the realities sink home and failed to appreciate the deep spiritual implications of it all. The Lord had clearly taught Peter that He must lay down His life for the sheep (Jn. 10:11)- but Peter wished to sacrifice his own life to save Jesus' having to do this (Jn. 13:36-38). So great was Peter's barrier to the idea of the Lord Jesus having to die. And we too run into this same barrier with the cross of Christ; it's why, e.g., we find it so hard to make an extended study of the crucifixion, why people walk out of movies about the Passion of Christ half way through, why we find it hard to concentrate upon the simple facts of the death of Christ at their memorial meetings...

13:37 *Peter said to him: Lord, why cannot I follow you even now? I will lay down my life for you!*- Peter understood where the Lord was going as

meaning 'to His death'. But the Lord had in view the intense spiritual intercourse with the Father and mutual glorification which would arise from that death (see on :32 and :33). His death was far more than death *per se*, it was a profound glorification of the Father. Peter's loyalty and desire to physically die for the Lord is commendable, but the record shows that he was rather missing the point and spiritual perspective of the Lord's death. When he says "Though I should / must die with you" (Mt. 26:35), he uses the word elsewhere translated "must" in connection with Lord's foreknowledge that He must suffer the death of the cross. Peter knew that he must share the cross- but the flesh was weak. When it became apparent that the Lord was going to actually die, he asked: "Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake" (Jn. 13:37). He saw the connection between following and laying down life in death. He had heard the Lord saying that He would lay down His life for them (Jn. 10:15,17). And Peter thought he could do just the same for his Lord- but not, it didn't occur to him, for his brethren. He didn't then appreciate the weight or extent of the cross of Christ. The Lord replied that he was not yet able to do that, he would deny Him rather than follow Him, but one day he would be strong enough, and then he would follow Him to the end (Jn. 13:36,37). Peter thought he was strong enough then; for he followed (s.w.) Christ afar off, to the High Priest's house (Mt. 26:58). But in ineffable self-hatred he came to see that the Lord's prediction was right.

Just before His death, the Saviour spoke of going to the Father, and coming again in resurrection (Jn. 13:36,37 cp. 14:28; 16:16,17; 17:11). He somehow saw the cross as a being with God, a going to Him there ('going to the Father' in these Johannine passages is hard to apply to His ascent to Heaven after the resurrection). When in this context He speaks of *us* coming to the Father, He refers to our taking up of His cross, and in this coming to the essence of God (Jn. 14:6 cp. 4, 13:36). See on Jn. 19:19.

13:38 *Jesus answered: Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you: The cock shall not crow, till you have denied me three times-* As noted on:37, Peter had rather missed the point anyway. The Lord was 'going' not to simply die *per se*, but into the profoundest spiritual glorification process with the Father which Peter was too immature to enter. But the Lord goes along with Peter's literalism, and gently points out to him that he was not even up to dying with Him, let alone entering the spiritual things which were implied in the Lord's death and where He was 'going'. The issues relating to the Lord's words to Peter here are discussed on Mt. 26:34,35.

## CHAPTER 14

14:1- see on 17:3.

*Do not let your heart be disturbed-* John has used this very phrase for a troubled or "disturbed" heart in describing the stress felt by the Lord as He faced the eternal issues of human salvation which were before Him (11:33; 12:27; 13:21). That is enough emphasis for us to safely conclude that the Lord meant- and means- that He is taking our stress and "trouble" about salvation onto Himself, and we need not worry about. For all the issues concerning whether we shall be saved were carried by Him. And it is surely alluded to when He urges them after His resurrection not to be "troubled" (Lk. 24:38). "Let not your heart be troubled" is an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:32, where Israel were not to fear Goliath because of the salvation which would be achieved through David.

*Believe in God, believe also in me-* For first century Jews, belief in God was taken as natural and normal. If they believe that He is from the Father and one with the Father in a functional sense, then they should believe also in Him. And the belief in view is faith in salvation (see on :1).

The Lord's goodbye address in Jn. 14-16 has many connections with those of Moses and Joshua, in which they expressed fear that after their death there would be a mass falling away within Israel, and their guise of spirituality would give way due to their lack of a real faith. This further indicates the weakness of the disciples. Our Lord's speech was shot through with doubt of the twelve and recognition of the weakness of the disciples, which needs tabulating to show its full force:

- |    |          |   |
|----|----------|---|
| 14 | :2       | "If it were not so" - implying they doubted   |
|    |          | "If I go... I will come again" - using logic to answer their implied doubt.   |
|    | :5       | "We know not whither Thou goest"  |
|    | :7       | "If ye had known me"  |
|    | :9       | "Have I been so long with you, and yet hast thou not known me?"   |
|    | :10,11   | "Believest thou?... believe me"   |
|    | :14      | "If ye shall ask..."  |
|    | :15      | "If ye love me... if ye loved me, ye would rejoice...if a man love me" (v.28,23)                                    |
| 15 | :4       | "Abide in me... no more can ye, except ye abide in me... without me ye can do nothing...if ye abide in me"          |
|    | :9,14,15 | "Continue ye... ye are my friends, if ye...I have called you friends" - implying 'But you've got to live up to it'. |

- :17 "These things I command you" - emphatic, desperate warning
- :20 "Remember the word"
- 16 :1 "That ye should not be offended"
- :5 "None of you asketh me, Whither goest Thou?" - implying Jesus was disappointed that they hadn't. "Sorrow hath filled your heart" (v.6) seems a similar rebuke.
- :24 "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask..."
- :31 "Do ye now believe? (said almost sarcastically)... ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone" - cp. Joshua and Moses questioning Israel whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away.

“Let not your heart be troubled... neither let it be afraid” (:1,27) repeats Moses’ final encouragement to Israel to “fear not, neither be dismayed” (Dt. 31:8; 1:21,29; 7:18). Inheritance of the Kingdom was assured- if they believed.

I think it is worth all of us pausing to ask the most basic question: Do we *really* believe that God exists? "Those who say that they believe in God and yet neither love nor fear him, do not in fact believe in him but in those who have taught them that God exists. Those who believe that they believe in God, but without any passion in their heart, any anguish of mind, without uncertainty, without doubt, without an element of despair even in their consolation, believe only in the God-idea, not in God". The Jews must have been shocked when the Lord told them to "believe in God" (Jn. 14:1 RVmg.). For there were no atheists amongst them. What the Lord Jesus was saying was that their faith was in the God-idea, not in the real God. For if they believed the Father, they would accept His Son. We must ask whether we feel any real passion for Him, any true emotion, any sense of spiritual crisis, of radical motivation... See on Acts 16:34.

There are many other references in the Upper Room discourse to Moses- without doubt, Moses was very much in the Lord’s mind as He faced His end. Consider at your leisure how Jn. 14:1 = Ex. 14:31; Jn. 14:11 = Ex. 14:8. When the Lord speaks in the Upper Room of manifesting the Father and Himself unto the disciples (Jn. 14:21,22), He is alluding to the way that Moses asked God to “manifest Yourself unto me” (Ex. 33:18 LXX). The Lord’s allusion makes Himself out to be God’s representative, and all those who believe in Him to be as Moses, receiving the vision of God’s glory. Note that it was that very experience above all others which marks off Moses in Rabbinic writings as supreme and beyond all human equal. And yet the Lord is teaching that that very experience of Moses is to be shared *to an*



*even higher degree* by all His followers. It would've taken real faith and spiritual ambition for those immature men who listened to the Lord that evening to really believe it... And the same difficult call comes to us too.

The command not to be troubled is also an allusion to "Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them" (Dt. 1:41). Yet the contrast is with Moses, who fain would have gone ahead into the promised land to prepare the place, but was unable.

14:2- see on Lk. 14:12.

*In my Father's house are many dwelling places*- This is a form of the verb 'to abide' which features so frequently in John's record. The Father and Son seek to abide in the believer through the Spirit, deep in the heart of the believer (:17; 1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). In this sense, each believer becomes like one of the rooms or cubicles around the temple, each used by a different priest. Insofar as the Spirit abides in us now, we are the temple of God, we are the new priesthood, and are therefore called to active service for others to His glory.

*If it were not so, I would have told you*- The offer of salvation is so repeatedly stated by the Father and Son throughout the Bible that we are left with a terrible choice: Either it is true, or God is the worst deceiver. And if that were the case, the Lord as the obviously good man would have told us. This awful choice points up the amazing truth- that God really wishes us to be saved and assures any and every believer of the certainty of salvation.

*I go to prepare a place for you*- The abiding Spirit was only given as a result of the Lord's death and glorification (7:38,39), and He will go on throughout the Comforter discourse to make this point. He was going to the cross, and to the intense mutual glorification of Father and Son there of which He has just spoken in chapter 13. He is speaking here in response to Peter's question as to where the Lord Jesus was now going to disappear to, i.e. in death. "I go to prepare a place for you" alludes to the idea of Moses and the Angel bringing Israel "into the place which I have prepared" (Ex. 23:30).

And it is also surely an allusion to the Palestinian tradition that the wife came to live with the new husband after a year and a day, whilst He 'prepared the place' for her. The cross was His purchase of us as His bride. The bridegroom was "taken away" from the wedding guests (Mk. 2:20)- the same word used in the LXX of Is. 53:8 for the 'taking away' of the Lord Jesus in His crucifixion death. But the groom is 'taken away' from the guests- because he is going off to marry his bride. The cross, in all its tears, blood and pain, was the Lord's wedding to us.

14:3- see on Lk. 17:34; 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 4:15.

*And if I go and prepare a place for you*- The Lord's death and glorification on the cross [in God's eyes], being lifted up in glory from God's viewpoint, was in order to release the Spirit. This was symbolized by the water which came from the Lord's side, and His breathing His last breath / spirit toward the weak and fearful disciples. He had asked the disciples to "prepare" the Passover meal for them (s.w. Lk. 22:12). And now He demonstrates the mutuality between Him and His followers by saying that He was now going to prepare a place for *them*, an abiding place, on account of actually being the Paschal lamb.

*I will come again*- The coming again refers therefore to His resurrection, and the spiritual intimacy with His followers which the gift of the Spirit would enable. There is of course

some reference to the second coming, but the Lord is to go on now to explain that His physical coming and presence were to be experienced in spiritual essence by His presence amongst them through the Spirit. The way He was going was to the cross- not to Heaven. There our place was prepared. He “came again” in resurrection.

The fact we sin and fail inevitably militates against a robust faith that “we will be there”. The Lord predicted how Peter would deny him; but went straight on to assure the shocked and worried disciples: “Let not your heart be troubled [because some of you will fail me]: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you... if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 13:36-14:3). These wonderful words of assurance were in the very context of predicting the disciples’ failure. It’s as if the Lord is saying: ‘Don’t let the fact that you will fail me shake your faith that I will never fail you, and I will save you in the end, despite your weakness and collapses of faith’.

*And will receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also-* This speaks of the spiritual intimacy which would be achieved through the gift of the Spirit released by the Lord's death. His death was enabling or preparing the abiding place by the Spirit in every believers' heart. "Where I am" is a distinct present tense. His being so united with the Father, able to lift up His eyes to Heaven and pray with no senses of barrier, was to be shared with the believers on account of the gift of the Spirit released through His death. This idea of His relationship and unity with the Father being shared with us is the great theme of His prayer of chapter 17. Where He was in His relationship with the Father would be ours. He would 'receive us unto Himself'- a phrase so intimate that it implies the closest form of marital union. It is used of taking a woman unto oneself in marriage (Mt. 1:20,24). "Unto myself" is the very phrase He used in 12:32 of how the cross would draw all the men of the new creation "unto me". This drawing unto and into Himself is all the work of the Spirit, an outflow of His work on the cross. The idea is not at all of going to be with Him in Heaven, but of being personally connected with Him; being received unto Himself is to be drawn unto Him on the cross. Again there is a connection with the prologue, where Israel generally did not "receive" Him, but those who did were given the Spirit of adoption, His grace / gift, His fullness (1:11,12,16 s.w.). The Jewish world refused to receive the gift of the Spirit (:17 s.w.). The same word is used of the receipt of the Spirit through His death (7:39; 20:22 "receive the Holy Spirit"; 1 Jn. 2:27 "the anointing which you have received"). There is a mutuality in all this; we receive Him, and He receives us (:20 s.w.). The receipt of the Spirit enables us to be received unto and into Himself, to be with Him where He was with the Father as He spoke those words. To deny the Spirit's operation is to miss out on the relationship with the Lord Jesus which is the essence of Christianity.

14:4 *And where I go, you know the way-* He had often told them of His forthcoming death, but rarely if ever about His ascension to Heaven. Where He was going clearly refers to the cross. The Lord seems to have imputed their future maturity to them at a time when they still didn't have it. 'You know where I go', He told them (:4,5)- when, as they themselves responded, they didn't. He said that they knew the Spirit of Truth, whereas the Jewish world didn't (14:17)- because “in that day you shall know...” (14:20). And this approach will help us with our immature and frustrating brethren; we need to impute to them that spiritual maturity to which we must believe they will rise.

14:5 *Thomas said to him: Lord, we do not know where you go. How do we discern the way?*- See on :4. Here we have our typical problem- we know the way of the cross, but in practice we don't know- or rather, we don't want to know. The disciples were confused as to where the Lord Jesus was going and to where He was leading them. His response was that He was and is "the way". C.H. Dodd in *The Interpretation Of John's Gospel* p. 412 suggests the meaning of Jn. 14:4,5 as: "You know the way [in that I am the way], but you do not know where it leads", and Thomas therefore objects: "If we do not know the destination, how can we know the way?". The Lord's response is that He is the way. That's it. It's not so much the destination as the way there. The excellency of knowing Christ demands of us to walk in His way, to know Him as the life right now, to live His life, to be in His way. The way is the goal; 'You don't need any further horizons than that, than me, right now'. This is totally unappreciated by the prosperity Gospel.

14:6- see on Jn. 13:37.

*Jesus said to him: I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me-* The way to the cross had been lived out by the Lord throughout His life. And that too is "the truth". "The way" was to the cross, and there we find and see the only true kind of life. That "way" of crucifixion life leads us to the Father, just as the Lord understood His death on the cross as a going to the Father. Because the cross so supremely manifested the Father, there we find Him, if we will live the life of Christ crucified. Yet if we keep His commandments, the Father and Son come to us (14:23), and we come to them. The cross enables a mutuality of relationship between us all. Note too that "the way" is now another term for "the cross". They were asking where He was going; was He going to die on a cross? And He replies that "I am the way"- that they ought to have realized that His whole way of life was a cross carrying, and so of course, He would be literally going to die on the cross; He would follow His "way" to the end.

"I am *the way*" may allude to the one great way of Proverbs. The whole way of life which leads to the Kingdom, the things we do, our deepest thoughts, our daily decisions; these are all "the way" which leads to the Kingdom; and yet Christ is "the way". This clearly means that all these things, the very essence of our being, the fibre of our thought processes, the basis of all our works; must be the Lord Jesus Christ. The fact God's ways and principles are unchanging encourage our self-examination; for there is always the rock of God and His way against which to compare our ways. The Lord Jesus is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

14:7- see on Jn. 17:7.

*If you had truly known me, you would have truly known my Father also. From this time forward you will truly know Him and will have seen Him-* The Lord tells the Father in 17:7,8 that the disciples have known Him and the Father, unlike the Jewish world who had not known Him (16:3). Here we see a wonderful principle revealed: The Lord speaks so positively to the Father about us, imputing righteousness and levels of commitment to us which we do not currently have. They would truly know and see the Father through the work of the cross and the gift of the Spirit which would open their eyes to the Son and thereby to His Father.

14:8- see on Dt. 5:4,5.

*Philip said to him: Lord, show us the Father, and it suffices us-* The Lord replies that He is the manifestation of the Father. This is the language of Ex. 33:18 LXX, where Moses likewise asks God “show Yourself to me”. The answer was in the theophany on Sinai, with the Name of Yahweh declared, as full of grace and truth. This, according to Philip’s allusion to it, is what we see in Jesus. And this is why the prologue in Jn. 1 speaks of the Lord Jesus in terms of the theophany of Exodus, that in His personality the full glory of the Father dwelt. Philip was the one who commented that “two hundred pennyworth of bread is not *sufficient*” for the crowd to eat and be filled. Yet he now uses the same, relatively uncommon, Greek word some time later, when he says that if he could see the Father, it would ‘suffice’ him (Jn. 6:7; 14:8). Perhaps John intended to bring out the growth in Philip; he now perceived that the bread created by the Lord for the crowd was indeed representative of the bread of life, the Lord Jesus who was the manifestation of the Father. The Lord had taught in Jn. 6:35 that He was the bread, and He bade His followers ‘see’ Him; and Philip had absorbed the point, even though, as the Lord makes clear, Philip still did not ‘see’ Him as he ought.

The relationship of the Lord Jesus with His Father was evidently intended by Him to be a very real, achievable pattern for all those in Him. The prayer of chapter 17 makes this clear, for the Lord there prays that we would share His relationship with the Father, or as He has just said, we would be with Him where He then was in relationship with the Father. He wasn't an aberration, an uncopiable, inimitable freak. John's Gospel brings this out very clearly. The Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father, the Son knows men, men know the Son, and so men know both the Father and Son (10:14,15; 14:7,8). The Son is in the Father as the Father is in the Son; men are in the Son and the Son is in men; and so men are in the Father and Son (Jn. 14:10,11; 17:21,23,26). As the Son did the Father's works and was thereby "one" with Him, so it is for the believers who do the Father's works (Jn. 10:30,37,38; 14:8-15). Whilst there obviously was a unique bonding between Father and Son on account of the virgin birth, the Lord Jesus certainly chooses to speak as if His Spirit enables the relationship between Him and His Father to be reproduced in our experience.

14:9 *Jesus said to him: Philip, have I been with you such a long time, and still you do not truly know me? He that has seen me has seen the Father. How do you ask: Show us the Father?-* Although the Lord speaks quite toughly to them at this point, as noted on :7, He is totally positive about them in talking with the Father about them (17:7,8). They did not truly know Him nor the Father, and yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did “know” Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn't then “know”, but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that “In that day you shall know” (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to “know” Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively. For to love someone is to impute things to them which we only hope for. That is the simple basis of the 'imputed righteousness' of which Paul writes in Romans.

14:10 *Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I speak not from myself; but the Father abiding in me does His works-* John's Gospel especially seems to speak of the “words” and “works” of the Lord Jesus almost interchangeably (Jn. 14:10-14); in illustration of the way in which the word of Jesus, which

was the word of God, was constantly and consistently made flesh in Him, as the prologue stated (1:14); issuing in the works / actions of this man who was "the word made flesh". See on Jn. 8:28. The Lord is encouraging us to see beyond the miracles or "works"; all of His words, works, miracles, character, spirit, personality were summarized in Him as a person. There was perfect congruence between Him as a person and all that He said, did and showed Himself to be. He was as He has just stated "the truth", the word made flesh. The appeal to let His words abide in us does not therefore only imply that we are to memorize His recorded words and endlessly recycle them in our minds. Although there may well be an allusion to the idea of memorizing the Gospel records. It is more a question of allowing Him to dwell or abide within us, with all His spirit, words, personality and essence of His being. For this would be the Hebraic understanding of a man's "word".

14:11- see on 14:1.

*Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake-* He wanted them to perceive the indwelling of the Father in Himself, and His mutual abiding in the Father, because this was the very thing which He was promising them- to share His relationship with the Father, to come to be where He now was with the Father (:3). The prayer of John 17 and the promises of the effect of the Comforter all speak of the same possibility.

As noted on 10:38, the Lord was willing to accept 'belief' if it was simply at the level of accepting that His miracles ["works"] were from God; in the hope that He could take such faith further. Yet here He seems to be saying that belief in Him as a person, was the same as believing in Him for the sake of His miracles. He as a personality, as a character, was the most powerful witness, at least equal to that witness provided by the miracles. To encounter Him without miracles ought to be persuasive enough, and we see this from the conversion of the Samaritan woman, who believed He was in the Father without seeing miracles.

14:12- see on Mk. 11:24; Jn. 17:20.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: He that believes in me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to the Father-* As noted on :10 and :11, "the works" of the Lord refer not only to His miracles but to all that He was. His going to the Father on the cross would release the gift of the Spirit (7:39). This was and is fundamentally a gift of internal strengthening in the heart, although it had issue in miraculous works for the disciples in the first century context.

It may be the Lord had in mind that the disciples through having the miraculous gifts of the Spirit would do greater works than He had done. But this raises the question of what is meant by "greater". It could mean "more", numerically. But the Greek word specifically carries the idea of being older, more mature- e.g. "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (Jn. 8:53) in the context means 'Are you older than Abraham?'. So He could be saying that the disciples would do greater works" in the sense that collectively between us we would reveal to an even greater or mature extent the works of God. Because there must be a connection in His thought with Jn. 5:20, where alone elsewhere we meet the phrase "greater works": "For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and greater works than these will he shew him, that ye may marvel". The greater works that the Father showed the Son

were the works which the believers in Christ were to perform subsequent to the Lord's resurrection. The "works" are the works of God Himself. The community of believers in Christ are doing His works, acting as God would do if He were a human being living on planet earth, and in this sense we are doing greater works than what Jesus personally did; for He was 'only' one person, and we are many. And Jesus was aware of this. He explained repeatedly that the works He did were the works which God did (Jn. 5:36; 10:25,32,37,38; 14:10,11). As God showed Him the works He was to do, so He showed those works to the world in which He lived (Jn. 10:32). Paul therefore states that there are good works which are prepared in Heaven for us to fulfil: "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). In a sense, all the works were finished from the foundation of the world, it's for us to go out there today and perform them (Heb. 4:3). Practically this means that as we contemplate "good works", we can be assured that somehow God will provide all that's needed for them to be performed. Our little faith so often stops us from performing them because we doubt whether we have the resources, the time, the money, the ability... whereas instead the need should be the call, and we should approach them in confidence that this is indeed God's will for us to do His works here on earth. For He has prepared both them and us to fulfil them.

The works of the Father and Son are defined in 6:29 as believing on the Son whom the Father sent. This is what it means to do the works of God. We could therefore read these promises as John's version of the great commission- to take the Gospel into all the world, and to trust that we shall be empowered by the Spirit to do this.

Another take on all this is that the potential enabled by the Spirit was never fully lived up to by the disciples, just as it is not with us. The Lord's promise that whatever the disciples asked, they would be given seems never to have been fully realized in them (Jn. 15:16). Likewise the 'prophecy' here that they would do greater works than done by the Lord, once they received the Comforter, and possibly the promise that they would be taught "all the truth" about "things to come" (Jn. 16:13), were all likewise promises / prophecies whose potential it seems the disciples never fully rose up to.

14:13 *And whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son-* This is not a blank cheque promise. I suggested on :12 that the works of God were to bring others to faith in His Son, for that is how they are defined in 6:29. It is in that context that whatever we ask for will be ultimately provided. The connection with the great commission in the Synoptics is in the promise that "all power" would be given to enable this work to be done (Mt. 28:18). The laboured emphasis upon "in my name" here and in :14 would then connect with the command to "preach in his name" with the promise of the Spirit to empower them in that work (Lk. 24:47,49). Whilst we do not now have the miraculous gifts, the essence of this remains powerfully true. All shall be provided, the Spirit works in non-miraculous ways, if we ask for empowerment to glorify the Father in the Son through bringing others to Him. My own ministry is proof enough of that.

14:14 *If you shall ask anything in my name, that will I do-* This repeats word for word the assurance of :13; but as noted there, it is in the context of doing the "works" of the Father, which are bringing others to faith in His Son (6:29).

14:15- see on Jn. 17:6.

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments*- As noted earlier in this chapter, the Lord is ever alluding to the last speech of Moses in Deuteronomy; here the appeal to "keep my commandments" sets the Lord as greater than Moses, mediating a new law to a new Israel; for "keep the commandments" reflects a major identical theme in Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,22; 13:3,4; 19:9; 30:16. The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6).

But the Lord's commandments are "not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3); it is not that we have been given a whole set of detailed regulations similar to the 613 given by Moses. It is not hard to be obedient to His commandments, 1 Jn. 5:3 implies. The Lord states clearly that He has left us one commandment- to love one another as He loved us (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). The plural "commandments" may be a reflection of the Hebraism whereby the plural is used to emphasize the greatness and cardinal value of one singular thing, the plural of majesty. This is perhaps confirmed by 15:17: "These things[plural] I command you: That you love one another". Love of each other was the great 'thing'. To love should not be grievous; if we are walking in the light of His endless love. Therefore "This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another" (1 Jn. 3:23). The commandment to love as He loved us is only capable of understanding and fulfilment if we have believed into the Name of the Lord Jesus, and experienced that love, having God's love shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit we receive after believing into Him (Rom. 5:5).

God is His word, as the prologue states (Jn. 1:1); to love God is to love His word. If we love His Son, we will keep His words (Jn. 14:15,21; 15:10). This is evidently alluding to the many Old Testament passages which say that Israel's love for God would be shown through their keeping of His commands (Ex. 20:6; Dt. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1,13,22; 30:16; Josh. 22:5). Israel were also told that God's commands were *all* related to showing love (Dt. 11:13; 19:9). So there is a logical circuit here: We love God by keeping His commands, therefore His commands are fundamentally about love. Thus love is the fulfilling of the law of God; both under the Old and New covenants (Rom. 13:10). It is all too easy to see our relationship with God and His Son as a question of obedience to their words, as if this is somehow a test of our spirituality. This is to humanize God too far, to see God as if He were a fallible man; for if we were God, we would institute some kind of written test for our creatures: 'Do this, and if you don't, then I know you don't love me'. The God of glory is beyond this kind of thing. He is His word. If we love Him, we will be eager to know His words, we will dwell upon them, we will live them out in our daily experience as far as we can. In our seeking to know an infinite God, we will of course fail to see or appreciate the spirit of all His words. But He appreciates this. Yet in a sense our attitude to His word is an indication of our state of 'in-loveness' with God. Reading His word will not be a chore, a mountain to be grimly climbed and achieved each day; it will be a vital and natural part of our daily life, as natural and spontaneous as our desire to eat; and even *more so* (cp. Job 23:12).

14:16 *And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, that he may be with you for ever*- Another Comforter / intercessor implies that the Lord Jesus was the first Paraclete [as confirmed in 1 Jn. 2:1]. Yet Moses was the foremost intercessor for Israel, and is actually called 'the Paraclete' in the Midrash on Ex. 12:29. But the idea is that the Lord was only physically with them for so long; the Comforter would mean that His presence was with them "for ever". Any attempt to confine the work of the Comforter to the first century is

therefore ill founded. For the contrast is with how the Lord physically was with them for only a period; but the Comforter, His abiding presence, would remain with them "for ever".

14:17 *The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive. For it neither sees him nor knows him. You truly know him, for he abides with you and shall be in you-* This is clarified when we appreciate the allusion to the prologue. The Jewish world did not receive the Lord Jesus, and therefore did not receive His Spirit; but those who did received power to become God's children, and the grace / gift of all His fullness (1:11,12,16). "You truly know him" was not then true; as noted on :9 and :10, the Lord is imputing knowledge to them which they did not have at that very moment. We too need to see the spiritual potential in people, rather than relating to them how they are at this given moment.

Likewise the Spirit of truth, so named because it would guide them into all truth (16:13), "abides with you" right then. Although the Spirit was only poured out at the Lord's glorification on the cross (7:38,39), this was so certain that the Lord perceived that potentially, the Spirit was within them already. This is the scenario in Corinthians, where they had been given the Spirit potentially, but were "not spiritual" (1 Cor. 3:1); and it is the case with many believers today who have not perceived the potential of the Spirit within them.

The promised Spirit "shall be in you"; it speaks fundamentally of an internal power, guiding into truth (16:13), which is a matter of the mind rather than miraculous external gifts. The Lord has just defined Himself personally as "the truth", so the promise is not so much of intellectual purity of understanding as relationship with Him; for "truth" is a Hebraism for relationship. It is only the Western mindset which would see in "truth" here a reference to academic, intellectual purity of understanding.

14:18- see on Mt. 18:6.

*I will not leave you desolate as orphans. I will come to you-* The Lord has just addressed them as "little children" (13:33), and senses their panic that He is leaving them. He assures them that He will come to them, just as He has stated in :3; that coming to them would be to receive them for ever to Himself through the ministry of His abiding Spirit. The allusion is to the way the Rabbis spoke of their disciples being left orphans after the Rabbi died. But the Lord's death would not be like that, but the opposite. His death would lead to His abiding personal presence and continual teaching of His disciples deep within their hearts. It is this allusion which explains the emphasis upon the Comforter providing continued teaching to the disciples. The discourse about the Comforter is inserted it seems in place of the Olivet prophecy, which in the Synoptics forms the Lord's promise of literally coming back. John's Gospel was written after them, and he is perhaps addressing the concern that the Lord had not returned, and might delay His return, by reminding them that the Comforter enabled the Lord's presence to be with us just as really as when He was literally present. There is an understandable desire in every true believer for the Lord's literal return; but we must be careful that our enthusiasm for it does not become so obsessive that we fail to sense His very real coming to us now in the Spirit. It is unfortunately significant that some of those most obsessive about the signs of the times fulfilling Bible prophecy and pointing to the Lord's imminent return are in fact those who also deny the operation of the Spirit today.

14:19 *Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you will see me. Because I live,*



*you shall live also-* The Lord carefully uses a present tense: "I live", not "I will live". His life was going to become their life because He would give them His spirit of life. The Lord would no longer be visible to the Jewish world; but He would be 'seen' by the disciples because the gift of the Comforter would be such that His presence was as real as if He were physically present.

14:20- see on Jn. 17:7.

*In that day, you shall truly know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you-* The "truth" in to which they would be guided by the Comforter, "the spirit of truth", would not be intellectual purity of understanding, but the knowledge or seeing of the Father and Son. And they would also "know" that "I [am] in you". This promise is often alluded to by John when later writing to the converts made from hearing or reading his Gospel record. For he writes about "hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13; also alluded to in 1 Jn. 2:3,5; 3:19; 4:6). So the knowledge that the Son dwells in us is from the experience of the Spirit. "That day" therefore refers to the day when the Spirit would be given, and they would 'see' the Lord ever before them and have His personal presence within them (:19).

14:21- see on Jn. 14:1.

*He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he that loves me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him-* I suggested on :15 that the plural "commandments" refers to the singular commandment to love which is paramount to Christianity. And the connection between commandment and love is continued here. To love one another as He loved us, keeping the commandment[s], is to love the Lord. And John later makes this explicit, in explaining that love of the Lord and love of each other are related and inseparable. The commandment[s] must be both 'had' and kept. To love those in Christ was a commandment which the Jewish world did not 'have' in that they did not accept it, and not only killed God's Son but persecuted and hated all who believed in Him. John's letters refer to those who hate their brother, and the reference is primarily to the Jewish persecution of their Christian brothers. Obedience to the command to love one another is effectively a loving of the Son, which is a loving of the Father; and in response the Son will love us in manifesting Himself to us. This self-manifestation of the Lord to those who love Him and His brethren is again through the ministry of the Spirit. It is paralleled in :23 with coming to the believer and abiding ["make our abode"] with him. "Manifest myself" is the word used of the manifestation of the risen Christ in Acts 10:40, and of the appearing of resurrected people of Mt. 27:53. John uses a related verb about the 'showing' of the Lord to the disciples after His resurrection (21:1,14). The evidence of the resurrection is not therefore in the literal visible appearance of the risen Lord to believers, but in His appearance or manifestation to them by the Spirit. In this sense His life is manifested or shown to us (1 Jn. 1:2 s.w.). This is why His resurrection, His life, His living again, can never be proven in Euclidean terms; it is a matter of experience. No amount of apologetics can prove the Lord rose from the dead, that a living body emerged from a cave on the outskirts of Jerusalem; and yet this is the cornerstone of the whole Christian faith. It is proven by His resurrection manifestation to those who accept His claims and live in His love, and whose lives are His life, His living. This may appear a circular argument, and so it is, in secular, human terms. But the transformation of life elicited by it, in radical love for each other, is to be the exhibit which cannot be argued against.

14:22- see on Jn. 7:4.

*Judas (not Iscariot) said to him: Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?-* They were far from understanding. His manifestation to the believers was because they had accepted Him and His claims, and were obeying His commandment to love each other. The Jewish world had not received Him, and so the internal manifestation of the Spirit could not be experienced by them. In simple terms, they did not love Him (:23).

14:23 *Jesus answered and said to him: If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him; and we will come to him and make our home with him-* The Jewish world did not accept the light of the Lord Jesus, as the prologue emphasizes. The manifestation of the Lord would be through His Spirit in the hearts of those who loved Him, and also loved their brethren, i.e. 'kept His word', His singular commandment of loving each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). See on :15. John's letters put this in so many words by saying that if we love the Father and Son, then we will love other believers. Here the Lord says that if we love Him, then we will "keep my word", which is the singular commandment to love one another. In that life of love, the Father and Son will 'come' to us by the Spirit, as explained on :3, and abide with us on a permanent level ["make our home"]. Not just in moments of emotional connection with them, but on a permanent basis.

14:24 *He that does not love me, does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me-* The words which are to be kept, as noted on :15, refer to the singular commandment to love each other (13:34; 15:12; 1 Jn. 4:21; 5:2). If we do not love the Lord, we will not love our brethren. And that word, of radical love, is the word of the Father. He is love, in that sense. This interpretation is confirmed by John's later interpretation of these words in 1 Jn. 4:16: "And we know and have believed the love which God has toward us. God is love, and he that abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him". See on :31, where again, keeping God's commandment meant simply loving Him, unto death on the cross for His people.

14:25- see on Jn. 1:38.

*These things have I spoken to you, while still with you-* The Lord predicted His personal presence amongst them through the Spirit before He left them. He didn't leave them to just experience His presence through the Spirit. That experience would remind them that this was precisely what He had predicted. And yet He realized that at that time, they did not understand. But the coming of the Spirit would make clear what He meant. These words spoken about the Comforter, spoken at that moment whilst still with them, were the words which would be recalled to their mind by the Comforter (:26).

14:26 *But the comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and cause you to remember all that I said to you-* The Spirit was "in my name" in that it would be as if the Lord was literally with them. The Lord was aware that His teaching about the Comforter could not then be understood by them; and so He assures them that the Comforter would make them remember these words about the Comforter and then all would be plain to them; see on :25. It could be that the Comforter had a specific role in

recalling literally all the Lord had spoken to them, so that the Gospel records could be written under inspiration. But the connection with :25 suggests to me that the Lord had in view His specific teaching about the Comforter.

14:27 *Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, do I give it to you. Let not your heart be disturbed, neither let it be fearful-* “Peace’ [‘shalom’ - the usual Semitic greeting] is my farewell to you” is an example of how He seems to have almost purposefully delighted in using language in a startlingly different way. There are times when the Lord Jesus seems to have almost coined words. The gift of the Spirit would be the source of peace with God, which is how "peace" is commonly used in the Bible. Therefore they need have no fear before God, troubled thoughts about the outcome of judgment day; see on :1. The peace given would affect their heart; the gift of the Spirit in view was primarily internal, in the heart. "My peace" refers to the peace which the Lord had with the Father, with no barriers. This is another way of saying what He does so often in this section- that the Spirit was enabling them to have the same relationship with the Father which He had. His *shalom* [peace] was not as the [Jewish] world could give it; each time He called out *shalom* across the street or to the guys at work each morning, He meant it. And He perceived that it would take His death on the cross to really achieve what He was giving to them in His words.

The Lord’s commission to His preachers comes along with a promise that He would “be with [them] always”. This is perhaps Matthew’s equivalent to John’s promise of the Comforter, who would abide with the Lord’s people for ever. The promise of Holy Spirit support in the work of fulfilling the great commission is not necessarily fulfilled in the ability to do miracles etc. It was in the first century, but not today. Yet the promise that “I am with you always, even [as you fulfil my commission to preach] unto the ends of the world”, is surely fulfilled in the promised Comforter, who is to ‘abide with us for ever’. What does this mean? The Comforter clearly refers to the personal presence of Jesus, even though He is not visibly with us:

<b>The Comforter</b>	<b>The Lord Jesus</b>
Will come into the world	Jn. 5: 43; 16:28; 18:37
Comes forth from the Father	Ditto
Given by the Father	Jn. 3:16
Sent by the Father	Jn. 3:17
The spirit of truth	The truth Jn. 14:6
The Holy Spirit	The Holy One of God Jn. 6:69
The disciples would know / recognize the Comforter	As they knew / recognized Jesus Jn. 14:7,9
Would remain within the disciples	Jn. 14:20,23; 15:4,5; 17:23,26
Declares things to come	Jn. 4:25,26
Bears witness, against the world	Jn. 8:14; 7:7
Not accepted by the world	Jn. 5:43; 12:48
Unseen by the world	Jn. 16:16

Because of this, the Lord made a clever word play by saying that “‘Peace’ [*shalom*] is my farewell to you” (Jn. 14:27)- when ‘Peace’ was what you said when you met someone, to say ‘Hello’. His farewell in the flesh was His ‘hello’, in that His personal presence would be with them. This Comforter, this personal presence of Jesus, is given *especially in the context of fulfilling the great commission to take Him to the whole world*. He will be with us, there will be a special sense of His abiding presence amongst us, because we are witnessing “in Him”, and our witness is a shared witness with Him. Any who have done any witnessing work, not necessarily missionary work, but any witnessing to Him, will have felt and known His especial presence, as He promised. And we live in a time similar to that when John’s Gospel was written- a time when the church were disappointed the Lord had not returned as quickly as they thought He would, when the eyewitnesses of Jesus in the flesh were not with them any longer. John’s point is that through the Comforter, it’s as good as if Jesus *is* here with us; and he brings out in his gospel how things like the judgment, eternal life, the coming of Jesus etc. all essentially occur within the life of the believer right now.

14:28 *You heard how I said to you: I go away and I come to you. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father. For the Father is greater than I-* As explained on :3, the going away was to the cross and the coming to them through His abiding presence in the Comforter. "If you loved me" may seem rather severe, seeing they were willing to die for Him. But their sorrow rather than rejoicing at His departure was actually because in real spiritual terms they did not love Him; they wanted Him to remain for their own sakes. If they loved the essence of what He and the Father stood for, they would have rejoiced at His departure, for it meant the giving of the Comforter which would glorify the Father and Son so much more than if He did not depart. "The Father is greater than I" may mean that the Father's glory was far greater an issue than the Lord's death or presence with them- the issues they were immediately concerned about. To love the Son was to love the glorification of the Father, who was greater than Him. They should therefore have rejoiced at the teaching that He was going away in order to come to them in the power of the Comforter. The same word has just been used of how "greater works" were to be done when the Comforter was given (:12), on account of the Lord's going to the Father on the cross. The "works", the miracles, would glorify the Father and Son (2:11; 11:4,40). The cross itself would glorify the Father and Son (12:41).

14:29- see on Jn. 12:16.

*And now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe-* The purpose of prophecy isn’t to specifically predict the future, but so that we shall be able to recognize the signs when they appear. The disciples did not expect Jesus to enter into Jerusalem “sitting on an ass’s colt” in fulfilment of Zech. 9:9. But when He did, then soon afterwards, all became clear to them- that He had fulfilled this prophecy (Jn. 12:16). Likewise with prophecies such as “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” in Ps. 69:9, and even the Lord’s own prophecies of His resurrection. When it happened, “his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture (Ps. 69:9), and the word which Jesus had said” (Jn. 2:17-22). Such later clarification of the Lord's words and actions was all part of the ministry of the Comforter to the disciples (:26).

14:30 *I will no longer say much to you. For the prince of the world comes; but he has no claim on me-* There was a Rabbinic tradition that the whole world was under the power of the

Angel of death which controlled Egypt at the first Passover, but had no dominion over Israel. They referred to this Angel as the *Sar ha-olam*, and at the time of Jesus the phrase "Prince of this world" would have been understood as referring to this Angel. This is how the Lord's use of the phrase would have been understood. He described the "prince of this world"- the Angel of death and darkness- as coming to him and finding nothing in Him. This would be alluding to the Angel of death at the first Passover (and Jesus was speaking at Passover time) coming to each house and finding nothing worthy of death there because of the blood of the lamb on the lintel. Jesus may have been using the 'language of the day' as He did regarding Beelzebub and demons, but the consistent fitting of the type implies Jesus believed the Rabbinic idea was at least partially correct, in that the whole world apart from Israel was under the control of a specific Angel. However, spiritually Israel were not under the protection of the blood of the lamb because they rejected Christ. The "prince of this world" Angel would therefore destroy them too. I have suggested on 12:31 that this prince refers to leader of the Jewish system, Caiaphas. This man, the very epitome of apparent spirituality, who had dominion over Israel, was being compared to the Angel of evil which the Jews believed had dominion over the Jews' enemies but not over the Jews. The Lord is turning it all around, to show that actually the Jews were like the Egyptians, and were under the domination of a leader who would not preserve them from the destruction now coming to them.

The Jews believed that the *Sar ha-olam* had no claim upon the Jews who were the true Israel, covered by the blood of the Passover lamb. The Lord is saying that *He* is that true Israel upon whom Caiaphas and his evil system had no power. This is the force of "he has no claim on me". The Angel whom the Jews thought would not touch them because of the other Angels hovering over them (the real idea of the word 'Passover') to protect them from the destroying Angel, was going to destroy them; the protecting Angel which hovered over them and led them through the wilderness was "turned to be their enemy"- i.e. to be the destroying Angel (Is. 63:10), the *Sar ha-olam*. And that destroying Angel was operating on earth through his human representative, Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world.

14:31 *And he comes so that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, thus I shall now do. Arise, let us leave here-* The prince of the Jewish world would come to take the Lord away to death, epitomized in his agent Judas, who 'came' to the Lord with the forces of the Jewish world to arrest Him (18:3). It was through reflection on all this that the Jewish world would "know" the Lord's sincerity, His love for the Father. That was however only potentially true, for even His death, with all the internal contradictions and evil within the Jewish system which were thereby exposed, did not bring all the Jewish world to know Him. "That the world may know" is an allusion to David's words just before the victory over Goliath.

The Lord's obedience to the Father's commandment was His love of the Father. Again we see a connection between love, and keeping commandment. I have suggested on :15 and :24 that the keeping of the Lord's commandment means loving our brethren unto the death of the cross, as He loved us. Here we see the same idea- the Son obeyed the Father's commandment by loving Him, unto death on the cross.

## CHAPTER 15

15:1- see on Lk. 13:8.

*I am the true vine and my Father is the husbandman-* The Lord Jesus in John's Gospel describes Himself in terms of the "I am..." formula. Each time, He was referring back to the burning bush revelation of Yahweh as the "I am"; and by implication, the Lord's audience are thereby placed in the position of Moses, intended to rise up in response as he did. This parable is in the direct context of the promise of the Spirit. This is expressed here as the Father's constant activity as our husbandman, seeking to elicit spiritual fruit from us. And likewise our partaking in the vine means that we receive the sap, representing the Spirit, without which we are "none of His" are dead, unable to bring forth fruit.

"The true vine" suggests that the community in view is the true one compared to a false one; and the false vine was the community of Israel: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt and planted it in this land" (Ps. 80:8).

In this parable, the mediation of the Spirit is envisaged as being provided collectively, to the whole vine. If we opt out of realistic mixing with each other, we are effectively resigning from Christ. For He *is* His brothers and sisters. He didn't say 'I am the trunk and you are the branches', He said 'I *am* the vine, and you are the branches'. We *are* Him, His body. Our attitude to our brothers and sisters is our attitude to Him. We cannot claim to love God if we don't love our brother. It's as simple as this.

The Father is the husbandman, and is noted for His long patience in waiting "for the precious fruit" (James 5:7). Every bit of spiritual development is so precious to Him. To hinder it by our attitude to others, or enforcing situations which are going to limit the development of spirituality in others, is deeply displeasing to God and frustrating of His purpose and work for people.

The same word is used by the Lord in the synoptics concerning the parable of the husbandmen in Mt. 21; Mk. 12 and Lk. 20. This is surely John's take on that parable. The Jewish husbandmen had failed to develop fruit for the Father, and had been replaced by other husbandmen. But ultimately, the owner of the vineyard also becomes the husbandman. He is manifested through our efforts to be husbandmen. If we consciously seek to develop spiritual fruit in others then we will experience God's especial blessing and empowerment of our efforts.

15:2- see on 2 Cor. 4:4.

*Every branch in me that carries no fruit, he prunes away; and every branch that carries fruit, he cleanses it, that it may bear more fruit-* The removed branch which was not cleansed refers initially to Judas, who had now left them, as he was the one of them who was not clean / cleansed (13:10). Bearing the fruit of the Spirit is absolutely essential; Paul puts it another way when he writes that if we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are "none of His". The Lord Jesus here speaks of how we as shoots on the vine tree are either 'cut off' in rejection, or 'trimmed / purged' to be more fruitful. There is a paronomasia here in the Greek text [i.e. a play on similar sounding verbs]- *airein* and *kathairein*. The point being that the purging process works through condemning oneself now; by going through the realization of our

condemnation now, we are thereby purged so that we avoid condemnation at the day of judgment.

The fruit to be produced is the fruit of the Spirit- which is all internal attributes, elicited by the sap / Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit (that which the Spirit produces) is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23). Nine qualities gathered as one cluster, just as on a grapevine.

As also to be noted on the parable of the vineyard in Isaiah 5, God does all He can to ensure that we have an optimal environment for bearing spiritual fruit. So often we complain that if only we were in this or that situation, then we would bear more fruit. But He knows best. The cleansing, spoken of in this Upper Room context, must be understood in the context of the Lord's washing of the disciples' feet, whereby they were cleansed, but not all (13:10); for Judas was not cleansed internally. His comment that feet needed regularly washing may refer to some regular cleansing by the Lord, of which He again speaks here. 'Cleansing' may refer to internal cleansing of the heart; the pure / cleansed in heart (Mt. 5:8), those cleansed "within" (Mt. 23:6), and the internal work of cleansing the heart and conscience is that of the Spirit, operating within the heart of believers.

15:3 *Already you are clean because of the word which I have spoken to you*- How does the Lord's word cleanse? It is inadequate to suppose that by reading the whole Bible, we are somehow internally cleansed. The same word is used in 13:10 of how they had been cleansed, but not all- for Judas was excepted. Yet he had heard the word, as spoken words- but was not cleansed. As ever in John, the prologue helps us toward understanding. "The word was made flesh", and was "in the beginning" of His ministry, and "was God". The reference is not to all the recorded statements of the Lord Jesus, as if we are to read and recite all the red letter words in a New Testament and thereby be cleansed by the exercise. I have suggested elsewhere that the Gospel records were indeed intended to be memorized. But "the word" is the Lord Jesus as a person, in the flesh, as the personality which was the sum total of all His words, miracles, work, personality and character. The word of John 1 was the light of men, in which they should live. *Logos*, "word", like *rhema*, is used to translate the Hebrew *dabar*. These terms, however, are used to refer not just to words, but to actions and persons. *Dabar* is used to refer to far more than spoken words; but to things and causes. When the Lord speaks of "My word", He means not simply His recorded statements, but He Himself, the summary of all His being and personhood. "The acts [*dabar*] of David" (1 Chron. 29:29) means not simply his words, but his acts and whole life story. "The things [*dabar*] which your eyes have seen" (Dt. 4:9) referred not to words heard, but to experience; and this is a common usage, speaking of event as a "word". In Hebraic thought, a 'word' is a thing done and not merely words as in lexical items. "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes [*dabar*]" (Dt. 4:21) doesn't refer to words so much as to the sake or cause of a person. The Lord's "word" must be understood in this Hebraic sense, far wider than simply His recorded speech as it stands in the Gospels. This is why He speaks of "My word[s]"; the word / *logos* / *dabar* which was Him. His reference is not to the words of God in the Bible, but to the word which was Him. Dt. 26:17 records that Israel had chosen Yahweh to be their King; but the Targum on this says that they had appointed the word / *logos* of God to be their king. The *logos* of a person is them, with all their actions and events; and thus the word of the Lord Jesus refers to He Himself, just as "the word was God" in the prologue.

We therefore at this point note the singular, "word", not "words" as we would expect if His utterances were in view. References in the plural to His "words" may well be an example of

the Hebrew plural of majesty- the one great word / *logos*, which in John's writing can be none other than the Lord personally. We are cleansed by Him, by His blood, His work, and His sacrifice of a uniquely perfect life. The association of cleansing with His sacrifice is a common New Testament theme.

15:4 *Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, so neither can you, except you abide in me-* The Lord's common Upper Room theme of 'abiding' in Him uses the same word as Moses used when exhorting his people to 'cleave unto' God (Dt. 10:20; 11:22 LXX). This abiding involved loving God and keeping His commandments- all ideas which occur together in Dt. 13:4; 30:20. The branch can only bear fruit if it receives the sap which is in the whole tree. This sap represents the Spirit, which is why this parable is found wedged in between the promises of the indwelling of the Comforter. Abiding in the Lord means Him abiding in us, which He does through the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (1 Jn. 3:24 etc.). The disciples were going to be tempted to turn away from the Lord; but He urges them to abide, because there can be no fruit of the Spirit on us unless the Spirit abides in us and brings forth those fruits. This is also a vital perspective on the claim that non-Christians produce spiritual fruit. The fruit brought forth by the Spirit, spiritual fruit, is indeed just that; and unless we are abiding in the vine, in the Lord Jesus, and He in us, then we simply cannot bring forth the fruit of the Spirit.

The man under the Old Covenant who made his offering of, e.g. an ox, at a place other than at "the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" was viewed as having shed blood and therefore was to be cut off from the congregation (Lev. 17:3,4). The Law foresaw that there would be this tendency, to worship God away from the rest of the congregation. Those who did so were condemned in the strongest terms: their sacrifice of an animal was seen as the murder of their brother, whereas they would have seen it as an expression of their righteousness. "He that kills an ox is as if he slew a man" (Is. 66:3) refers back to this, making it parallel with idolatry and proudly refusing to let God's word dwell in the heart.

15:5 *I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abides in me and I in him, the same carries much fruit. For severed from me you can do nothing-* He is the whole tree; He does not say that He is the trunk, and we the branches. To leave the tree is to leave Him; and He is His body, the entire community of believers. And severed from me, He said, you can do nothing, in spiritual terms. Much as some think they can. And in the end, like a slow cancer, the brother or sister who was offended by whatever, will eventually die in that they leave the vine of Christ. It is from the body of Jesus that there comes nurture and nourishment, supplied by every member of the body (Eph. 4:16). And we, all of us, are the body of Christ. To cut ourselves off from it, formally or informally, openly or deep within our hurt hearts, is to deprive ourselves of the nourishment which He is willing to give through our brethren. And likewise to try to exclude others from it is serious indeed; for so many who are disfellowshipped or excluded then fall away from true spirituality. It follows from this figure that not *all* our brethren are no good. There's a lot of goodness out there- those who give up lands, houses, parents etc. for the Lord's sake *will* find within His ecclesia a hundredfold of these things. But we will only share in these things if we are willing to look at the positive side in our brethren. For in many things we also offend others. Yet we know well enough we basically are sincere and willing to give to others. And as we expect others to relate to that good side in us, so we should to others. Nobody in the brotherhood is totally, purely evil- at least, seeing we cannot judge in that sense, we should not think that of any. We have to



assume that each of our brethren is secured in Christ, and will be in the Kingdom. They have the Christ-man formed in them, however immaturely.

15:6- see on Mt. 13:6; Rev. 14:10.

*If a man does not abide in me, he is thrown out as a branch and withers, and these are gathered and thrown into the fire, and they are burned-* The language of branches being severed from the vine is used in Romans 11 about how *God* can do this in judgment. But it is He who can do this, and not us. We are the branches, not the husbandman. Those who choose not to abide in the Lord shall wither. In the primary context, the Lord had Israel in view, the fig tree which "withered" and would then have to be burnt (s.w. Mt. 21:19). The Lord had this figure in view when He spoke soon afterwards, on the way to the cross, of Israel as a withered tree about to be burnt up in AD70 (Lk. 22:31).

But Israel then, as many today, are living out their own condemnation; they will be "thrown out" or [s.w.] "cast away" at the final judgment (Mt. 13:48; Lk. 14:35) in response to their conscious decision not to remain in the Lord, in the vine; and refusing the sap of the Spirit. It is they rather than the Lord who have chosen their fate.

15:7 My words- see on Job 22:27,28.

*If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you-* I have suggested elsewhere that the Lord's "words" refer not so much to His recorded statements, those printed in red letters in some Bibles; but rather to the whole essence of His being and personality. For He was "the word made flesh", as the prologue states (1:14). The reference is not to the entire Bible, but specifically to the words of the Lord Jesus. If He abides in us, we will ask what *we* will, and it will be done. Yet only if we ask according to *God's* will can we receive our requests (Jn. 15:7 cp. 1 Jn. 5:14). The implication is that if the word that is Him dwells in us, our will becomes that of the Father, and therefore our requests, our innermost desires, are according to His will, and are therefore granted. It is by the Spirit that He abides in us (1 Jn. 3:24). His Spirit, His word, His way of thinking, is His will, which is the Father's will. If we have Him within, then our will shall be the Father's, and we will intuitively ask for only what we know is His will. We will not as it were be guessing, asking for lists of things in the hope that we shall hit on some points where our will and His coincide.

In our age, the Bible is indeed a valuable source for growing in knowledge of His will. The word of the Gospel becomes "united by faith with them that hear it" (Heb. 4:2 RVmg.). Through the medium of our response to God's word, our will becomes united with His. Therefore the word was what directed and motivated David's regular daily prayers (Ps. 119:164); they weren't standard repetitions of the same praises or requests, but a reflection of his Biblical meditation. He asks God to hear his prayers because He keeps God's word (Ps. 119:145,173). He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. He even goes so far as to draw a parallel between God and his own "reins" or inner self- both of them "instruct me" (Ps. 16:7). His inner self was so absorbed into the reality of God. He asks God to hear *his* voice in prayer, using the very same words with which he reflects upon how he heard *God's* voice as it is in His written word. In successful prayer, therefore, our will merges with that of

the Father. His will becomes our will; and *vice versa*. By this I mean that *our* will can become *His* will in that He will hear us and even change His declared will [Moses several times achieved this during the course of his prayer life]; prayer really does change things. Our will becomes God's just as His becomes ours. There is an awesome mutuality between a man and his God as he kneels at night alone, praying and asking for the very things which are now God's will.

15:8- see on Jn. 12:23-26.

*Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; and so shall you be my disciples-* They were fearful that the Lord was going away, and they were being left "orphans", pupils without a Rabbi. But the promise of the Spirit means that He will be present with us just as much, and even more so, than when He was physically present as their teacher. He envisaged them, and all believers, continuing to be disciples, and Him through the Spirit being their continued teacher. The "fruit" in view is what Paul later terms "the fruit of the Spirit", the fruit brought forth by the Spirit, through our allowing the Lord to operate in us. It is the Father's will that we should bear much fruit, because it glorifies Him; and this is the end result of all the Lord's teaching, and of our being His disciples. We may think that if only our life situation were different, then we would be the more spiritually fruitful. But the Lord is clear that it is the Father's will, and His will, that we should be fruitful. As taught in the parable of the vineyard of Isaiah 5, all has in fact been done to provide us with an optimal environment in which to bring forth fruit.

The Father is glorified in our fruit bearing; but it is a major theme of John that it is the cross of Christ which brings glory to Him. The connection is in the fact that a true response to the principles of the cross brings forth true spiritual fruit. The glory of God is His Name and the characteristics associated with it; and we will bear these if we respond to the spirit of the cross. In this sense the Lord Jesus could say that through His death, He would be glorified in us (Jn. 17:10). By beholding and perceiving His glory on the cross, we glorify Him (Jn. 17:24,10).

15:9 *Even as the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love-* Abiding is achieved through the Spirit abiding within us (1 Jn. 3:24); it is through the gift of the Spirit accepted within our hearts that His love is shed abroad within our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We abide in Him, in His love, and His love abides in us. And we therefore shall live in love to others. If we do not love our brother, we do not abide in Him nor He in us (1 Jn. 3:14). These allusions in John's letters seem to be saying that abiding in His love means loving each other, those others who are also in Him. This idea is continued in the next verse, speaking of how abiding in the Lord's love means keeping His commandment, of loving our brethren.

15:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

*If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love-* I suggest that the plural "commandments" is a Hebraism, a plural of majesty, referring to the one great commandment. And that is defined clearly in :12- the singular commandment is to love one another as He loved us, to death on

the cross. This effectively means: 'If you love one another, then you shall abide in My love'. Which is just what He has said in :9 (see note there). "His commandments" and "the [singular] commandment" are paralleled in 2 Jn. 6. The Father's commandment likewise is the same. For the Lord taught that all the Father's commandments are summarized in the idea of loving God and thereby our neighbour; see on Mk. 12:31. Any other reading of this verse is likely to veer towards treating the Lord's commandments as another list of statutes, similar in principle to the 613 given by Moses; as if He grants His love conditional upon our legal obedience to some extended moral code of behaviour. If this were the case, given our disobedience and weakness, we shall never know His love. And His love is not conditional upon legalistic obedience in this sense.

15:11- see on 1 Jn. 1:4.

*These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full-* The filling up of joy means that something will be done to us within our hearts; for that is where "joy" is experienced. 'Filling up' is the language of the ongoing filling of the Spirit, which is the context of this whole section in chapters 14-16. The Lord's spirit, His way of being and thinking, His mind, included "joy". He wished to give His spirit to us, so that His spirit might become ours; and thereby His joy would be within us. His "joy" is expressed in the Gospels as joy over a lost sheep being found (Lk. 15:7), the joy of finding people for the Kingdom (Mt. 13:44), the joy of seeing others enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:21). What He rejoices in, we shall. His joy shall be in us in that we share His spirit, His attitude and mindset (17:13). John himself experienced this when he wrote of having joy that his converts were abiding in Christ; and he could think of "no greater joy" (3 Jn. 4).

15:12 *This is my commandment: That you love one another, even as I have loved you-* As noted on :10, this singular commandment is spoken of in the Hebraic plural of majesty as His "commandments", plural. This in one 'word' is the essence of His message, His *logos* to men. We are to love each in on ongoing way, as Christ loved us in His death in that once-off act (Jn. 15:12,17). The combination of the present and aorist tenses of *agapan* ['to love'] in these verses proves the point. Thus our obedience *to* Christ in loving each other is exemplified by the obedience *of* Christ (:10). Quite simply, something done 2000 years ago really does affect us *now*. There is a powerful link across the centuries, from the darkness of the cross to the lives we live today in this century. "By his knowledge", by knowing Christ as He was there, we are made righteous (Is. 53:11). As Israel stood before Moses, they promised: "All the words which the Lord has spoken will we do". When Moses then sprinkled the blood of the covenant upon them- and this incident is quoted in Hebrews as prophetic of the Lord's blood- they said the same but more strongly: "All the words which the Lord hath spoken will we do *and be obedient*" (Ex. 24:3,7). It was as if their connection with the blood inspired obedience. Likewise the communication of God's requirements was made from over the blood sprinkled mercy seat (Ex. 25:22)- another foretaste of the blood of Christ. Quite simply, we can't face the cross of Christ and not feel impelled towards obedience to that which God asks of us, which is to love as the Lord loved us. For the next verse will define love as the love of the cross.

15:13 *Greater love has no one than this: That a man lay down his life for his friends-* This is a truth accepted in every human society, and many men have laid down their lives for their friends. What is unique about the Lord's love-unto-death was that He died for us whilst we

were yet enemies, and not His friends (Rom. 5:8); He took the initiative in loving us through the death of the cross (1 Jn. 4:10,19). We only love, because He first loved us. As noted on 10:11, the Lord did not have His life taken from Him, He gave it of Himself, to the point of controlling the very period and moment at which He died, consciously out breathing His last spirit toward us. And so the Lord's "greater love" was in that He died for us whilst we were not actually His friends but enemies (Rom. 5:10 "when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son"). He *called us* friends; that is the huge force behind those words in :15. He took the initiative, calling us friends when we were enemies; and died for us. We show ourselves to be His friends by accepting His love, and living in that love toward others (:14).

15:14 *You are my friends, if you do the things which I command you-* For "friends", we could read 'The ones whom I love', for that is how the Lord has just defined love, as laying down life for friends (:13). The things commanded are quite simply to love our brethren as the Lord loved us (:12); that singular commandment is spoken of in the plural in :10 as a Hebraic plural of majesty, the one great commandment, the one great thing commanded. The Lord is not saying: 'I shall love you, if you first love Me, and demonstrate that by keeping a list of a few hundred commandments I have given you'. That would be to totally miss the point. We love, because He *first* loved us (1 Jn. 4:19); it was not that we loved God, but that He loved us in giving His Son (1 Jn. 4:10). The Lord has died for us, showing us that "no greater love" (:13). We abide in that love if His spirit abides in us, and we likewise live in love, doing the great thing He commanded both by word and example- to love as He did.

15:15- see on Jn. 16:12.

*No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what his lord does; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father, I have made known to you-* As noted on :13, the uniquely "greater love" shown by the Lord was that He died for us when we were still enemies (Rom. 5:10); but He *called us* His friends. His intense hopefulness in our response accompanies all our efforts to invite others to accept His love and consciously befriend Him who so befriended them. The "no longer" suggests that in His death on the cross, they will see the final revelation of God, the quintessential declaration of all that He had heard from the Father, made known to them. There is no hint here that He now is going to declare the future to them. Now they were going to understand what their Lord and friend had done; for the Comforter was to open their understanding to the things of the cross, to the meaning of it all. This explains how things were going to change in their understanding, from being servants just obedient for the sake of it to a Master they respect and obey but do not really understand, to friends who now have been shown the innermost essence of their Master. As noted on 16:13, the Comforter was to make known to them the things which were coming, the things of His death on the cross. He would show them plainly of the Father, in His death on the cross and the Comforter unpacking that death to them (16:25). Or as Paul puts it, the gift of the Spirit opens our eyes to understand the depth and height of our Lord's love for us (Eph. 1:18; 3:18,19). And His love was declared in essence in the death of the cross.

Friendship is exactly the language God uses about Abraham- because He was His "friend", He showed Abraham what He was going to do (Gen. 18:17-19). But the things to be done here refer to the cross (see on 16:13). To the Lord's first hearers, a slave was defined by his

or her obedience to the master's commands. The Lord says that His followers are His friends, who do His commandments- but they're not slaves. He seems to be saying that they were indeed His slaves- but a new kind of slave, a slave who whilst being obedient to the Master, was also His personal friend. It's lovely how the Lord speaks of such well known ideas like slavery, and shows how in the humdrum of ordinary life, He gives an altogether higher value to them. See on Jn. 10:28.

He has just reminded them that they call Him Lord, and rightly so, and therefore His washing of their feet was what they must do (Jn. 13:13). Earlier, He had rebuked them for calling Him "Lord" but not *doing* what He said (Lk. 6:46- this is in a speech directed at the disciples- Lk. 6:20,27,40). And yet He told others that His disciples *did* His word (Lk. 8:21). He was so positive about them to others, even though they did not *do* the consequences of calling Him Lord [e.g. washing each other's feet- instead, they argued who was to be the greatest]. Perhaps when the Lord says that He will no longer relate to them as a Lord, with them as His servants, but rather simply as their friend, He is tacitly recognizing their failure, and preparing Himself to die for them as their friend rather than as their Master. And yet, as the Divine economy worked it all out, it was exactly through that death that they exalted Him as Lord and Master as they should have done previously.

15:16- see on Mk. 4:8; Jn. 14:12.

*You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you to go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. So that whatever you shall ask of the Father in my name, He may give it to you-* This is alluded to in 1 Jn. 4:10,19- it is not that we loved God and He responded, but He loved us. We were out seeking for the Lord Jesus and found Him as a result of hard Biblical scholarship. He found us; indeed Paul cites the whole question of choosing, calling and predestination as the parade example of God's grace through the work of the Spirit. His choosing of us is the supreme example that it is not of works, nor intellectual ability, but of grace through the Spirit. "You did not choose me, but I chose you... out of the world" (:16,19) corresponds to the oft repeated theme of Moses that God has chosen Israel "out of all peoples" (Dt. 7:6 RVmg.), by grace (Dt. 4:37; 10:15; 14:2).

It is not as if the Lord Jesus has said to us: 'Would you like me to die for you on the cross, to gain your salvation?'. Because then we could say 'No, don't do it for me', and we would be free of obligation. But He has taken the initiative. He has already died for us, He suffered for me, He won my redemption. And He has called me to know this and respond to it. I *can't* say, with eyes even only half open to the cross, 'No, I don't want what You did for me. Take it away, no, I don't want it'. He has done it. He has called me. I can't say I don't want it. And for you too. We have not chosen Him of our own decision; He has chosen us, and asked us to bring forth fruit (Jn. 15:16). Reflected upon, this is one of the most tremendous imperatives which we have to a dedicated life of response to the principles of His cross: justifying the weak, showing a spirit of grace amidst hatred, imbibing the word, being concerned for the salvation of others amidst our own agonies, enduring apparently endless tribulation (notice, and circle in your Bible, all the occurrences of the word "and" in Mk. 15 A.V.)... that principle that *nothing else matters* apart from our response to His love, so great, so free. The whole horror, pain and tragedy of the cross was surely to show us that *He loved us far more than we have ever or will ever love Him*. And yet He asks us to accept His love, to respond to it, to love Him and in that love, show forth His character to others. With shame at the paucity

and poverty of our own devotions, we can do little else but respond as fully and as best we can.

The twelve evidently saw Jesus of Nazareth as a Rabbi, their special, lovable, somewhat mystic teacher at whose feet they sat. But the disciples saw Jesus within the frames of Judaism. "What does this mean? He tells us..." (Jn. 16:17) is similar to a familiar Rabbinic formula. But of course Jesus was far more than a Rabbi, and He laboured to change their perceptions. For example, He stresses many times that *He* chose *them* to be His disciples (especially Jn. 15:16-19)- whereas in Judaism, it was always disciples who chose a Rabbi: "Jesus chose the disciples, but the students of the rabbis almost always chose a teacher". The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh.

The language here is very much that of ordaining to priestly service, just as in chapter 17 the Lord will talk about sanctifying His followers, as if they are Levites, and sending them out to do Divine service in the work of the great commission, calling others to His grace. We find this same theme of a new Israel being created in the usage of "ordained [Gk. *etheka*] you". C.K. Barrett shows that *etheka* reflects the Hebrew *samak*, and that the Lord's phrase alludes to the ordination of a disciple as a Rabbi. Those guys must've looked at each other in shock. They who were barely literate, and knew how very human they were, whose small minds were creaking under the burden of trying to understand this Man they so loved... were being ordained as Rabbis, by a man who'd just washed their feet, which was what disciples usually did for their Rabbis. But yes, the Lord challenged them and us to have a far higher estimate of His opinion of us...

"I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should *go forth* and bring forth fruit... that whatsoever you shall ask of the *Father* in *my name*, he may give it you" is full of connection with the world-wide preaching commission; and in this context, *whatever* we ask to this end will be given. All will be provided for our mission; if it is indeed solely for His mission that we are making request. Lack of resources has never therefore ultimately and truthfully hindered any sincere attempt to obey the great commission. I can personally testify to that and so can many.

The fruit brought forth is therefore in converts. The 'remaining' [s.w. 'abiding'] of the fruit would then refer to the converts abiding in the Lord and He in them through the Spirit, which would then be alluded to by John when he writes that he has no greater joy than to know that his converts abide in the Lord (3 Jn. 4). This is the branch and fruit abiding in the vine.

15:17- see on Eph. 1:5.

*These things I command you, so that you may love one another*- This doesn't mean 'I command you to love one another, so that you may love one another'. The idea rather is that

all the "things" the Lord had taught, in the word or commandment which was Him as well as in His actual words, were summarized in the need to love one another. This was and is the essence of Him, His word made flesh. See on :17.

15:18 *If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you-* The "if..." is perhaps a reflection of the Lord's hope that the Jewish world would be persuaded by the witness of the disciples' love and unity- although elsewhere He clearly envisaged their being cast out of the synagogues and experiencing evil at the hands of the Jewish world. And yet in that word "if..." we see reflected His positivism and hopefulness for others, which is to be part of our spirit too, if we have received His spirit. The hatred of the world has been explained by the Lord as a result of their resistance to the message preached (7:7). I suggested on :16 that the Lord is here repeating the essence of the great commission, to go into the world and bring forth fruit for Him. The comment about love in :17 would then be suggesting that our love for each other will back up that witness, as the Lord envisaged in chapter 17. And now He comforts His future preachers that they are to expect opposition to their witness, but in that experience they will know Him and share His spirit, for that was His experience too.

15:19 *If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you-* This is basic psychology; those who come "out of" a system are hated by that system. But the hatred is specifically because the disciples would preach to the world and seek to convict them of sin (7:7). The talk about love and hatred here is alluded to by John when he urges his converts not to hate each other, especially in 1 Jn. 4. By hating our brother, we are as the world. For that is what the world does. And John presents a chasmic divide between the believer and the world. To hate our brother is to place ourselves on the side of the world. John was writing for Jews and to Jewish converts; the pull of the Jewish world, the synagogue, was every strong. And he is reminding them that the Lord saw a huge divide between His followers and that world, a world which was fast heading to its destruction in AD70.

15:20 *Remember the word that I said to you: A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will keep yours also-* The Lord has just taught that He treats His followers not as servants but friends; and yet here He addresses them again as servants. But I suggested on :15 that His idea was that they are His servants whom He treats as intimate friends, revealing absolutely bare all that He is and stands for, and dying for them. From how the Lord speaks here, serious opposition to the preaching of His word is absolutely to be expected. A merely social Gospel, a doing good works in the hope somebody might somehow notice and come to the Lord, will not have this effect. Our preaching of Him means that there will be the parallel made here between "my word" and 'your word'. His word was the essence of Him, the light which challenged the darkness of men; and we shall meet the same response as He did. But it is that plain presentation of Him which will lead people to Him, rather than the supposed social Gospel of good works alone. For that is not a uniquely Christian statement, in that many folks do good works. 'Keeping My word' meant receiving life eternal (8:51,52), and the Father and Son making their dwelling in the heart of the hearer (14:23); this is the profound message we have for men.

15:21 *But all these things will they do to you for my name's sake, because they do not truly*

*know Him that sent me-* John later speaks about those who fulfil the great commission as going forth for His name's sake (3 Jn. 7). Throughout this section, the Lord is speaking about the need to follow the great commission and preach forgiveness and repentance in His name (Lk. 24:47). If His Spirit, His word and essence, abode in them, then they would experience the same opposition which He did. Their 'not knowing' the Father who sent the Son would be the basis of their hatred of the preachers. On the other hand, to know the Father is to have relationship with Him, and love His children. John's letters develop this same theme; to not love is to not have a relationship with the Father.

15:22 *If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin-* We see here that hearing the word is the basis for responsibility to judgment. The 'coming' of the Lord was not a reference to some descent from Heaven to Palestine on planet earth; His coming to the Jewish world was in His words spoken to them. And as He was sent into the world, so He was sending His disciples. The fact they were without excuse issued in a hatred for the preachers who had spoken to them- for that is the context here in :23 and :21. All the synoptics use the word translated "excuse" about the Jewish leadership making a "pretence" of spirituality (Mt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47). And this is John's version of that. He states specifically what the synoptic writers do not- that the "pretence" of external religion was in fact to cloak [AV] or hide their sin. The synoptics state that for a "pretence" the Jews made long prayers, but they do not specifically state what was being cloaked or covered over. And here, the Lord states it was "sin". So often, religious behaviour is used in order to cover our sin from our own eyes. We must remember that we are all prone to the psychology of religious behaviour. The Lord 'spoke to them' about this; and they no longer had that cloak, for He had removed it and demonstrated that He saw through it. Their works were evil (7:7) and He had urged them to address their internal issues instead of covering their evil thoughts with external acts of obedience. And their response was to hate Him.

15:23 *He that hates me hates my Father also-* The attitude of people to the Son is their attitude to God. The Jews of course considered that they loved God, but hated His Son. And the Lord is saying that this cannot be the case. And again John builds on this in a pastoral sense in 1 Jn. 4, arguing that if we hate our brother, then we hate the Father and Son. It was an awful thing to accuse an Orthodox Jew of hating God; their whole life was so apparently God-centred. But our attitudes to His Son and all His children are our attitudes to Him.

15:24 *If I had not done among them the works which no other man did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father-* This parallels the statement in :22 that it was because the Lord had "spoken" to them that they "had sin". His spoken words were paralleled with the works He did amongst them. As John especially makes clear, all those miracles were "signs", were a word to men. This confirms our earlier suggestion that the references to "my word[s]" in John are talking about the essence of the Lord's self-declaration and declaration of the Father, rather than literally referring to His recorded lexical items, the sentences printed in red letters in some Bibles. The "works" were so that they could see the Son, and thereby the Father. The miracles were not therefore random acts of kindness to meet human compassion; for the Lord walked past many cases of human need without responding. They were specifically designed to enable men to see / understand / know / believe in the Son and Father. We also learn from this that the Jews through the miracles did in fact perceive who the Lord was, hence the hatred for Him which arose from a bad conscience. Throughout the Joseph record there is the unwritten sense that the brothers had a niggling conscience that Joseph might be alive. This typifies the



underlying Jewish conscience towards the Lord Jesus. They knew Christ as Messiah, but blinded themselves to the fact (Jn. 6:36; 9:41; 15:24 cp. 14:7).

15:25- see on 1 Cor. 11:20.

*All this happens so that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their law: They hated me without a cause-* "Their law" rather than 'God's law' is another reflection of how they had hijacked God's word and ways and turned it into their own religion; the feasts of the Lord and house of the Lord had become the feasts of the Jews, and the temple of the Jews. "They hated me without a cause" (Ps. 35:19; 69:4) surely refers to their crucifixion of Him "without a cause" as reflected in the collapse of the legal case against Him. Their own law ["their law"] admitted there was no cause for death. He died purely because of their hatred. He again seems to use the past tense to describe His yet future death. These men would see the Father and Son, which has to be connected with John's recurring theme that in the cross men saw what Moses so wanted to see- Yahweh Himself manifested.

The Messianic Psalms quoted about hatred of the Lord without a cause imply that this hatred was especially seen in His death. And yet the Lord has said that our sharing in His Spirit will mean that we too shall be hated if we witness "in Him", in His Name. This means that in our experience of opposition and hatred, we are sharing in His crucifixion experiences. He there becomes each of us. He was indeed our representative, and we are His too. Our experiences therefore provide a bridge between Him there, many centuries ago, and us today. We thereby in an experiential sense come to "know Him", and Him in His time of crucifixion. And if we thus suffer with Him, we shall also live with Him, eternally.

15:26 *And when the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me-* The opening of this verse, "And..." or "But...", suggests a direct connection with what has preceded. There we have been told one of John's versions of the great commission. The Lord envisaged that believers in Him would go forth into the world and bring forth fruit, but would encounter the same hatred from the Jewish world which He had experienced. His anticipation of persecution for His witnesses (:20) is the background for this renewed promise of the Comforter. It is this context of persecution which provides the appropriacy of the language of *parakletos*. The Spirit would testify of the Lord Jesus; yet the disciples personally were to do so. They would have the Lord's Spirit within them, and so their witness would be in the power of the Spirit.

The *parakletos* / Comforter is literally 'one called alongside', and this title is appropriate to the idea that the Lord is physically leaving them, but His presence will abide with them through the Spirit. It is as if the Lord is physically with us, as if He has come alongside us. The legal aspects of the word, referring to an advocate, may have been appropriate to the context of persecution. The association of the Comforter with "testimony" continues the legal association.

There is a definite link between the power of witness and the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that bears witness; and yet we are the witnesses. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit are not in view, although in the first century context, they were a visible manifestation of possession of the Comforter. The Spirit bears witness in us in that the spirit of Christ, the joy, peace, love which we show as individuals and thereby as a community, gives as much credibility to our

witness as did the performance of miracles in the 1st century. And so Paul told the Thessalonians: “Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much assurance”. The “assurance”, the power of confirmation, was in the credibility which the Spirit of Christ in their examples gave to their preaching of the word. And likewise in 1 Cor. 2:3-5: “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”.

"He shall testify of me" reflects a masculine term in the Greek. But the object referred to is the Holy Spirit, which is neuter. This apparent mismatch of gender in Greek grammar is intentional; for the Lord is saying that the Spirit will enable them to have His personal presence in their hearts, to the point that the neuter "Spirit" is effectively Him, a male; so really can He be in us by the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit would be their testimony (:27). It is our spiritual character, the evidence of the Spirit within us, which is the real and compelling witness to this world.

15:27 *And you also shall testify, because you have been with me from the beginning-* This was exemplified in Acts 4:13, where it was apparent from the nature of the disciples' preaching that they “had been with Jesus”. To be with the Lord, to have experience of Him, meant that one would witness to Him; such is the true experience of Him that it is axiomatic that it issues in witness. All who have truly known the Lord will witness to Him. And if we don't... do we know Him, have we “been with” Him...?

14:26 and 16:12 likewise associate the work of the Comforter with the testimony of the disciples, who had been with the Lord from the beginning of His ministry. There was a special sense in which the Comforter was relevant only to the disciples, the first eye witnesses from the beginning of the ministry. But the connections with other teaching about the gift of the Spirit lead us to conclude that as with all New Testament teaching about the Spirit, the essence is for all time, although the miraculous manifestation was only for the first century. These passages (here and in 14:26; 16:12) make it clear that the disciples were to witness as Christ to this world exactly because they had been with the Lord from the beginning. John's gospel is his obedience to that. And so he explains that he is recounting how things were from the beginning off the Lord's ministry. And Luke does the same, writing that he too was a witness from the beginning and is therefore testifying to what he had seen (Lk. 1:2).

The whole purpose of the Lord's life was that He should “bear witness” unto the Truth of the Father (Jn. 18:37). But John also records the Lord's expectations that all in Him should likewise “bear witness” (Jn. 15:27). And as John recounted the Gospel [of which the Gospel of John is a transcript], He stresses that by doing so he is ‘bearing witness’, living out the work of the Lord who lived as the faithful and true witness to men (Jn. 3:11; 19:35; 21:24 cp. 18:37).

### **The Comforter: An Angel?**

The point has been made by several expositors that as Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God's Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension. The gift of the Holy Spirit was to be

"within" the disciples; but it could be feasible that this was superintended by an Angel. The following thoughts are presented more for reflection; I am undecided about the matter. It could be that the Lord is alluding to Jewish ideas about a *paraklete* Angel and deconstructing them; urging His people to forget Jewish angelology and have His direct personal presence in their hearts through the Spirit. But for the record, here is a summary of the reasons for thinking that the Comforter may have some reference to an Angel:

- Is. 63:7-11 describes the Angel that guided Israel through the wilderness as the "Holy Spirit"- which is the Comforter.
- The Comforter was sent in God and Christ's Name (Jn. 14:26)- the Angel was sent in God's Name (Ex. 23:21)
- The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide (16:13), be a judge (16:8) and prophesy (16:13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God's ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God's Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them.
- The Comforter would "shew you things to come" (Jn. 16:13)- fulfilled by the Angel giving the Revelation to John.
- The Angel testified to the churches (Rev. 22:16)- "the Comforter... shall testify of Me" (Jn. 15:26).
- The references in Acts to the Holy Spirit as a person would then be easier to understand - e.g. "The Holy Spirit said, Separate Me Barnabas. . ." (Acts 13:2). Similarly the frequent occurrences of the ideas of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit together fall into place if the Holy Spirit has some degree of reference to a personal being in the form of an Angel. The error of the doctrine of the trinity is not in identifying the three common forms of God manifestation (i.e. through God Himself, Jesus and the Holy Spirit Angel), but in the inter-relationships between them which it proposes. This idea is worth applying to our understanding of the baptismal formula.
- The work of the Comforter Angel may have been confined to the first century, in the same way as the Angel was particularly evident to the ecclesia in the wilderness during the initial Exodus period. Thus the words 'Angel' and 'Spirit' are obviously interchangeable in the book of Acts (e. g. 8:26,29; 10:3,19,20).
- The Angel in Revelation "like the son of man" (i.e. representing Him but not Him personally) would then be this same Comforter Angel representing Jesus (Rev. 1:11 cp. 22:13,8,16). He carried the titles of Jesus, who carried the titles of God- e. g. "Alpha and Omega".
- The Comforter is called "the spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls literature, this phrase describes an Angelic Spirit who is the leader of the "good forces" and 'in whom' the righteous walk [*Testament of Judah* 20, 1-5]. The Aramaic translation of Job, and the targums on it, uses the term *prqlyt* to describe the Angelic spokesman [the *malak melis*] who makes a testimony in Heaven in Job's defence (Job 16:19; 19:25-27; 33:23).
- Otto Betz, *Der Paraklet* (AGJU, 1963), brings out many connections between the Comforter and the Angel 'Michael the Spirit of truth' in contemporary Jewish writings.
- When we read of the "spirit of the Lord" snatching away Philip, it seems logical to interpret this as the same Angel already mentioned earlier in the chapter (Acts 8:26,29,39). But this Angel is defined as the Lord's Angel- and the Lord in Acts is nearly always the Lord Jesus. Clearly we are led to understand the Lord Jesus as being associated with a specific Angel.

- "Ye have an unction from the Holy One (the Comforter/ Holy Spirit), and ye know all things" (1 Jn. 2:20) is clearly alluding to the promise of the Comforter in Jn. 14:26; but "Holy One" is Angelic language, as if the Holy One was also an Angel.

- The tongues sitting like flames of fire on the apostles at Pentecost was an Angelic manifestation; the Angels can be made "a flame of fire".

- Jude 5 reminds the new Israel of the first century that Israel of old had been condemned due to their provoking of the wilderness Angel- a warning that takes on special power once it is recognized that the very same Angel was leading the early church.

- Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains many references to the Angel of Israel. He uses examples from Israel's history in which they rejected those who were types of Jesus- e. g. v. 9,10,22,25. It follows then that v. 35 must refer to this same aspect of Moses as a type of Christ being rejected. "This Moses whom they renounced... even him God sent to be a ruler and a redeemer with the hand of that Angel which appeared to him in the bush" (Diaglott). Israel resisted the work of the Angel supporting Moses, and so years later they were also rejecting the support of the same guardian Angel for the teachings of Jesus and His disciples, the greater than Moses. So v. 51 stresses "ye do always resist the Holy Spirit (the title of the Comforter Angel in Is. 63): as your fathers did, so do ye". Their fathers resisted the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century were doing just the same.

## CHAPTER 16

16:1 *These things have I spoken to you, so that you should not be made to stumble-* The context goes on to speak of excommunication from the synagogue. The Lord perceived that religious excommunication created a strong possibility of stumbling; and so it is to this day. He says this in the context of His promise of the Comforter, His presence amongst and within the believers. His argument is that if that is felt and experienced by believers, then being disfellowshipped from some human group will not at all affect them. The wonder of His abiding presence will be far greater than the trauma of being excluded from some human group or society. And that truth remains wonderfully true today, the ultimate comfort through all church politics and exclusions performed by those who thereby proclaim that they do not have the Spirit.

The discourse in the upper room was intended by the Lord "to prevent your faith from being shaken" or, literally, 'scandalized' (Jn. 16:1). And yet He uses the same word to predict how "This night you will all be scandalized because of me" (Mt. 26:31). He knew they would stumble, or be 'scandalized'. Yet He hoped against hoped that they would not be; so positive was His hope of them. And exactly because He was like this, the pain of their desertion and stumbling would have been so much the greater. And the Lord who is the same today as yesterday goes through just the same with us, hour by hour.

16:2 *They shall put you out of the synagogues. Yes, the time is coming, when whoever kills you shall think that he offers service to God-* See on :1. The coming time or hour in John's Gospel refers usually to the Lord's death (2:4; 7:30; 8:20,21; 12:23,27). In the crises of persecution we face, we are sharing in His death, that His life might be ours too.

Realizing the need of each believer for the brotherhood will lead us to be more than careful before ever evicting anyone from our association. Indeed, forced expulsion from any social group is highly damaging to the victim. The Lord appreciated this when He said that when His followers were cast out of the synagogues, then they would be likely to stumble (Jn. 16:1,2). They were excommunicated exactly because of their faith in Him; and yet He foresaw that in the aftermath of that rejection, emotionally, sociologically, economically, they would be likely to stumble. Eviction of anyone from our fellowship ought therefore never to be done lightly, if ever. For by doing so, we are likely to make them stumble from the path to eternity; and nobody would want such a millstone around their neck at judgment day. We may in this life appear to be 'keeping the truth pure', 'doing the right thing'- but the Lord will judge the effect we had upon another's path to Him.

Initially, as we see from e.g. John's Gospel, the core issue in Christianity revolved around simply believing in Jesus. But soon, as we see from John's letters, it became important to counter wrong beliefs *about* Jesus. As controversy over interpretation developed, it was almost inevitable that the arguments led to exaggerations on both sides. We see it happen in political arguments today- the supporters of candidate X respond to criticisms of him by painting him as more exalted, wonderful and even Divine than he really ever could be. And as they do so, the critics become even more virulently against them. This is the nature of controversy. And as the Jews began expelling Christians from their synagogues (Jn. 9:22; 12:42; 16:2) and inventing many slanderous stories about Jesus, it was inevitable that those without a solid Biblical grounding in their faith would *react* rather than *Biblically respond* to this- by making Jesus out to be far more 'Divine' than He was.

The apostate among God's people, both in Old and New Testaments, sunk to the most unbelievable levels, but sincerely felt that they were doing God's will. These things included killing righteous prophets (Jn. 16:2), turning the breaking of bread service into a drunken orgy (1 Cor. 11:21), and turning prostitution within the ecclesia into a spiritual act (Rev. 2:20). For believers to come to the conclusion that such things were the will of God surely they were not just misinterpreting Scripture. There was an extra-human power of delusion at work. We have seen in the above verses that God is responsible for this kind of thing. Note that the Bible knows nothing of a super-human devil who does all this.

The early believers were initially members of the synagogues, and Paul always visited the synagogue services in his travels. Peter and John went up to pray in the temple at the ninth hour along with everyone else (Acts 3:1). Early ecclesial meetings were based upon the synagogue system (James 2:2). The Lord didn't tell them to leave because they might catch some 'guilt by association'. He knew that if they forthrightly preached the Truth, they would be excommunicated: "the time will come when they will expel you from their synagogues", He had foretold; as if He expected them to stay there until they were chased away. Those who reject the Lord Jesus will treat us likewise (Jn. 15:18-21). However, it must be said that the Lord was perhaps making some concession to the weakness of His new people by allowing them to remain members of the synagogue system, and keep parts of the Law. As the New Testament period progressed, the Holy Spirit through Paul increasingly urged upon the believers the need to cast out the bondwoman of Judaism, to trust completely in grace not law. Consider, too, Paul's command in 1 Cor. 11:14 that brethren do *not* wear head coverings in ecclesial meetings. Assuming this to have been a universal principle which he intended to be followed in all ecclesias [and the reasons he gives are based upon universal principles], this was really signalling an exit from the synagogues, where men *had* to attend with covered head. Now they could no longer go on attending the synagogues to fulfil their Christian worship; they had to realize the extent of the implications of the Lordship and Headship of Christ, as the image and glory of God. Yet sadly, the brethren increasingly returned to the synagogues rather than separated from them.

16:3 *And these things will they do, because they have not known the Father nor me-* The idea is 'because they have refused to know'. They had been given the chance, as explained at the end of chapter 15, but had rejected it. And their bad conscience overflowed in personal anger. Not knowing the Father and Son was the reason why they killed the Lord (Acts 13:27,28). Because they killed Him, we must expect persecution at their hands, if we are in His Name and share His spirit. John stresses that because they knew not the Father nor Son, they crucified Jesus (15:21). And yet on another level they *did* know the Son and Father, especially when they saw His death (8:28). Even the Centurion was convinced that "truly, this was the Son of God". And even before that, "Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying: You both know me, and know from where I am, and that I have not come of myself" (7:28). They knew, but chose not to know. And this was the psychological cause of their extreme anger.

16:4 *But these things have I spoken to you, so that when the time comes, you may remember what I told you. And these things I did not say to you from the beginning, because I was with you-* The "things" presumably concern the persecution which they were to experience, and the supportive presence of the Comforter as their defence. The Lord did not begin His

teaching of the twelve by telling them of their likely sufferings; and His personal presence with them involved their 'keeping', both spiritually and in terms of physical safety (17:12; 18:9). Now He was departing, He would still be with them, in that the presence of the Comforter, His spirit in their hearts, would be as real as if He were personally with them. "The time / hour comes" is used in John normally concerning the hour of the Lord's cross. But now the Lord uses the term about the time of *their* sufferings, extending the idea that His Spirit, experience and destiny is to be theirs; or as the synoptics record it, they would pick up His cross, sharing in His sufferings.

16:5 *But now I go to Him that sent me; and none of you asks me, Where do you go?*- Peter had asked that very question (see on 13:36-38). But he had asked it only from concern about himself and the disciples; not from interest in where the Lord was actually going. Real interest in the Lord Jesus can so often only be a form of self-interest and even self-preservation.

16:6 *But because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart*- We sense the Lord's disappointment that they did not grasp that His departure meant the glorification of the Name, and the receipt by them of the Comforter. All they could think of was His physical presence not being with them, and they were filled with sorrow rather than with the Spirit. And yet the whole of the Lord's last discourse to the twelve reflects His positive view of them- at the very time when their commitment to Him was in some ways at its lowest ebb. For they all forsook Him in His hour of need. He comments that they are filled with sorrow because of their misunderstanding about His departure from them. But He goes on to liken this sorrow to the sorrow of a woman in labour, who forgets that sorrow as soon as her child is born (Jn. 16:6, 20-22). In the analogy, the travailing woman is the disciples, and the new born child is the resurrected Jesus. For "then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord". Their 'sorrow' was thereby interpreted by the Lord as their longing and striving towards His resurrection. But this is a very positive way of interpreting their sorrow. Their sorrow was based on their misunderstanding (Jn. 16:6). Yet the Lord saw that deep underneath that sorrow, even though they didn't perceive it themselves, they were actually yearning for His resurrection. This helps explain the slight mismatch in the metaphor; for "sorrow" is not an emotion really associated with a woman facing labour pains; rather, anxiety, stress and fear. But the Lord as it were makes the analogy fit, because He wants to positively represent their sorrow and hope that something positive comes out of it.

This was all partly due to His penetration of their psychology, but it also reflects the simple fact that He certainly counted them as more spiritual than they actually were. He tells them to "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full", having just defined their future joy as the joy of seeing Him risen from the dead (Jn. 16:24,22). But did they ask to see His resurrection? Not as far as we know; for He upbraids them with their slowness to believe His predictions of resurrection. But despite all that, He said that they *would* have that joy which would come from asking to see Him risen from the dead. They didn't ask for this, but they would still have the joy. Why? Because He perceived them to have 'asked' for what they didn't actually ask for in so many words. He read their basic inner yearning for Him as a prayer for His resurrection, even though they were far from understanding that He would ever rise again once dead. It's rather like God saying that the righteous remnant in Jerusalem had shaken their head at the Assyrian invaders and laughed at them in faith- when this was certainly not the case on the surface (Is. 37:22). And this Lord is our Lord today, interpreting our innermost, unarticulated desires as prayers to the Father (Rom. 8:26,27).

16:7 *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. I will send him to you-* "It is expedient" is the very phrase used by Caiaphas in saying that it was expedient that the Lord die (11:50). The parallel is clearly between His 'going away' and His death, confirming the suggestion that His talk of 'going to the Father' refers specifically to His crucifixion and not only to the ascension to Heaven. The Lord sees a major purpose of His death as being the giving of the Comforter, His spirit. When he breathed His last, and blood and water flowed out from Him, He was giving His spirit toward us, the confused and misunderstanding disciples. This is the connection between His death and the gift of His spirit to us. Our understanding and acceptance of this gift of the Spirit is therefore crucial; it is in fact what He died for, it is the gift of His life given to and into us.

"I will send him to you" uses the same word frequently used of how the Father sent the Son, and the Son sends us. But here, the Son will send the Comforter to us. He explained in 8:29 that "He that sent me is with me; the Father has not left me alone". The sending of the Son involved His being given the Father's presence. And in His sending of us into the world, in fulfilment of the great commission, He sends us as the Father sent Him, but He also sends us with His presence. The language of 8:29, "not left alone... with me" is exactly that which the Lord uses about His presence with us through the Comforter. That presence however is specifically associated with our mission, the purpose for which we have been sent. The great commission in Mt. 28:20 comforts us that "I am with you always"; and here in John's version of that commission we find that the Lord's presence refers to the gift of the Spirit, empowering our mission, guiding us to correct understanding, spiritually keeping us from falling, and mediating to us the sense of His personal presence. The theme continues into the Lord's prayer of chapter 17, where He speaks of how He has sanctified us, as Levites, and sent us forth on this great commission. Therefore the work of the Gospel, the fulfilment of the great commission, is to be utterly central to our Christian lives. The way it is solemnly placed at the end of the synoptics is proof enough of this.

16:8 *And he, when he comes, will convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment-* Just as the Lord convicted the world of sin (7:7; 15:22), so we will do so if the Comforter dwells in us, the presence within us of the Lord Jesus through the Spirit. We shall continue His work through our witness in the power of the Spirit / Comforter (15:26,27). The legal dimension to the word *parakletos* is here referred to. Our advocate will also be the prosecutor of the world. It is on our witness that the world is convicted of sin, because they heard the Gospel from us, through our obedience to the great commission, but rejected it [as made clear in 15:22].

16:9 *Of sin, because they do not believe in me-* The Jewish world was convicted of sin through the Comforter-filled disciples witnessing to the Jews about their sin in rejecting the Lord. The implication of this statement is that when we preach Christ to people, they actually realize the truth of what we say, at least on a subconscious level [no matter how well they disguise it]. Otherwise, why would they be convicted of the sin of unbelief? The principle has been outlined in 15:22, that hearing the spoken word of the Lord Jesus is to be left with no excuse for sin. This is a huge encouragement in our preaching to an apparently disinterested world. Their disinterest is a guise, however unconscious, to attempt to cover their deep disease at their rejection of the call they are receiving. And more often than we may think, our message cuts through that guise, that cloak (15:22), and touches hearts.



16:10 *Of righteousness, because I go to the Father and you see me no more-* To convict the Jewish world of righteousness is a strange idea, making little sense until we see the allusion to Is. 64:5 LXX, which describes Israel's righteousness as abomination. They would be convicted concerning their righteousness- that it was empty. It would be clear from the witness of the Comforter, the spirit of Christ within the preachers, that they were counted righteous by grace; and all the legalistic rightness of Judaism, and indeed the world in any time or place, is but filthy rags.

16:11 *Of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged-* Just as "righteousness" in :10 refers to the false righteousness of the Jewish world, so here. The Lord has many times been wrongly judged by the Jewish world (7:24), coming to a climax in the way that Caiaphas, the prince of the Jewish world, judged the Lord as worthy of death. The witness of the Comforter, the Spirit-filled witness of the disciples, would demonstrate this to the Jewish world.

"The prince of this world" (sin, the devil?) was judged by the victory of the cross (Jn. 16:11). There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The Lord was judged by Caiaphas and other princes of this world, but He in fact stood before them as the judge and condemned them. And yet it is *our* witness, empowered by the Comforter, which is to convict the world of judgment. We take the spirit of the Lord's cross before the world, and it convicts them.

16:12 *I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now-*

The message or word of Jesus was far more than the words that He spoke from His lips. In one sense, He revealed to the disciples everything that He had heard from the Father (Jn. 15:15); and yet in another, more literal sense, He lamented that there was much more He could tell them in words, but they weren't able to bear it (Jn. 16:12). His person and character, which they would spend the rest of their lives reflecting upon, was the 'word' of God in flesh to its supremacy; but this doesn't necessarily mean that they heard all the literal words of God drop from the lips of Jesus. I have shown elsewhere that both the Father and Son use language, or words, very differently to how we normally do. The manifestation of God in Christ was not only a matter of the Christ speaking the right words about God. For as He said, His men couldn't have handled that in its entirety. The fullness of manifestation of the word was in His life, His character, and above all in His death, which the prologue in 1:14 may be specifically referring to in speaking of how John himself beheld the glory of the word being made flesh.

16:13 -see on 1 Jn. 4:1; Jn. 14:12.

*However, when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he shall guide you into all the truth. For he shall not speak from himself; but whatever he shall hear, these shall he speak-*

"The Spirit of truth" is in reality "the spirit of Christ", making His presence near and real just as if He were literally with us. So "the truth" is again a reference to the Lord Jesus personally,

the truth of Him who is "the truth", rather than a reference to the academic 'truth' of a particular set of theology. "All truth" would be going far too far if it refers to intellectual truth, for nobody could ever claim to have "all truth" in that sense. It makes little sense to talk of being "in" truth in the sense of theological truth. The language is far more appropriate to a person, the Lord Jesus.

"Guide" is the language of a Rabbi teaching or guiding his disciples by teaching (s.w. Mt. 15:14; 23:16; Lk. 6:39; Acts 8:31; Rom. 2:19). The disciples were concerned that their Rabbi was leaving them and they would be without a teacher (see on 14:18). The Lord is assuring them that His teaching presence would continue amongst them through the presence of the Spirit, the Comforter.

"He shall not speak from himself" recalls the Lord's claims that "I speak [not] from myself", but from what He heard from the Father (7:17; 8:28; 12:49). The Comforter is personified and spoken of in exactly the terms of the Lord Jesus because He wished to emphasize the idea that the presence of the Spirit would be as if He personally was with them, teaching them as He had done as their Rabbi on earth.

*And he shall declare to you the things that are to come-* There could be a reference here to the giving of the book of Revelation, but the hour to come in John's Gospel, the even "to come", is clearly the Lord's death. The meaning of that would be declared to them by the Spirit. They did not then understand what the Lord was doing, but they would do so afterwards- when the Spirit revealed it to them.

16:14 *He shall glorify me; for he shall take what is mine and shall declare it to you-* The Spirit would be the medium of communication between the Lord and His followers. The context here is of teaching, of the disciples continuing to be taught by the Lord from Heaven through His Spirit (see on :13). "What is mine" would therefore refer to the understandings given to the Lord by the Father, which were now going to be in turn transmitted to His followers by means of the Spirit. And that process would be to the glorification of the Lord Jesus. For they would understand Him and His achievements so much deeper. This is the same word used in 16:25 of how the Lord would declare or shew to them plainly of the Father. He was to do this in His death for them, but that death would be unpacked by the Lord's work within them through the Spirit.

16:15 *All things, whatever the Father has, are mine. Therefore I said: that he shall take of mine and declare it to you-* These "all things" which the Father has refer to the things which would be declared to them (:14), and those things centre in the Lord Jesus. All those things in that sense were 'Me', the Lord Jesus. For the prologue states that the *logos* of Jesus is God, in the sense that the entire purpose and plan of God is centred in His Son. The focus of the Father upon His Son is significant beyond appreciation. The Son was "all things" to the Father; and the things of the Son, and thereby the "all things" of the Father, were to be declared to the believers by the Spirit.

16:16 *A little while, and you will see me no more; and then a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to the Father-* The first "little while" refers to the time remaining until His death (7:33; 13:33). The second "little while" is until the point when they would 'see' Him because He goes to the Father. The 'seeing' in view is the vision of the presence of Jesus

which arises from the gift of the Spirit which would be given as a result of the Lord's death. His going to the Father could refer to ascension; but that was not when the Spirit gift was given and they 'saw' Him. It was not through his ascension that the gift was enabled, but rather through His death. And it is to His death that "I go to the Father" refers elsewhere in John. The second "little while" I suggest refers to the period from His death until the receipt of the Comforter and the full seeing of Him then. He is of course presenting a purposeful paradox; that His going away was in fact when they would 'see' Him. This 'seeing' was the understanding of Him and experience of His presence which would be possible through the Comforter. Elsewhere in John, beholding or seeing the Son doesn't refer to physically seeing Him, but rather to understanding and believing in Him (Jn. 1:14,29,36,50; 6:40; 12:21; 14:9,19; 17:24 etc.). The Lord surely meant: 'Soon, you will no longer see / understand / believe me... but, in the end, you *will* understand / believe in me'. And John, the author or speaker of this Gospel record, was one of those being referred to. So he, and all the disciples, would've been appealing to people to see / understand / believe in Jesus, whilst openly telling them that they themselves had once lost that understanding / belief which they once had, even though they regained it later.

"If I go... I will come again... A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me, because I go to my father" (Jn. 14:3; 16:16). This may refer to Moses going up and down the mountain, disappearing from Israel's sight, and then returning with the covenant- to find Israel worshipping the golden calf. Perhaps this refers to the Lord's disappointment that they did not perceive the wonder of His resurrection.

The New Testament speaks in challenging terms of how real is to be our relationship with the Lord Jesus. The Lord's enigmatic words of Jn. 16:16 indicate just *how* close the Comforter was to make Him come to His people once He was in Heaven: "Yet a little while, and ye shall not see me [*theoreo*, to physically see]: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me [*horai*, to know or understand, to spiritually 'see'], because I go to the Father". It could be argued, *contra* my position just stated, that the "little while" in each clause is one and the same. In "a little while" they would not see Him physically, but exactly because He would be with the Father, He would send the Comforter, and enable His people to 'see' Him in the sense that John usually speaks of in his Gospel. This 'seeing' of Jesus, this perception of Him, is effectively a 'seeing' of the Father.

16:17- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

*Some of his disciples questioned each other: What is this that he said to us? A little while and you will see me no more; and then a little while and you shall see me, because I go to the Father?-* Their questions were presumably said out of the Lord's earshot, for He perceived rather than heard their questions (:19). His sensitivity of Spirit was such that He could perceive the hearts of men, without necessarily receiving some bolt of direct revelation as to what they were thinking. And His sensitive spirit is given to us. See on :16 for comment about the "little while".

There are two different words for "see" used here, and at first blush they seem rather strange. But that was purposeful, as the Lord wished their minds to work upon this immense idea of His absence meaning His presence through the Spirit. The first means 'to discern' and the second more literally 'to see'. In a little while He would die and they would not discern / see Him, they would not understand; but then they would 'see' Him when He went to the Father.

The presence of the Son through the Comforter would be as real as if they were literally seeing Him; and this huge challenge comes down to us today.

16:18 *They said: What is this that he said? A little while? We cannot decipher what he said-* They struggled over which period He had in view, and whether there were two 'little while' periods or whether they are referring to the same period. See on :16. The Lord was speaking in such a way that they would mull over His words. For the truth He presents here is so utterly profound and demanding that it cannot be accepted or perceived by just reading or hearing a few words and grasping the idea. The gift of the Spirit would mean that He would be amongst them just as really, and even moreso, as He had been in His physical presence.

16:19 *Jesus perceived that they wanted to ask him, and he said to them: Do you inquire among yourselves what I said? A little while and you will see me no more, and then a little while and you shall see me?-* See on :17 regarding the Lord's perception. The Lord may be rebuking them for asking *among themselves* for the answer to the paradox, rather than asking *Him*. Very rarely in the Gospel records does the Lord respond directly to the questions He was asked. He replies at a tangent, sometimes directing the questioner away from the question to more significant issues, or answering the question in terms of higher principle rather than focusing just on the specific case in question. And His response here is the same.

16:20 *Truly, truly, I say to you: You shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice. You shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy!*- As noted on :19, the Lord's response to the question about what "a little while" meant is typical of how He tends not to directly answer questions. He wanted them to reflect about what He meant; He wanted them, like us, to personally come to realize the momentous truth that through the Spirit, He will be as present with us as He physically was with the disciples during His ministry, teaching us as He taught them, under the trees and in the courtyards of Galilee. Instead He re-focuses their minds on the trauma immediately ahead. The Gospels do not record the disciples weeping and lamenting the Lord's death whilst the Jewish world rejoiced, but that is what happened during the days the Lord lay dead. Their sorrow is read here positively by the Lord as sorrow for the loss of a loved one. But in reality, their sorrow was also because of dashed hopes, as the disciples on the way to Emmaus clearly reveal. Their sorrow was also partly because of disappointment. But the Lord wishes to interpret their sorrow positively, and therefore turns it into the idea that their sorrow was that experienced by a woman just before giving birth. But as noted on :21, that is to force a simile, for "sorrow" is not really the dominant emotion or feeling of a woman in advanced labour. The way the Lord forces the simile is a reflection of how He was simply so positive about the weakness of the disciples' understanding. And we must have His positive spirit in all our dealings with our fellow disciples, never cutting them off because they lack understanding, faith or sufficient attention to the Lord's words; but ever hoping that they shall develop, and accepting what understanding they do have in a positive way; seeing the glass half full rather than half empty.

16:21 *A woman when she is in labour has sorrow, because her hour comes; but when she has delivered the child, she does not remember her anguish, because of her joy that a child is born into the world-* The coming hour is spoken of in John as the hour of the Lord's death. Although the Lord is addressing the disciples, as so often in His teaching, He is speaking to Himself too. For He was the one about to go through physical pain, to the end the child of the church should be born into the Jewish world- a world which would not accept it, as the drama of Revelation 12 makes clear, in its immediate first century application. Judaism used this

very metaphor to speak of Israel's sufferings immediately prior to the coming of the Messianic Kingdom. The Lord is alluding to this, saying that His Kingdom is to come in the form of the birth of the church, but only as a baby, which must grow into the full maturity of His Kingdom on earth to be established at the second coming. His joy in us now means that He does not "remember" the anguish of the cross. The pain of the cross was therefore His bearing of the pain of Israel. The Lord is going along with the Jewish understanding of the metaphor, in that He is alluding to Is. 26:16-21 where we meet the ideas of a "little while", the last day, the hope of resurrection and the metaphor of a woman in labour. And John was writing immediately prior to the pains of AD70 and Christian persecution/. The Lord had taken those pains into Himself in His crucifixion sufferings, and could absolutely relate to them.

The day of the Lord will result in the wicked being "in pain as of a woman that travaileth" (Is. 13:8). Yet the faithful just before His coming would also be like a woman in travail (1 Thess. 5:3), with the subsequent joy on delivery matching the elation of the disciples in realizing the Lord had risen and would be eternally present with them through the Comforter (Jn. 16:21). So, it's travail- or travail, especially in the last days. If we choose the way of the flesh, it will be travail for nothing, bringing forth in vain (this is seen as a characteristic of all worldly life in Is. 65:23). We either cut off the flesh now (in spiritual circumcision), or God will cut us off at the last day. This point was made when the rite of circumcision was first given: "The uncircumcised [un-cut off] man...shall be cut off" (Gen. 17:14). See on Mt. 3:11.

16:22 *You now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one will take away from you-* It is tempting to connect this joy with the joy of the disciples when they met the risen Lord and literally saw Him again (20:20). But the joy in the heart which would never be taken from them is really a stronger reference to the coming of the Comforter to abide with them for ever; this was when and how they 'saw' the Lord in the sense John's Gospel uses the term, to mean understand / believe. The Lord's literal resurrection and the joy they had on literally seeing Him is presented as the joy that shall be with all who have received His abiding presence in the Comforter. That joy cannot be taken from them; but the joy of literally seeing Him would soon fade when He ascended, if the joy in view is simply that of literally seeing the risen Lord. The joy at seeing Him which does not fade is only possible if His presence abides permanently, and that is the work of the Comforter, making Him present to us as really as if He were physically with us. "Your heart shall rejoice" is a direct quotation from Is. 66:14 LXX about the permanent joy of the Kingdom age. This is not to say that the Kingdom has now come. The idea is that through the work of the Comforter we experience the life eternal, the permanent joy of the Kingdom age is known in our experience of His abiding presence now.

"I will see you again" reads strangely; we would rather expect "You will see me again, so don't be sad". He sees us again, in that He comes to us. And He knows / sees us, as well as us seeing / knowing Him. Gal. 4:9 may have this idea in view, teaching that it is not so much a question of us knowing God, but of Him knowing us. Likewise, we did not choose Him, but He chose us (15:19).

16:23 *And in that day, you shall ask me no questions-* As noted on :22, the experience of abiding joy and seeing the Lord is all Kingdom language, in that the Comforter enables us to live the eternal life, the Kingdom life, right now. This explains why "that day" is a phrase commonly used to refer to the last day (2 Tim. 1:12,18 etc.). "That day" in essence comes to all who receive the Comforter, and thereby have the Lord's permanent presence. In 1 Jn. 2:18

John speaks as if the believers are right now in the last day / hour; not only in that they are expecting the second coming at any minute, but in that the last day is in essence being experienced by them.

"Ask me no questions" can be translated "ask me nothing". The idea is that His relationship with the Father will be ours; we will relate directly to the Father as He did and does, because we are "in my name", possessing the Comforter which is sent in His name. If we insist on the sense of 'ask me no questions', the idea could be that because we know the Father and Son through having relation with them, we will not be full of questions (1 Jn. 2:20). Our base experience of relationship with them will mean that 'hard questions' are of no particular angst to us. We know the things of our salvation (15:14,15), and that is enough. Any other questions are of far secondary importance. All struggles about apologetics, questions about the conflict between current science and the Bible, all become utterly subsumed beneath the reality of knowing the Father and Son in the sense of having ongoing relationship with them. The questions in the immediate context concerned the Lord's going away and coming again. The Comforter would explain those questions; and we note that the meaning of the Lord's death, resurrection and gift of the Holy Spirit were not understood by the disciples until after His resurrection and their receipt of the Holy Spirit Comforter. The Comforter works likewise with us, unpacking the meaning of these things- for the Lord was far from the only man to die through crucifixion. The personal import of *His* death and resurrection and gift of His Spirit has to be personally experienced; theology can only go so far. And that is the work of the Comforter.

We recall that towards the end of His ministry, the Jews ceased asking the Lord questions (Mt. 22:46). This was because things had come to such a pitch that the Lord had answered everything and presented Himself without doubt as their Saviour and God's Son. The choices left were to believe in Him, or turn against Him blinded by a bad conscience. The Lord seems to be alluding to that position, saying that the disciples were also going to be in a position where they totally believed in Him and needed answers to no more questions, for the answer was already clear.

*Truly, truly, I say to you: If you shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name-* The intimacy of relationship between Father and Son is to be experienced by us on account of the Comforter. We will sense His will and pray accordingly, and receive. "In my name" is another way of saying that because we are in Christ and He in us, we shall directly dialogue with the Father just as He did and does. He will no longer be a mediator, in that sense. The language of His intercession which we encounter later in the New Testament is all concerning His attainment of salvation for us (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25), and the contexts do not refer to some kind of mechanical transaction being performed between Son and Father every time we pray for some request. We who were enemies have now been reconciled to God in Christ, as Romans 5 teaches. The Lord's work of mediating between God and man is therefore for those who have yet to be reconciled; for us it is done, we already live as reconciled to God.

Moses reached something of that intimacy; he cried to Yahweh to take away the frogs, "and Yahweh did according to the word of Moses" (Ex. 8:12,13); the requests of prayer become almost a command to God; by His grace, we will ask what we will and He will do it for us (Jn. 16:23). W.E. Vine makes the point that the Greek here implies a superior asking an inferior to do something. Not only is this an essay in the humility of God's self-revelation, but it surely shows how if we seriously believe in the power of prayer, what we request really

will be given. "Thou shalt also decree a thing (in prayer) and it shall be established unto thee" (Job 22:28). Rev. 9:13 portrays prayer as a command to the Angels. The prayer of command is to be found in the well known words of Ps. 122. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem", David exhorts. And the response [made so much clearer when the Psalm is sung]: "Peace be within thy walls... I will now say, Peace be within thee" (Ps. 122:6-8). The way peace is 'commanded' to be in Jerusalem by those who pray is because they so believe that the answer will surely come.

The wonder of the resurrection would totally affect our attitude to asking for things, the Lord taught in Jn. 16:23,26. "In that day [of marvelling in the resurrected Lord], ye shall ask me nothing... if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you [RV]... in that day you shall ask in my name...". What are we to make of all this talk of asking and not asking, in the 'day' of the resurrected Lord Jesus? My synthesis of it all is this: Due to the sheer wonder of the resurrection of the Lord, we will not feel the need to ask for anything for ourselves. The gift of freedom from sin is enough. Because if God gave us His Son and raised Him from the dead, we will serve for nothing, for no extra 'perks' in this life; and yet, wonder of wonders, *if* we shall ask, in His Name, we will receive. But we must ask whether the implications and wonder of the fact of the Lord's resurrection have had such an effect upon us...?

16:24 *So far you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be made full-* By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new creation (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled. This doesn't simply refer to the joy of receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name. See on 17:13.

16:25 *These things have I spoken to you in figurative language-* This explains why the Lord did not directly answer their question concerning what He meant by "a little while"; see on :18,19.

*The hour comes, when I shall no longer speak to you in figurative language, but shall show you plainly about the Father-* God was especially in Christ at His death. Perhaps it was partly with reference to the cross that the Lord said: "I shall shew you plainly of the Father" (Jn. 16:25). See on Jn. 19:19.

John's references to the hour coming nearly always refer to the crucifixion. The plain showing forth of the Father was in the naked body of His crucified Son; there, all the theory which Jesus had taught was exemplified in stark, plain terms. The Father was ultimately revealed. Is. 64:1-4 had foretold: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence... For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him". This latter verse is quoted in

1 Cor. 2 about how the "foolishness" of the cross is not accepted by the wise of this world. Only the humble and spiritually perceptive eye of faith realized that there in the naked shame of Golgotha, God Himself had rent the heavens and come down, as all the faithful had somehow, in some sense foreseen and yearned for. There, in the battered body of Jesus, was God revealed to men.

As noted on Jn. 2:4; 4:21-23 and 5:25-29, the hour that was to come is a reference to the cross. There, we see and hear the preaching / word of ['which is', Gk.] the cross. There on the cross, there was no allegory. There we were shown plainly the Father. He went on: "Behold, the hour [s.w. "time"] cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (16:32). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. Philip had just asked to be shown the Father, just as Moses had asked (14:9,10). And the Lord is saying that in the cross, they will see plainly of the Father. And perhaps therefore we are to understand 17:24 as meaning that Jesus prayed that the disciples would physically see and spiritually understand His cross: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world". "I am", "my glory", given by the Father, and the lamb slain from "the foundation of the world"... this is all language of the cross.

And yet the showing plainly of the Father is spoken here in the context of assuring the disciples that although He, their Rabbi, was to be taken from them, His teaching of them would continue and intensify through the ministry of the Comforter in their hearts. The showing plainly is to be connected with the promise that the Comforter would guide them into all truth (:13), and then they would have no more questions (:23).

The Lord recognized the influence of the synagogue upon them when He said that He spoke to them in parables, and would later speak to them plainly (Jn. 16:25)- when He had earlier spoken to the Jewish world in parables rather than plainly, because they did not understand (Mk. 4:34). And yet the disciples got there in the end. He spoke to them in the end "plain words" (*parresia*), and this word is the watchword of the disciples' own witness to the world (Acts 2:29; 4:13,29,31; 28:31). They spoke "plainly" (*parresia*) to the world, without parables, because they reflected to the world the nature of their understanding of their Lord. However, during His ministry, it would appear that the Lord treated them as if they were still in the Jewish world. When they asked Him why He spoke to *the people* in parables, He replies by explaining why He spoke *to them* in parables; and He drives the point home that it is to those "outside" that He speaks in parables (Mk. 4:11).

16:26- see on Mt. 6:13; 1 Pet. 2:5.

*In that day you shall ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I will pray to the Father for you-* The Lord has just explained that "in that day" when they possess the Spirit, they will not need to go to the Father through the Lord. They will have the same relationship with the Father which the Son had and has; see on :23. They would ask the Father on account of being "in Christ", in His Name, baptized into it and abiding in it with the presence of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts. The Lord will not in some mechanical sense pray to the Father with our



words but expressed in different language, with a nudge, as it were, for Him to respond positively because we are the Lord's. We shall be in direct relationship with the Father.

This unity of Spirit between us, the Son and the Father explains an apparent contradiction in the Lord's discourse in the upper room: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will *I* do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask *me* anything (being) in my name, that will I do (Jn. 14:13,14 RV)... If ye shall ask anything of *the Father*, he will give it you in my name... and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you" (Jn. 16:23,26 RV). Who do we pray to? The Father, or the Son? Who 'does' the answer to our prayers? God, or Christ? The context of the Lord's words was that "the Father is with me... I am in the Father, and the Father is in me... the Father abiding in me doeth the works", even as the believers are in the Son and in the Father, as they are in us. This means that the question of who to pray to is on one level irrelevant. Our spirit bears witness with their Spirit, and there is only one spirit. This unity of the believer with the Father is only made possible through the Son, and so our formal prayers should be addressed to God not with "in Christ's Name" tagged on to the end of them [for that smacks of ritualism], but on account of our being in Christ, we can have a direct relationship with the Father. But the essence of prayer is not formal request. To pray "in my name" could mean 'in union with me'; yet Christ was at one with the Father. "He that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:27) without us verbalizing our spirit in formal prayer. In the same way as the priests helped / assisted the Old Testament worshippers rather than actually offered their prayers or sacrifices, so with the Lord Jesus. Paul spoke of how he would be helped "through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus" (Phil. 1:19 RSV). Their prayers ascended directly to God, but the response was helped by the spirit of the Lord Jesus which was to be given them in the Comforter; and because He is so sublimely at one with the Father, this means that the help will surely come. The rapport between our spirit and His Spirit is again reflected by the way Rom. 8:6,27 use the same phrase, "the mind of the spirit", to describe firstly the mind of *our* spirit, and then, the mind of the spirit of the Lord Jesus. We will no longer need Christ to ask the Father for us, we will be able to have a direct relationship with the Father in prayer. We will not need to be like the disciples, who in their immaturity asked Jesus to pass on their requests to God (Jn. 11:22). He sees our spirit anyway, He knows our need anyway; this knowledge doesn't depend on the Lord's mediation. The advocate, the Comforter, identifies with the one he helps, stands next to him, knowing his case fully. But as Christ is our advocate, so we should be to our brethren ("comfort" in 2 Cor. 2:7 is s.w. 1 Jn. 2:1). This doesn't necessarily mean that we interpret our brother's words to God, but rather than we pray for our brother, in our own words; we are with our brother, supporting him, knowing his weakness. So on one hand we have a direct relationship with the Father. On the other, the Lord Jesus is our vital, saving advocate with Him. I don't think these two aspects can be reconciled by re-translation or expositional juggling. The fact is, through what the Lord achieved, we theoretically don't need His mediation any longer. He was our High Priest to bring us to God on the cross. He no longer needs to enter into the Holiest Place (cp. heaven) to gain our atonement, for this He did once for all (Heb. 9:26). We should be able to pray with the earnest intensity of Elijah or Moses, who prayed without an intercessor, and were heard. But where we lack that intensity, the Lord Jesus holds up our feeble 'groanings' before the Father. Likewise He is our 'advocate', although theoretically a righteous man doesn't need an advocate. John almost writes as if 'Of course, you won't sin, but if very occasionally you do, Jesus can act as a powerful advocate for you'. And yet in reality, He is acting in the advocate role for much of our sin-stricken lives.

16:27 *For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came from the Father-* The Comforter, the gift of the Spirit in their hearts, would enable them to have the same relationship with the Father which the Son enjoyed in His mortal life. This is the repeated request in the prayer of chapter 17. The Lord does not therefore need to persuade the Father to be loving and generous in response to us; He Himself and of Himself *loves us*. Our love of the Son is read by the Father as love of Him, because we believe that the Jesus we love is His Son, 'come from the Father'. John later extends this logic, distilling it to mean that if we love the begetter we love also the begotten- and applies this to how therefore we cannot claim to love God but not love His spiritually begotten children (1 Jn. 4:1,2). "The Father Himself loves you" is a phrase we need to bear in our hearts always. We do not need the Lord to as it were get us on His right side; He Himself directly loves us, and all our brethren too.

The Lord's statement that "You... have believed that I came out from God" elicited agreement from the disciples: "[Yes], we believe that you came forth from God". But to that He responds in :32: "Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, is now come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and shall leave me alone". Although they didn't really fully believe, He said that they did. He wasn't so in love with them that He was blind to their failures. But He was all the same so positive about their practically non-existent faith. And what's more, He goes on to tell the Father His positive perspective on their faith: "They... have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (Jn. 17:8). But the Lord had only just been telling the disciples that they *didn't* really believe that He had come out from God...! Yet He counted them as if they did, and reflected this to the Father in prayer. And this is surely how the Lord feels and speaks about us to the Father today.

16:30- see on Jn. 15:16-19.

*Now we are sure that you know all things, and do not need anyone to question you. By this we believe you came from God-* They do not say to the effect that 'Ah, now we understand everything!'. They realized they did not, but were now satisfied that the Lord did understand and know all things. And here we have comfort to us in our questioning of Him; the comfort is not that we know the answers, but that there are answers, and He holds them. "By this we believe you came from God" may be reported as another example of a confessional formula; the hint is to readers and listeners to make the same confession in their hearts.

The words of the Lord Jesus were the words which He had 'heard' from the Father. But this doesn't mean that He was a mere fax machine, relaying literal words which the Father whispered in His ear to a listening world. When the disciples finally grasped something of the real measure of Jesus, they gasped: "You do not even need that a person ask you questions!" (Jn. 16:30). They had previously treated Jesus as a Rabbi, of whom questions were asked by his disciples and then cleverly answered by him. They finally perceived that here was more than a Jewish Rabbi. They came to that conclusion, they imply, not by asking Him questions comprised of words and hearing the cleverly ordered words that comprised His answers. The words He spoke and manifested were of an altogether higher quality and nature than mere lexical items strung together. Here was none other than the Son of God, the Word made flesh in person.

16:31- see on Jn. 17:6.

*Jesus answered them: Do you now believe?*- This recalls how Joshua and Moses in their goodbye speeches questioned Israel as to whether their commitment was really what they claimed, and warning that after their death they would soon fall away. See on Mt. 28:10.

However, a fair translation, supported by NIV and Leon Morris (*John* p. 631) is: "You now believe!". In this case, He rejoiced at their faith despite knowing that they would be weak in faith (:32); in the same way as John's Gospel positively records all confession of faith in the Lord, despite noting how weak that faith was subsequently shown to be.

16:32- see on Jn. 10:5.

*Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home, and you shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me-* The Lord's 'hour' which was to come was His death (Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23,27; 13:1; 17:1; 19:27). The disciples scattered at the crucifixion, probably they came to see it and then scattered in fear after the first hour or so. But He was not left alone; for the Father was with Him there. Just as John began his Gospel by saying that "the word was with God", with specific reference to the cross. See on Jn. 19:19 concerning the special presence of the Father with the Son on the cross.

Each of them ran off to their own little family, to safeguard their own petty little human possessions, and left Him alone; alone, when He most needed some human comfort and compassion, a wave from a friend in the crowd, a few silently mouthed words, a catching of the eye, perhaps even the courtesy of a brief hand-shake or clap on the shoulders before the 11 ran off into the night, the word 'thank-you' called out as He stumbled along the Via Dolorosa. But nothing. They cleared off, they got out, every man to his own. And the pain of betrayal with a kiss by a man He was gracious enough to think of as His equal, with whom He had shared sweet fellowship (Ps. 55:13,14). And to hear Peter's cursing, perhaps cursing of Him; his denial that he'd ever known the guy from Nazareth. And yet in the face of *all this*, the Lord went on: He laid down His life *for us*, we who betrayed Him, scattered from Him, hated Him, did Him to death in the most degrading and painful way our race knew how. In the face of rejection to the uttermost, He served us to the end, even to death, and even to the death of the cross.

The response of the disciples to the Lord's arrest was to flee; and at the time of His resurrection, which in faith they ought to have joyfully expected, they quite literally 'went fishing'. The powerful point is made that the church was built upon the foundations of men weak in faith, who were openly discredited and who themselves, in the Gospel records, preached their own weakness. And yet they are the foundation stones of the new Jerusalem pictured in Revelation. This stands for all time as an encouragement to all in their weakness.

"The Father is with me" is recorded here in this context of weakness; for the Lord later cried from the cross that the Father had forsaken Him (Mt. 27:46). Perhaps this obvious tension is introduced here to show that human crisis of faith is not necessarily sinful, for the Lord experienced it.

16:33 *These things have I spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good courage; I have overcome the world-* This promise of personal "peace" comes straight after the prediction of their collapse of faith and shameful

abandonment of the Lord. "Peace" in the Bible usually refers to peace with God. He is saying that despite their failure, He had foreseen it and His death would deal with it, and the gift of the Spirit would involve the gift of peace in their hearts, despite their sin and weakness. They could therefore find peace with God despite their failure; and despite their tribulation in the Jewish world, particularly that which would come in the last days and AD70(Mk. 13:9), their peace with the Father and Son would make them courageous and strong in the face of all rejection by the Jewish world, in which they would have tribulation.

The Lord had "overcome" the Jewish world, and every form of this world; and He frequently uses the word in His letters to the churches in Rev. 2,3, encouraging us likewise to overcome. His spirit is to be ours. John too rather likes this word "overcome", using it of how his converts had "overcome the wicked one" and the [Jewish] false teachers (1 Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4). "The wicked one" is therefore, in the first context, the Jewish world which the Lord overcame. This is why the terms "satan" and "devil" and other such titles are used about the Jewish world so often; see my chapter 'The Jewish Satan' in *The Real Devil*, chapter 2.



## CHAPTER 17

17:1 *These things spoke Jesus*- The idea is that after having given the discourse just recorded in the previous chapters, the Lord prayed this prayer. In discussing the Lord's teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16, we have noted that He speaks of this gift as He Himself, coming in the first instance to the disciples who had been with Him "from the beginning" and who were to convict the Jewish world of sin by their witness, in the strength of the Comforter; and yet we have also seen that the promised Comforter is essentially an internal strengthening given to all believers. These three themes are all summed up in the Lord's prayer of John 17. The prayer falls easily into the same three categories; prayer for Himself (:1-5), for the disciples (:6-19) and for all believers (:20-26).

*And lifting up his eyes to Heaven, he said*- The significance of this is that the Lord has spoken of how the Comforter would enable believers in Him to have the same kind of relationship with the Father which He had enjoyed in His mortal life. And His prayer goes on to emphasize this. The fact He could pray to God in Heaven with no sense of barrier is a profound visual indicator of the totally open nature of that relationship; and His intention is that we share the same relationship with the Father as He did.

Indeed we must ask why the record of this prayer, the Lord's longest recorded prayer, this unique insight into His relationship with the Father, is placed at this point. Why do we not have transcripts of other, earlier prayers to the Father earlier in the account? I suggest it is because it follows on from the Lord's promise that through the presence of the Spirit, believers would share His relationship with the Father. And in this prayer, we see something of what that relationship involved.

*Father, the hour comes. Glorify Your son, that the son may glorify you*- The coming of the predetermined hour for His death did not make the Lord fatalistic, merely submitting to the Father's will. Not the hour had come, He prayed to the Father. Our sense of God's utter sovereignty should lead to prayer and action, as it did with the Lord; rather than mere resignation to His will. The Lord was lifted up on the cross, and 'lifted up' is the Hebrew idea for glorification. The Lord saw the whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as glorification; He did not break the process down into chronological segments, for He looked at it from outside time as we know it. It was by or for the glory of the Father that the Lord was raised from the dead (Rom. 6:4), so the glorification process includes both death and resurrection. The purpose of His glorification was for the Father's glory, and Paul alludes to this in teaching that the whole process of the Lord's humiliation and glorification was "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). The language and concepts simply cannot be fitted in to the Trinitarian paradigm.

The echoes of Deuteronomy in the Lord's goodbye speeches shouldn't be missed; for Moses at this time truly was a superb type of the Lord Jesus. Deuteronomy concludes with two songs of Moses, one addressed to the Father (Dt. 32), and the other to his people (Dt. 33). It is apparent that the Lord's final prayer in Jn. 17 is divisible into the same divisions- prayer to the Father, and concern for His people. It has been observed that the prayer of Jn. 17 is also almost like a hymn- divided into seven strophes of eight lines each. It would appear to be John's equivalent to the record in Mk. 14:26 of a hymn being sung at the end of the Last Supper.

The prayer is in some ways an expanded restatement of the model prayer. In it, the Lord asks for the Father's Name to be hallowed or glorified (Jn. 17:1,11,12); for His work or will to be done or finished (Jn. 17:4); for deliverance from the evil one (Jn. 17:15). The prayer of Jn. 17 can be divided into three units of about the same length (Jn. 17:1-8; 9-19; 20-26). Each has the theme of glory, of directly addressing the Father, and of the needs of God's people- all clearly taken from the model prayer.

17:2 *Even as You gave him authority over all flesh, so that he should give eternal life to all whom You have given him-* The connection between the universal authority of the Lord and the need to preach it is made in Jn. 17:2,3 AV: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, *that* he should give eternal life to [men]... and this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent". The great commission says that because He has power over all flesh, therefore we must preach Him to all flesh (Mt. 28:18,19). Jn. 17:2 says that because He has this power, He can give men eternal life through the knowledge of Him. But that giving of eternal life is through the process of our obedience to the great commission to go out and offer it to all flesh. The extent of our obedience to the preaching commission is the extent to which eternal life is given to men. Their eternal destiny is placed in our hands. The authority to save all men and women has been given to the Lord, but the extent to which this becomes reality depends upon our preaching it. And yet the gift of eternal life cannot be limited to the gift of immortality at the Lord's return; for throughout John, the gift of the life eternal is a present experience. The Lord gives us His life, through the gift of His Spirit into our spirit and living. It is this which we offer to "all flesh", and it shall surely have its issue in the gift of immortality at His return.

17:3- see on Jn. 10:15; 1 Jn. 1:3.

*And this is everlasting life, that they should know You, the only true God, and him whom You sent, Jesus Christ-* As noted on :2, the gift of eternal life refers not only to immortality at His return. The meaning of this idea in John is that we can live that eternal life now. And so He defines what it is to life eternal life now- it is a knowing of the Father and Son, using 'knowledge' in the Hebraic sense of relationship with. The idea is not that if we have true academic, theological knowledge about the Father and Son, we shall get eternal life at the last day as a kind of reward for being so smart. That was the Rabbinic understanding; but the Lord turns it on its head, by saying that the knowledge of Father and Son, the life lived in relationship with them, is a gift, given right now, to those who believe (:2).

The Lord usually speaks of Himself in the third person- e.g. "the son"; but here in Jn. 17:3 He refers to Himself in prayer to the Father as "Jesus Christ", as if He was consciously aware of how we would later see Him, and aware that His words were being recorded for us.

He will say to many in the last day that He has never known them, for they never knew Him- for all their pure doctrine and good works. Life eternal is about knowing God and Jesus (Jn. 17:3)- and the Greek word here doesn't mean to merely know in an academic sense, but to know intimately and personally in relationship. Only if we *really* see / perceive the Son will we be saved; "you have seen me and yet believe not" the Lord told the Jews, warning them that only those who see the Son *and* believe in Him will have eternal life (Jn. 6:36, 40). If we

really know the Son then we will likewise know His love and sacrifice is enough to truly grant us the life eternal. If we truly see the Son and believe in Him, then we will know that we (will have) eternal life- because His grace, His love, His desire to save will be so clearly evident to us through the study and knowledge of His personality. If we know Him, we will be sure of our salvation; for we are living now the kind of life which we shall eternally live, the eternal life given right now to believers through the Spirit. We will be humbly confident that in the very, final end- we will be there. There is therefore the factual, doctrinal 'knowledge' or 'seeing' which by grace has been granted us. But beyond that there is the true seeing and believing into the Man Jesus, with the definite Hope which that brings. If we *truly* know Him we will count literally all else as loss (Phil. 3:8). We should not be in the faith, labouring towards the Kingdom, just so that we personally can have eternal life at the end of it. "Eternal life" in John's Gospel refers to knowing and understanding God now, rather than simply to infinity (Jn. 17:3; 1 Jn. 5:20).

The "... know you" is in the continuous tense. It speaks of relationship. It is simply not so that if we attain a set level of knowledge of God and His Son, then we shall be rewarded with immortality at the last day. The 'knowledge' in view is ongoing, incremental, and therefore refers to a relationship. This point has been sadly missed by those who insist on teaching converts theology about God and Jesus, baptize them once they have attained a level of facility with it which the teacher sets, and then tells them to hold on to those understandings and hope to get immortality for it at the last day. This verse has tragically been misread to support such a view. But it teaches something quite different- to be knowing, in a continuous tense, is a gift from God; and is the definition of the gift of life eternal. That eternal knowing will of course continue eternally, throughout the Kingdom. As God is infinite, it will take eternity to get to know Him. Life eternal both then as now will be all about getting to know God and Jesus. David saw the Kingdom as a time of *enquiring* after God in His temple (Ps. 27:4). According to Jn. 17:3 and its various Old Testament foundations, to know God is to live for ever. Eternal life is all about knowing His Name. Hos. 6:2,3 LXX puts it like this: "We shall rise [from the dead] and live in His presence, and have knowledge; we shall press forward to know the Lord". If we start knowing God now, and press ever forward to know His Name yet more... we have started the essence of the life which we will eternally live. And of course 'knowing the Lord' involves a personal union with Christ, experience and relationship with Him, of which intellectual knowledge is only a part. For in John's Gospel, seeing, knowing and believing are related; "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:7-9) is paralleled with "If you believe in God, believe in me" (Jn. 14:1). We start the process of knowing the Father's Name in this life; and in this sense we embark upon what will be for us [by His grace] the experience of the eternal life.

The new covenant promised that all God's people would know Him (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11). By baptism into the Lord, that new covenant is made with all believers. The knowledge promised is therefore a gift, part of the covenant promise, the equivalent of the word to Abraham that "I will be their God", in personal relationship / knowledge with each member of the seed. This promise of knowing God begins to be fulfilled when each believer is given that knowledge / relationship. It is not the case that on the basis of acquired theological knowledge, a believer receives some blessing. Rather is the knowledge of God a gift from Him to us, in the sense of relationship with Him, in which it is more significant to be known by Him rather than to know Him academically.

17:4 *I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You gave me to do-*  
The Lord sees His death and resurrection as His glorification of the Father (:1). And yet He

knew that in essence, He had accomplished or finished that work during His mortal life. His final cry "It is finished / accomplished" was of course significant, but the essence of His sacrifice had been made in His personality and life amongst men before that. In 4:34 He spoke of His accomplishing the Father's work as still ongoing; and an example of it was [in that context] the saving of the Samaritan woman. His work was the Father's work, which was bringing men to faith and the experience now of eternal life. His life was the pattern for that eternal life, and now His life was at an end, He could say that He had completed that work.

17:5- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And now Father, glorify me with Your own self with the glory which I had with You before the world was-*

The idea of 'apocalypse' alludes to this Jewish idea of predestined things 'existing' in Heaven with God; for 'apocalypse' means literally an unveiling, a revealing of what is [in Heaven]. In this sense the believer at the resurrection will receive what was already laid up in store for him or her in Heaven (2 Cor. 5:1; Col. 1:5; Mt. 25:34). Because of this, Hebrew can use past tenses to speak of that which is future (e.g. Is. 5:13; 9:2,6,12; 10:28; 28:16; 34:2; Gen. 15:18 cp. Acts 7:5). Things can thus "be" before they are created: "They are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). And thus when the Lord Jesus speaks of the glory which He had with God from the beginning, there is no suggestion there that He therefore existed in glory from the beginning. He didn't ask for that glory to be restored to Him, as trinitarianism demands; instead He asked that the glory which He already had in the Divine purpose, be given to Him. Significantly, there is a Greek word which specifically refers to personal, literal pre-existence: *pro-uparchon*- and it's never used about the Lord Jesus.

To understand this verse, we must enquire what the Bible means when it speaks about "glory". The glory of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai- and what he heard was the declaration of God's Name or character, that Yahweh is a God full of grace, mercy, truth, justice, judgment etc. (Ex. 33:19; 34:6,7). Jesus alludes to what happened at Sinai by saying that He has "glorified you... manifested your name" (Jn. 17:4,6) before the foundation of the Jewish world, which was at Sinai. Whenever those characteristics of God are recognized, manifested or openly shown, God is glorified. In this sense, God is the "God of glory" (Ps. 29:3 etc.). He is totally associated with His Name and characteristics- it's not that He just shows those particular attributes to men, but He Himself personally is someone quite different. He *is* His glory. And this is why Jn. 17:5 parallels His glory with God's very own "self".

That glory of God was of course always with God, right at the beginning. He hasn't changed His essential characteristics over time. The God of the Old Testament is the same God as in the New Testament. As John begins his Gospel by saying in the prologue, the essential "Word", *logos* of God, His essential plans, intentions, personality, was in the beginning with Him. It was "made flesh" in the person of Jesus (Jn. 1:14), in that the Lord Jesus in His life and especially in His death on the cross revealed all those attributes and plans of God in a concrete, visible form- to perfection.



The request of Jesus to be glorified is therefore asking for the Name / attributes / characteristics / glory / word of God to be openly revealed in Him. Surely He had in mind His resurrection, and the glorifying of God which would take place as a result of this being preached and believed in world-wide.

But in what sense was this the glory which Jesus had with God before the world was? The “glory” of God was revealed to Moses at Sinai in Ex. 34 as the declaration of His character, at the beginning of the Jewish world. In this sense, the Lord Jesus could speak of having in His mortal life “that glory which was with [the Father]” when the [Jewish] world came into existence at Sinai (Jn. 17:5 Ethiopic and Western Text). It was that same glory which, like Moses, He reflected to men. But according to 2 Cor. 3:18, the very experience of gazing upon the glory of His character will change us into a reflection of it. There is something transforming about the very personality of Jesus. And perhaps this is why we have such a psychological barrier to thinking about Him deeply. We know that it has the power to transform and intrude into our innermost darkness.

There is essentially only one glory- the glory of the Son is a reflection or manifestation of the glory of the Father. They may be seen as different glories only in the sense that the same glory is reflected from the Lord Jesus in His unique way; as a son reflects or articulates his father’s personality, it’s not a mirror personality, but it’s the same essence. One star differs from another in glory, but they all reflect the same essential light of glory. The Lord Jesus sought only the glory of the Father (Jn. 7:18). He spoke of God’s glory as being the Son’s glory (Jn. 11:4). Thus Isaiah’s vision of God’s glory is interpreted by John as a prophecy of the Son’s glory (Jn. 12:41).

The glory of God is His “own self”, His own personality and essence. This was with God of course from the ultimate beginning of all, and it was this glory which was manifested in both the death and glorification of the Lord Jesus (Jn. 17:5). The Old Testament title “God of glory” is applied to the Lord Jesus, “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8; James 2:1). It is *God’s* glory which radiates from the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Jesus is the brightness of God’s glory, because He is the express image of God’s personality (Heb. 1:3). He received glory from God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:17). God is the “Father of glory”, the prime source of the one true glory, that is reflected both in the Lord Jesus and in ourselves (Eph. 1:17). The intimate relation of the Father’s glory with that of the Son is brought out in Jn. 13:31,32: “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him; and God shall glorify him in himself, and straightway shall he glorify him”.

What all this exposition means in practice is this. There is only “one glory” of God. That glory refers to the essential “self”, the personality, characteristics, being etc. The Lord Jesus manifested that glory in His mortal life (Jn. 2:11). But He manifests it now that He has been “glorified”, and will manifest it in the future day of His glory. And the Lord was as in all things a pattern to us. We are bidden follow in His path to glory. We now in our personalities reflect and manifest the one glory of the Father, and our blessed Hope is glory in the future, to be glorified, to be persons who reflect and ‘are’ that glory in a more intimate and complete sense than we are now, marred as we are by our human dysfunction, sin, and weakness of will against temptation. We now reflect that glory as in a dirty bronze mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). The outline of God’s glory in the face of Jesus is only dimly reflected in us. But we are being changed, from glory to glory, the focus getting clearer all the time, until that great day when we meet Him and see Him face to face, with all that shall imply and result in. But my point in this context is that there is only one glory. That glory was with God from the beginning. The Lord Jesus was in the mind and plan of God from the beginning. It was God’s original plan to

resurrect and glorify and justify His Son. And in Jn. 17:5, the Lord is asking that this will happen.

The glory which the Lord Jesus had “before the world was” is connected with the way that He was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20), the way God promised us eternal life (through His Son) before the world was (Tit. 1:2). 2 Tim. 1:9 speaks of us as being called to salvation in Christ “before the world began”, He “chose us in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). In the same way as we didn’t personally exist before the world began, neither did Christ. Indeed 1 Cor. 2:7 speaks of *us* having some form of glory with God “before the world began”. It’s the idea of this “one glory” again- God’s glory existed, and it was His plan to share it with His Son and with us; and He speaks of those things which are not as though they are, so certain are they of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17). In Jn. 17:5, the Lord Jesus is ‘pleading the promise’ of these things. We have noted that the Lord speaks of His whole process of death, resurrection and ascension as one item- going to the Father, glorification. He doesn’t break it down into chronological segments, and likewise His talk of glory before is spoken from the Divine perspective, outside the limitations which our kind of time places upon our language.

We need to remember that the Lord was speaking, and John was writing, against a Jewish background. The language of 'pre-existence' was common in Jewish thinking and writing. To be 'with God' didn't mean, in Jewish terms, to be up there in heaven with God literally. Mary had favour *para* God (Lk. 1:30) in the same way as Jesus had glory *para* God, but this doesn't mean she pre-existed or was in Heaven with God with her "favour". The Torah supposedly pre-existed, everything on earth was a pattern of the pre-existing ideas of those things which were held in the plan and mind of God in Heaven. John 17:5 has reference to these things: "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed". The Talmud and Genesis Rabbah speak of the "Throne of Glory" pre-existing before the world existed. And the Lord Jesus seems to be alluding to that. The Jewish mind wouldn't have understood the Lord Jesus to be making any claim here to have bodily, physically existed before birth. Peter reflected Jewish thinking when he wrote (albeit under inspiration) that Jesus was "foreknown" before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20 ESV). Think through the implications of being "foreknown"- the Greek word used is the root of the English word 'prognosis'. If God 'foreknew' His Son, the Son was not literally existent next to Him at the time of being 'foreknown'. Otherwise the language of 'foreknowing' becomes meaningless. He goes on to say that the faithful were 'God's' (:6), who were given to the Lord. This is another example of speaking of things which were not as though they were.

17:6 *I manifested Your Name to the men whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were and You gave them to me, and they have kept Your word-* The manifestation of the Name has echoes of the Angel manifesting the Name to Moses; here, the Lord is as the Angel, and the disciples are likened to Moses, which was a huge challenge to a mindset which considered Moses as the untouchable pinnacle of spirituality. But His manifestation of the Name was far greater than had happened then. We note that "Name" effectively means 'the whole person', all they stand for, characteristics, history and essence of being. The manifestation of the Name in the person of the Lord was throughout His life, but it would come to an intense climax in His manifestation of it on the cross (:26). It was not made to the Jewish world, but to those who had come out of that world, rather like Moses going out of the congregation of Israel in order to behold the manifestation of the Name to him.

As noted on :5, the Lord is here speaking to the Father, and as such has His perspective on time and existence. He speaks of the men whom the Father had given Him, as if they had always existed. They were given to Him, just as "the work" was given Him (:4). That "work" was therefore the salvation of those given Him, those foreknown and predestined to that call. The men having been given out of the Jewish world recalls the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed your word, and kept your covenant" (Dt. 33:9, cp. "they have kept your word"), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between the Lord and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

The idea of the manifestation of the Name recalls the prologue's statement in Jn. 1:14 that when the word of God was made flesh in the Son of God, we saw the glory of God. If "The word" which was made flesh is in fact a reference to the Name of God, then this becomes understandable. And so the *logos* of God, the Name of God, being with Him in the beginning and being Him in a sense, was revealed fully in the human person ("flesh") of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said this in so many words: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me" (Jn. 17:6). John surely has this in mind when he comments that the word / Name became flesh, and we saw that glory, but others in "the world" didn't perceive it (Jn. 1:14).

"They have kept your word" is the Lord speaking positively to the Father about His followers, just as He does concerning us today. The Lord's High Priestly prayer of intercession in John 17 [so called because of the way He speaks of 'sanctifying Himself'] reveals how positively He felt about the disciples- even though He knew and foretold that they were about to betray Him, deny Him and leave Him alone in His hour of greatest human need. His grace towards them here is quite profound. He describes them to His Father as those who "have kept your word"- referring to His own parable of the good ground, those who keep the word and bring forth fruit with patience (Lk. 8:15). Again, He tells His Father about them: "They have believed that You did send me" (Jn. 17:8). But He had just upbraided them for their *unbelief* in Him (Jn. 16:31), and would do so again in a few days' time (Mk. 16:14). Yet He presents His weak followers to the Father as so much better than they really were; and this is the same Lord who mediates for us today. Likewise, the Lord assures the Father that they were not "of the [Jewish] world" (Jn. 17:14,16), even though as we have shown in these studies, they were deeply influenced by the Jewish world around them. Perhaps the Lord looked ahead to the day when they would be spiritually stronger, and yet He presents the immature disciples to the Father from the perspective of how He hoped they would one day be. Thus He says that He has already "sent them into the world" (Jn. 17:18)- but this was only done by Him in its fullness *after* His resurrection. He speaks of how He was glorified in them before the [Jewish] world (Jn. 17:10)- when He knew Peter was about to deny Him and shame His whole cause and mission. But surely the Lord looked ahead to the hope He had in Peter and all of them, that they would go out into the world and glorify Him. Indeed, the whole prayer of Jn. 17 reveals how the Lord presented them to the Father as men who in many ways they simply were not. When they say "We believe... that you came forth from God", He comments: "Do you now believe?" and predicts their scattering. Yet in prayer to the Father, He says that they did believe "Surely... that I came out from thee" (Jn. 17:8,25). Their faith was anything but "sure". Likewise, we have shown above that they failed to really perceive His death, and thus failed to perceive the essence of *Him*. In the face of this tragedy, this frustration and pain, the Lord could calmly tell the Father: "I am glorified *in them*" (Jn. 17:10)- in they who understood so little, indeed who refused to understand. Even worse, the Lord had just been telling them that they didn't really love Him fully (Jn. 14:15,23,28). And yet He speaks to the Father of them as if they are *so* committed to Him.

The Lord's comment to the disciples that if they loved him, then they would 'keep his word' (Jn. 14:15,21,23) implies their love was at best imperfect. Their keeping of His word and loving Him was certainly under question in Jn. 15:10. And yet He confidently represents them to the Father as those who had kept His word (Jn. 17:6). Perhaps by this He simply means that they loved Him and thereby the Father, rather than claiming any particular level of obedience for them.

*17:7 Now they know that all things, whatever You have given me, are from You-* As noted on :6, there was much they did not know / understand / believe, which is the sense of 'knowing' in John. The Lord imputed more understanding and faith to them than they really had. The Last Supper discourse showed clearly enough that they didn't understand or "know" (Jn. 14:7,9; 16:5,18). Yet here, He uses the perfect tense of the verb 'to know' when He says "Now they have come to know..." . It's almost as if He increasingly imputed things to them which were not yet so, as increasingly He faced up to the reality and implications of His death for them. The disciples didn't "know" the things the Lord spoke to them about His origin and purpose- they only "knew" them after the resurrection (Lk. 18:34; Jn. 10:6; 12:16; 13:7). Jn. 14:7,9 is plain: "If you had known me... yet have you not known me", He tells the disciples. And yet He uses just that same Greek word in telling the Father that His men did "know" Him and His word (Jn. 17:7,8,25). He had faith and hope in their future maturity- they didn't then "know", but they did in the future (Jn. 12:16; 13:7). The Lord had hope that "In that day you shall know" (Jn. 14:20). For there was no absolute guarantee that the eleven would come to "know" Him and His word, seeing they had freewill- Jesus had faith they would, and He expressed that faith and Hope to the Father so positively.

The things given the Son were the disciples (:6). Perhaps the sense is that they now realized and believed that they had been given to the Son by the Father, and were therefore 'with' the Father.

17:8- see on Jn. 16:27; 17:6.

*For the words which You gave me I have given to them, and they received them, and knew as a truth that I came forth from You; and they believed that You did send me-* The connection with the prologue is in the way that the Jewish world did not receive the Lord as a person, but the disciples did. "He" as a person is hereby paralleled with His words.

The Lord told the Father that He had given the disciples His words, "and they have received them" (Jn. 17:8). This is evident allusion to the editorial comment in Dt. 33:3 about how all Israel received God's words through Moses. Likewise "I manifested thy name... they have kept thy word" (Jn. 17:6,26) = "I will proclaim the name of the Lord... they have observed thy word" (Dt. 32:3; 33:9). One marvels at the way the Lord's mind linked together so much Scripture in the artless, seamless way in which He did.

Their 'receiving' of the Lord's words should not be read as meaning that they reviewed all His recorded speech, as it were the 'red letter' sections of the New Testament, and accepted them as true or reasonable. The prologue defines the disciples as those who received "Him" (1:12; 13:20). There is a common parallel between Him personally and His words (5:43; 12:48). His words are put for Him as a person, as noted elsewhere. They received not just His spoken words but all His "fullness", the "testimony" of His person, His spirit (1:16; 3:33; 14:17). They received 'Him' in the sense of allowing Him into their hearts and lives, allowing Him to

fill them and abide in them. This is not quite the same as intellectual acceptance of words spoken as true and reasonable. Hence the same word is used about the receiving of the gift of the Spirit in the innermost being (7:39; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 1 Jn. 2:27).

17:9- see on 1 Tim. 2:2.

*I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for those whom You have given me; for they are Yours-* The disciples were given to the Lord out of the Jewish world, as the Levites were. As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14), so are the believers. The Levites represent us (Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between the Lord and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful. His statement that He prayed not for the Jewish world recalls the command to Jeremiah not to pray for the Jewish world of his day, for they had spurned multiple chances and now had to face judgment.

The Lord Jesus worked through individuals. His strategy was not so much to win the multitudes for His cause as to firmly found the faith of a few women and 12 men who would then take His message to the world. The men He chose were like us- impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, burdened with all the prejudices of their environment. Their mannerisms were probably awkward and their abilities limited. But He prayed for them, as we should for those converts the Lord grants us, "not for the world" [perhaps, not *so much for the world as for*] those few whom the Father had given Him out of the world. Everything depended upon them, for "through their word" the world was to believe (Jn. 17:6,9,20). With all the powers of the universe at His command, the Lord could have chosen a programme of mass recruitment. But He didn't. They were to follow Him, so that later they would become fishers of men on a larger scale than He chose then to work on (Mk. 1:17). They would later bear witness because they had been with Him from the beginning (Jn. 15:27). In the few years they were with Him, those men learnt of Him

17:10- see on Jn. 17:6.

*All things that are mine are Yours, and Yours are mine, and I am glorified in them-* His comment that "I am glorified in them" was evidently said in hope and faith that they would glorify Him- for before His death He "was not yet glorified" (Jn. 7:39). Indeed, Jn. 12:16 suggests that the disciples only "glorified" Him after the resurrection, once they remembered and understood His words and actions properly. It was through "bearing much fruit" that the disciples would glorify Him (Jn. 15:8)- and they evidently hadn't started doing that. Indeed, from when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, the Father was indeed glorified in Him- but not through the disciples, who ran away in denial of their Lord (Jn. 12:28; 13:31). And yet the Lord Jesus confidently asserts to His Father, to God Almighty, that He was glorified in the disciples (Jn. 17:10). As noted on :6, we see here how positive He was in prayer to the Father about His followers.

17:11 *I am no more in the world; but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them whom You have given me in Your Name, that they may be one, even as we are one-* As noted on 14:2,3, the going to the Father meant going to the cross. His presence with the

Father meant that the Father would "keep" them just as the Lord had "kept" them whilst physically present with them (:12). This 'keeping' was and is achieved through the gift of the Spirit, keeping hearts and minds faithful. Those begotten by the Spirit are thereby "kept" from the wicked one and sin generally (1 Jn. 5:18; 2 Thess. 3:3), "preserved [s.w. "kept"] in Christ" and from falling (Jude 1,24), kept by the Holy Spirit which dwells within us (2 Tim. 1:14). This 'keeping' is part of a mutual relationship, for often we read of the need to 'keep' the Lord's words.

There are many points of contact between the Lord as the seed of the woman in the garden of Gethsemane and Eve in the garden of Eden- e.g. "Those whom you gave me" recalls Adam's "the woman which Thou gavest Me" (caused me to be sinful in Your sight- as we did to Jesus on the cross in the same garden). Not least there is the contrast between the struggles against temptation which took place in the same garden.

1 Jn. 3:23 associates believing on the Name with loving each other; and in Jn. 17:11 Christ prays that God will keep us all as one *through His own Name*. So often God's Name is associated with unity. God's Name is connected with His being "the Holy *One*" (Is. 29:23; 47:4; 54:5; 57:15; 60:9; Ez. 39:7). God being the Holy *One* is a further statement of His unity. Of course, we are speaking of ideal things. False doctrine and practice, the uncertainty of knowing exactly who carries God's Name, these and many other limitations of our humanity make it hard to achieve the unity which this theory speaks of. But the unity we do achieve is a foretaste of the Kingdom; unless we *love* this idea of unity, we will find ourselves out of place in the Kingdom. "In *that day* there shall be one Lord, and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). It may well be that Eph. 4:4-6 is alluding back to this verse; this passage inspires us to keep the unity of the Spirit, because here and now "there is one body, and one Spirit... *one Lord* ...one baptism, one God"; in other words, Paul is saying that the unity of the Kingdom, as spoken of in Zech. 14:9, must be found in the ecclesia of today. See on Jn. 5:23; Mk. 13:32. There are several connections between there being one Name of God- one set of principles with which He identifies Himself- and unity between believers. David had his people exalt God's Name "together", in unity (Ps. 34:3). The fact that there will be one Lord and His Name one in the future will inspire unity amongst the whole world. By being kept "in the name", we are made one (Jn. 17:11)- by sharing in and developing that unique set of characteristics that comprise God's Name / personality, unity between us is enabled by the love, forgiveness, justice etc. which we will show.

The account of the tabernacle labours the point that the whole house of God, this huge but delicate structure, was held together by "clasps of brass to couple the tent together, that it might be one" (Ex. 36:18 and often). "That it might be one" is alluded to by the Lord when He prayed for His people, "that they might be one" (Jn. 17:11,21-23). The record of the tabernacle stresses how the system was based around a mass of boards, tenons, curtain couplings etc. God's dwelling place, His house, hangs together by millions of inter-personal connections. "Out of church Christians", in the sense of those who think they can go it alone in splendid isolation, are totally missing the point. We are encouraged to see the allusion by realizing that "Holy Father... righteous Father" (Jn. 17:11,25) was a form of address which the Lord had in a sense lifted from Moses when he addresses God as "righteous and holy" (Dt. 32:4 LXX).

17:12 *While I was with them, I kept them in Your Name which You have given me, and I guarded them; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition, so that the scripture might be fulfilled-* As noted on :11, the 'keeping' here refers to spiritual keeping in the Way and in all the things bound up in the Father's Name. The Lord had done this whilst physically with them, and now He was leaving them, He asks the Father to continue that keeping. His going to the Father meant the giving of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to the believers; and this was and is the means by which we are kept or guarded in the things of the Name. The only one the Lord had not 'kept' or spiritually preserved was Judas. This of itself shows that the keeping in view is spiritual preservation, a matter of the heart; and this is therefore the arena of operation of the Father's keeping, guarding work, performed by the Spirit given into the hearts of believers.

The Hebraism 'the son of...' referred to a person having the characteristics of what they were 'the son of'. Judas acted like a condemned person, and so he was one. The fulfilment of Scripture may not simply refer to specific predictions about Judas the betrayer, such as Ps. 109:8. The upcoming fulfilment of the Old Testament scriptures was to be in the Lord's death, and the idea may therefore be that Judas chose to be as he did, but this was used in God's wider plan in order to fulfil the Scriptures in the Lord's death.

17:13 *Now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy made full in themselves-* The Lord was aware that His private prayer was being spoken publicly, out loud, and the disciples were listening and a transcript of it would be read by all generations afterwards. He spoke the prayer so publicly because He wanted them to see what His relationship with the Father was like, and to have that same relationship with the Father. He wanted them to have 'His joy' in relationship with the Father experienced within them / us. The Lord's joy was in our salvation (Mt. 25:21,23), that spiritual being were born into the world of the new creation (16:21) and human repentance (Lk. 15:7). By receiving the spirit of the Lord Jesus, His mindset becomes ours. His joy becomes our joy (15:11). This explains the Lord's exhortation to ask in His name so that their joy might be fulfilled (16:24). This doesn't simply refer to the joy of receiving a request which has earlier been requested in prayer. The fullness of joy received means having the Lord's joy within us; having His Spirit / mind / value set. This means that the thing asked for was the Comforter, the mind of Christ, His Spirit, which included His joy; the mindset which rejoices in the things He rejoices in. And they are the things of human salvation and the glorification of the Father's Name.

The Lord had foreseen most aspects of His death: the handing over, the picking up of the cross, the carrying it, the being lifted up. In Lk. 15:5 the Lord spoke about how He as the good shepherd would carry the lost sheep on His shoulders, *rejoicing*. It is tempting to connect this with the way Christ spoke of His *joy* just hours before He was arrested. I am not suggesting there was *any* joy at all for the Lord in His carrying of the cross- not in the way we understand joy. But perhaps to Him, in His vocabulary, "my joy" meant something else; as for Him, 'eating' meant not eating food but doing the Father's will (Jn. 4:34). Whatever "rejoicing", "my joy" meant for the Lord, He had that sense as He carried the cross on His shoulder.

17:14 *I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world-* The Lord's gift of "Your word" surely doesn't mean that He presented them with a copy of the Bible, as it were. "I... give" are words found on the

Lord's lips in John concerning His gift of the Spirit (4:14), of Himself on the cross as the bread of life (6:51), His glory (:22) and of His "example" in Himself and the person He was (13:26). The gift He gave in the immediate context was of the Comforter (14:16,27). God's word was "made flesh" according to the prologue, in the person of Jesus (1:14). Again, as noted earlier in John, "word" refers not simply to the literal Bible, but the expression of all a person is. God's "word" to men was in His Son, and the Lord had given Himself to the believers.

The disciples don't record much of the opposition they personally received. But here the Lord tells the Father that the Jewish world "hated" the disciples; in fulfilment of His comment that the Jewish world would "hate" any who testified of its wickedness (7:7). John develops this idea in a pastoral context in saying that it is the world who hates the Lord's people, and any who hates his brother in Christ is therefore of the world (1 Jn. 2:9,11; 3:15; 4:20). This all implies that the community of believers to whom John wrote had hatred against their brethren, and this marked them out as being of the Jewish world and not in fact believers at all. And the same powerful logic must be applied to all hatred within the church.

*17:15 I do not pray that You should take them out from the world, but that You should keep them from the evil-* The association of "evil" with "the world" is clear. And in John, "the world" usually refers to the Jewish world. Clearly it was Judaism which was the source of "evil" for the early Christians, explaining why it is referred to as the great "satan" / adversary in the later New Testament. It's observable that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed most parts of His model prayer in His own life situations. "Your will be done... Deliver us from evil" (Mt. 6:13; Lk. 11:4) were repeated by Him in Gethsemane, when He asked for God's will to be done and not His, and yet He prayed that *the disciples* would be delivered from evil. It is as if He prays the "Lord's prayer" for them; "keep them from the evil", although they should have been praying this for themselves. And there are times when we likewise almost have to pray prayers for others which they ought to be praying themselves.

The Lord reasoned that by remaining in the world, as He had been in the world, they could be the light of the world. He therefore speaks of the day when they shall be cast out of the synagogues (16:2), which was spoken of by some Rabbis as being cast out of the Jewish world. He wanted them to remain as long as they could, and here He prays that the Father will enable this to happen- that they should not be taken out of the Jewish world. We see here His complete lack of any 'guilt by association' mentality.

*17:16 They are not of the world even as I am not of the world-* He Himself made the point that if His Kingdom- i.e. the people under His Kingship- were of this world, then they would fight for Him (18:36). And that is exactly what they tried to do in Gethsemane! They acted then as if they were indeed "of this world" by trying to fight for Jesus physically. And yet the Lord saw through to their inner spirit, and presented this to the Father as their being actually not of this world. The Lord's Heavenly origins, being "not of the world", are here imputed to His followers. His language of being from above and not from beneath therefore says nothing about any supposed personal pre-existence, or descent from Heaven to earth in some primitively literal sense. For all such language He applies here to His followers too.

To be "of the world" is later defined in 1 Jn. 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father but is of the



world". The Jewish world in which John's Jewish converts lived, for all its apparent righteousness and sanctimony, was structured around the lusts of the flesh and pride.

17:17 *Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth*- The reference is to how the Levites were sanctified (1 Chron. 23:13 Heb.). The Levites were initially consecrated in God's eyes by their zeal to rid Israel of apostasy; this is what constituted them Yahweh's "holy (sanctified) one" (Dt. 33:8,9). They sanctified themselves to God, and He sanctified them. Through His allusions to this, the Lord was telling the disciples not to be frightened to stand alone from the Israelite community they knew; for it was deeply apostate. So often, the Lord is speaking of the development of a new Israel, with new Rabbis and Levites taken from the ranks of very ordinary and dysfunctional people who had believed in Him.

The teaching here is complemented and explained by :19: "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth". They were sanctified in Him; because the Lord was supremely sanctified, holy in character, He was fitted for Divine service *par excellence*. And all that was true of Him was to be true of those in Him, as Paul later develops. They were sanctified because they were in Him, the supremely sanctified One. So "Sanctify them in the truth" is parallel with being sanctified on account of being in Him. "The truth" is therefore a reference to Himself personally, as in 14:6. And that is confirmed by the statement: "Your word is truth". The prologue is clear that the Divine word was the Lord Jesus personally, made flesh in Him. The "word" of God in His Son refers to all we have seen and known of Him in Christ. That is the ultimate "truth" by which we are to live. It is nothing but shoddy Biblical workmanship which superimposes the words "Your word is truth" over pictures of open Bibles. The Bible is indeed God's word and is true. But that is simply not in view here. God's word in John is clearly the Lord Jesus personally, who is "the truth". If the Lord intended us here to understand God's word as the Scriptures which comprise the Bible, He surely would have used some other term apart from *logos*. And how can we be sanctified by a book, even an inspired one? It is simply not so that Bible reading of itself makes us sanctified. Verse 19 is quite clear that we are sanctified through being "in Christ", on account of *His* sanctification.

17:18 *As You sent me into the world, even so I send them into the world*- The Son was "sanctified and sent into the world" (Jn. 10:36). And yet we too are sanctified (Jn. 17:17,19), and likewise sent into the world (Mk. 16:15). The basis of our sanctification is our being in Christ (see on :17,19). The priestly service which is in view in the term 'sanctified' is therefore that of taking the Gospel to the world. As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world [Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21 - this is again John's equivalent of the great commission]. God sent forth Christ to save the world, and likewise we are sent forth in witness (Gal. 4:4 cp. Mt. 9:38; 22:3; Acts 13:4). As He was sent into the world, so He sent us (Jn. 17:18).

We note again that the language of sending into the world is applied to us as well as to the Lord. It simply does not mean that He pre-existed and was somehow sent from Heaven down to earth in some metaphysical sense. For that is not how *we* are sent into the world.

"The world" in John often refers to the Jewish world. John is presenting the great commission in terms of going into the Jewish world as the Lord was sent into it. Whilst the great commission is universal in scope, we should not miss this initial intention- to go out and bring the Jewish world to faith in the One first sent to them with the Gospel.

17:19 *And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they may also be sanctified in truth-* The Lord's death was the final act of sanctification in His holy life. If we venture to enquire how exactly He achieved what He did, what His motivations were... we are entering holy ground. But here He states that He did it "for their sakes", so that we might be sanctified in Him, "the truth" (see on :17,18). His vision, however, was that we would not simply be 'saved' but 'sanctified', which as explained on :17 is a clear allusion to priestly service. He sanctified Himself so that in Him, we would be sanctified- to do priestly service. And the service particularly in view, as noted on :18, was to be sent into the world to save others. We are therefore expected to be proactive in our response to Him. Quite simply, if we behold and believe the things of the cross, we will respond.

17:20 *Neither for these only do I pray, but for those also that believe in me through their word-* The word preached was in order that others like us "believe in me". The content of the word preached is therefore the Lord Jesus and belief into Him. He personally, and not solely the results of the salvation He achieved ["the Kingdom of God"], is to be the focus of the word preached. As noted on :18 and :19, the Lord has in view that the sanctification of the believers will be so that they can do priestly service- which is to take the Gospel to the world.

In the same way as John matches the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus with a more spiritual interpretation in Jn. 1, so he likewise refers to the great commission, expressing it in more spiritual terms throughout his gospel. I bring together here some comments that have been made elsewhere in this commentary, to show the number of allusions:

- Jn. 10:32: "If I be lifted up from [RVmg. 'out of'] the earth, will draw all men unto me". Straight after the Lord's death and resurrection the great commission was given, to bring all men unto Him and His cross.
- God sanctified / consecrated the Lord Jesus and sent Him into the world (Jn. 10:36). But this sanctification was through His death on the cross (Jn. 17:19). The Lord was sanctified on the cross and sent into the world in the sense that we His people would be impelled by His cross to take Him into all the world. *We* would be sent into all the world in His Name.
- As the Lord was sent into the world, so He sends us into the world (Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21)- the very language of the great commission. Jesus 'came down' to this world in the sense that He was the word of the Father made flesh, and 'all men' saw the light of grace that was radiated from His very being. And that same word must be flesh in us, as it was in the Lord.
- In Jn. 12:23-26, the Lord foretold aspects of His coming sacrifice: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit [spoken in the context of potential Gentile converts]. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it... if any man serve me, let him follow me". Here the Lord goes on to assume that His death, His falling into the ground, would be matched by His followers also hating their lives, that they might rise again. And He connects His death with glorification. Soon afterwards, the Lord spoke of how his followers would likewise "bear much fruit", and thus *glorify* God. And in this context He continues with words which can be read as John's record of the great preaching commission: "I have chosen you... that ye should go [cp. "Go ye into all the world..."] and bring forth fruit" (Jn. 15:8,16). Clearly the Lord connected His bringing forth of "much fruit" through His death with the same "much fruit" being brought forth by the disciples' witness. It follows from this that the fruit which He potentially achieved on the cross is brought to reality by our preaching. And perhaps it is also possible to see a parallel between our preaching and His laying down of His life on the cross,

as if the work of witness is in effect a laying down of life by the preacher, in order to bring forth fruit.

- The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time “shall become one flock” (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be “perfected into one, that the world may know” (Jn. 17:23 RV). As the Gospel spreads worldwide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. And once the fullness of unity is achieved, our communal way of life will have hastened the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3).

- Matthew and Mark record how the apostles were *sent* to preach the Gospel and baptize, for the *forgiveness* of sins (cp. Acts 2:38). Luke records the Lord stating that the apostles knew that *forgiveness of sins* was to be preached from Jerusalem, and therefore they should be witnesses to this. I would suggest that John’s Gospel does in fact record the great commission, but in different and more spiritual words: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you...If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven” (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God’s forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: ‘I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don’t fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven’. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. “Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” becomes the equivalent of “he that believeth not shall be damned”. Note that the Greek for ‘retain’ strictly means ‘to hold / bind’, and that for ‘remit’ means ‘to loose’. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: “...so shall ye be my disciples...that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide”. The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher’s obedience to his Lord’s commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men’s hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6).

- “These are written [“in this book” of John’s Gospel] that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ...and that believing ye may have life in his name” (Jn. 20:31 RV)- belief, life, “in his name”, these are all references to the great commission. It’s as if John is saying that he fulfilled it by the writing and preaching of his Gospel record. John’s equivalent to an appeal for baptism may be his concluding appeal to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and as a result of that belief, to receive life “in his name” - into which we are baptized.

John’s record of the great commission is not merely found at the end of his gospel. When John records how the disciples were to proclaim “the word” to the world (Jn. 17:20), he is surely intending connection to be made with how “the word” had likewise been made flesh in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 1:14); and how it was that same “word” which Jesus had given to His men, just as His Father had manifested that word through Himself. Our witness is to be in our making flesh of the word in real life, just as it was in the Lord.

17:21- see on Jn. 13:35.

*That they may all be one, even as You, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe You did send me-* As noted on 14:2,3 and throughout the Comforter discourse, the Lord intended that the relationship He had with the Father ("where I am") would be experienced by all those who received His Spirit. The unity in view here is expressed in a slightly ambiguous way because it is two-fold. Unity between the believer and the Son and Father; and thereby unity between each other, between preacher and convert, and convert and convert. This would be achieved through being together "in us", as the Son and Father mutually indwelt each other. The source of this indwelling was the Spirit; 1 Jn. 4:13 alludes here: "Hereby we know that we abide in him and He in us, because He has given us of his Spirit". Those who resist the idea of the indwelling Spirit are invariably not at one with their brethren, and thereby not at one with the Father and Son. For it is through the mutual indwelling of the Spirit that He is in us and we in Him; and thereby we are all one with each other.

The laying down of the Shepherd's life was so that the flock might be one, in one fold (Jn. 10:15,16). The offering of the blood of Christ was *so that* He might "make in himself... one new man" (Eph. 2:15). Thus the theme of unity dominated the Lord's mind as He prepared for His death. "For their sakes I sanctify myself [in the death of the cross]... that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:19,21). The glory of God would be the source of this unity in Christ (Jn. 17:22); and that Name and glory were declared supremely on the cross (Jn. 12:28; 17:26). The grace, mercy, judgment of sin, the goodness and severity of God (Ex. 34:5-7)... all these things, as demonstrated by the cross, bind men together. And thus in practice, both a too strict and also too loose attitude to doctrine and practice, an unbalanced understanding of the glory of God, will never bring unity.

This unique unity, the "unity of the Spirit", brought about by the indwelling of the Spirit (see on Eph. 4:3), will be so compelling that the world, initially the Jewish world, would believe that the Father sent the Son. It would be apparent that this unity had been created by Jesus of Nazareth, who therefore was no ordinary man, but the One supremely sent by the Father. In this thought we see continued the many allusions in this section to the great commission. The sanctification of the Son, the indwelling of the Spirit, unity between us and with the Father... all this was to be harnessed in the work of winning others for His cause.

We naturally ask why, therefore, the world, both our world and the Jewish world of John's time, have not all believed. It could be that they do not believe simply because as with the witness of the Lord, they for the most part choose to disbelieve it and reject it, lest their lives be too disturbed. But it could be that the dysfunction of the church, which is characterized by its disunity rather than unity, has meant that the potential conversion of the world to Christ has not happened.

17:22 *And the glory which You have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one-* The glory given to Moses was nothing compared to that given to the Lord. By beholding that glory in the face of the Lord Jesus, it shines off from our faces too (2 Cor. 3:18). The glory is potentially given, but it is only by beholding it in the face of the Lord that it becomes real for us. The faces of the disciples at that time, as they watched the Lord praying, were anything but glorious. They fled from Him, and went fishing instead of being

enthused by His resurrection. But so much was made potentially available to them. The glory that would soon shine from the Lord's face when He was arrested was theirs, already.

"The glory" has associations with the Name declared at Sinai, and now even moreso in the person of God's Son. Connect :6,8,22: "I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest Me... I have given unto them the words Thou gavest Me... the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them". Indeed, so much was "given" to the believers by the Lord. He gave them the essence of Himself, His Spirit; the prologue says they were given "power to become the Sons of God" (1:12). The idea of the gift of glory is associated with the gift of the Spirit in Eph. 3:14-18 where the same words are used and again connected with unity between those who possess the Spirit: "I bow my knees to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He would *grant* ["give"] you, according to the riches of His *glory*, that you may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you would be rooted and grounded in love, that you might be able to comprehend with all the saints". The gift of glory therefore sums up everything- the very essence of the Father and Son, their word, their Spirit, the Name. The receipt of those things will issue in unity between us. In this sense the gift of "glory" is what enables our unity both with the Father and Son as well as with each other.

*17:23 I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know You did send me and that You have loved them just as You loved me-* The unity envisaged was a process; the indwelling of the Father in the Son, and they in us, is by the Spirit (1 Jn. 4:13). But as noted earlier, we are progressively filled with the Spirit, it is not a one-time gift. And there is therefore this process of perfecting into one. It could be that once the believing community are truly filled with the Spirit and one with each other, that they will finally convince the [Jewish] world of the Father's love. John alludes here in later writing that love between believers is the sign of this perfecting process developing: "If we love one another, God dwells in us ["I in them and you in me"], and His love is perfected in us" (1 Jn. 4:12). It is not God's love of itself must be perfected or matured; as we mature in love to each other, and thereby unity, His love is declared in an ongoing sense. The idea of our love being perfected and thereby the outcome of God's love being perfected is quite a theme (1 Jn. 2:5; 4:12,17,18).

We have suggested elsewhere that the great commission is repeated in John's Gospel but in more spiritual language. The whole world is to know the Gospel because of the unity of the believers (Jn. 17:18,21,23); and it follows that a situation will arise in which the extraordinary nature of true Christian solidarity over linguistic, ethnic, social and geographical lines will make a similar arresting, compelling witness as it did in the first century. The Lord had prophesied that His followers over time "shall become one flock" (Jn. 10:16 RV); they would be "perfected into one, that the world may know" (Jn. 17:23 RV). He surely hoped this would have become true in the first century. As the Gospel spreads world-wide in the last days, the unity of the believers will become all the more comprehensive, and this will of itself provoke yet more conversions. It could have been like this in the first century- for Eph. 3:9 speaks of how the unity of Jew and Gentile would "make all men see" the Gospel. This is the urgency of Paul's appeal for unity in Ephesians- he knew that their unity was the intended witness to the world which the Lord had spoken of as the means of the fulfilment of the great commission in Jn. 17:21-23. But sadly, Jew and Gentile went their separate ways in the early church, and the possibility of world-converting witness evaporated.

This almost uncanny sense of unity is referred to in Eph. 4:3 as "*the* unity"; although, as Paul shows, the *keeping* and experience of that unity is dependent upon our patience with each other and maintenance of "the one faith" (i.e. the unifying faith that gives rise to the one body). This unity is potentially powerful enough to convert the world. Through it, "the world may know", "the world may believe" (Jn. 17:21,23). And yet, in Johannine thought, "the world may know" was a result of the Lord's death (Jn. 14:31), and yet also of the love that would be between His people (Jn. 13:35). The Lord's death would potentially inspire such a love between His people that their resultant unity would let the world know the love of the Father and Son. Paul alludes to all this when he says that because of the new unity and fellowship between Jew and Gentile, "all men (would) see", and even to the great princes and powers of this world would be made known by the united church "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:9-11). The miraculous Spirit gifts were given, Paul argues, to bring the Jewish and Gentile believers together, "for the perfecting (uniting) of the saints", into "a perfect man", a united body. And thus, once Jewish and Gentile differences were resolved within the ecclesia by the end of the first century, the gifts were withdrawn.

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17:24- see on Jn. 7:34.

*Father, I desire that they also whom You have given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which You have given me. For You loved me from before the foundation of the world-* The glory given before the foundation of the world (:5) is paralleled here with God's love for His Son at that same time. These terms such as "glory" and "love" are all parallel, and do not require too much specific definition. To behold or perceive the Lord's glory, which was the Father's glory, was to "be where I am", which was the whole intention of His death. For He died so that His Spirit would be given to us, that where "I am" in His relationship with the Father, there we might be also (14:2,3). To be where He was meant to behold or perceive the glory; to perceive in Him, a 33 year old Palestinian Jew, of a certain blood type and plasma, son of a hairdresser from a Nazareth back street, covered in blood and spittle on a Roman cross, on a day in April, on a hill just outside Jerusalem, tormented by flies... the sublimest glory of God.

It could be that His request is therefore specifically that His disciples should be with Him at the cross- "I will that where I am, there they may also be" (Jn. 17:24 RV- hence John's emphasis that he really did behold Him there). He so wishes for us to at least try to stand with Him there and enter into it all. See on Lk. 22:15. But more than physical presence, He desired that they would perceive the crucifixion as the manifestation of glory, after the pattern of the theophany of Exodus 34.

Love before the foundation of the world is a reference to the description of Moses as having been prepared in God's plan from the beginning: "He prepared me [Moses] before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant" (*Assumption of Moses* 1.14). Once we appreciate this and other such allusions to popular Jewish belief about Moses, then the passages which appear to speak of personal pre-existence are easier to understand. The Jews didn't believe that Moses personally pre-existed, but rather that he was there in the plan / purpose of God, and with the major role in that purpose, from before creation. The Lord was applying those beliefs and that language to Himself, showing that He was greater than Moses. But by doing so, He wasn't implying that He personally pre-existed.

"That they may behold my glory" connects with the statement in the prologue that they *did* behold His glory, as if to say that the Lord's request here was indeed granted. His glory was especially manifested in His death. "Where I am" and His future glorification are linked into one and the same event, even though the glorification was not then apparent. This use of language is to be connected with the way John's Gospel speaks several times of the hour coming, and yet having already come (Jn. 4:23; 5:25; 16:32). I have suggested that all these references have application to the Lord's death.

He tells the Father in prayer: "I will [NEV "desire"] that they... be with me" and yet elsewhere in the same prayer He says "I *pray* that..." (Jn. 17:9,15,20). Our will is essentially our prayer, just as His will was His prayer. If our will is purely God's will, we will receive answers to every prayer. And yet our will is not yet coincidental with His; even the will of the Son was not perfectly attuned to that of the Father (Lk. 22:42; Jn. 5:30; 6:38), hence the unanswered prayer for immediate deliverance from the cross. Yet as we grow spiritually, the will of God will be more evident to us, and we will only ask for those things which are according to His will. And thus our experience of answered prayer will be better and better, which in turn will provide us with even more motivation for faith in prayer. The Lord Jesus is the great example in all this. The implications of our will becoming God's will, of the sacrifice of our natural will, are enormous. Our will is the thing we cling to the most, and only give up at the very last. Our will alone is what we truly have, our dearest thing- and we are called to sacrifice it. I see in the OT significance of the blood poured out far more than merely our physical life force- rather does it further symbolize our essential will.

17:25 *O righteous Father, the world did not know You; but I knew You, and these knew that You sent me-* The Jewish world rejected the light of the person of Jesus, as stated in the prologue. By rejecting Him they rejected knowledge of / relationship with the Father. The Lord balances the idea of 'knowing God' with 'knowing that You sent Me'. He is aware that the disciples still have not fully known Him nor the Father (14:8-10). But He sees in their recognition that He was sent from God the potential for further development, into knowing the Father. His words here are therefore an indirect request, rather than a mere statement of fact. He wishes that through the Spirit, they would progress from knowing that He was sent from God, to fully knowing the Father. We recall how Nicodemus is presented as initially recognizing that the Lord was "from God", but coming to fuller faith through the experience of the cross.

17:26 *And I declared to them Your Name, and will declare it, so that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and I in them-* The second declaration of the Name was in the

cross. On 19:19-22 I note that the Name was particularly declared upon the cross, and that the title over the cross in Hebrew was comprised of four words, the first letter of each spelling the YHWH Name. All the words of God, the essence of His Name, were summed up in that death. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me... I have declared unto them thy name" (:8, 26). "I have proclaimed the name of the Lord" (Dt. 32:3 LXX) was surely in the Lord's mind; Moses did that just before his death. Particularly on the cross we see the very essence of love, which is at the core of the Name. Having loved His own, He loved us there unto the end, to the end of the very concept of love and beyond (Jn. 13:1). He knew that in His death, He would shew "greater love" than any man had or could show. There He declared the Name and character of God, so that the love of God would be within us. "Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16 Gk.). The death of the cross was therefore the very definition of love; love is a crucifixion-love, a conscious doing of that which is against the grain of our nature. We *must therefore* respond by showing that love to our brethren. It is not an option. To be unloving is to deny the very essence of the cross of Christ.

The idea of indwelling love again alludes to the indwelling of the Spirit, which was given to us through the Lord's surrender to us of His spirit on the cross. It is through the Lord's indwelling of us in this way that we love one another as He loved us. This is why John's letters have so much to say about love, and about how hatred of our brethren is a sign that we are not spiritual, are not indwelt by the spirit of the Son.



## CHAPTER 18

18:1 *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where there was a garden into which he and his disciples entered-* We have the impression that having offered Himself to the Father in speaking those words of prayer in chapter 17, the Lord now purposefully went forth "unto the Father". It was as if He had planned it all; He knew that Judas would guess that he would likely spend the night in that garden, and would be on the lookout for Him there to have Him arrested discreetly. And so He went to that very place. His life was not taken from Him, He gave it of Himself (10:18); the whole situation and timing of His death was brought about by His supreme perception of human psychology, and He thereby arranged the whole scene, getting the stage perfectly ready for the actors to walk on and act exactly as He had set them up to.

18:2 *Now Judas, the one who betrayed him, also knew the place. For Jesus often met there with his disciples-* As noted on :1, the Lord went there because He knew Judas would guess that He would go there to spend the night. And the Lord was right; Judas was hanging out there with a band of soldiers, guessing the Lord would go there. We note in passing that the Lord was unlike any other great teacher; He literally spent nights sleeping rough. Surely there were some who invited Him to stay at their place, and it would not have been impossible for them to have slept where they kept the last support or to have walked out to Bethany. But the Lord went to Gethsemane because He knew that Judas would guess He might go there.

18:3 *Judas along with a detachment of temple guards whom he had been given, and the servants of the chief priests, and the Pharisees, arrived there with lanterns and torches and weapons-* As noted on :1,2, Judas went there because he guessed that the Lord would spend the night sleeping rough there, rather than walk out to Bethany or stay with other sympathizers in Jerusalem. The Lord knew he would think like that, and went along with the plan which He Himself had set up. He was not overtaken by events and murdered; rather did He give His life just when and how He wished, setting up the entire situation which would enable Him to die as the Passover lambs were being slain, on that particular Passover, by crucifixion, at Romans hands but at the behest of the Jews, with the masses turned against Him as well as their leaders. As noted on the triumphal entry, this was why He set the crowds up to be bitterly disillusioned in Him by His inversion of all their values and expectations. Judas had prepared the men, on the off chance he would be right and the Lord would indeed go and sleep rough in Gethsemane that night. He must have been so glad his bet paid off, and the men with him would not have wasted their efforts; for a *speira* "detachment", was about 200 men, and some of the chief priests themselves were present (Lk. 22:52). But he was fulfilling the exact plan of the Lord. Hence RV "*Judas therefore...*". It was all set up by the Lord. They came with lanterns and torches, despite the full moon of Passover, because they assumed He might hide somewhere in the Kidron ravine once He saw them coming. But the Lord went out and gave Himself over to them.

18:4 *Jesus knowing all the things that must come upon him, went forward and said to them: Whom do you seek?-* As noted on :1-3, the Lord had set up the entire situation, and it was going exactly according to His plan. So it was knowing how His plan was going to work out that He went forward to surrender to them; we should not at all read this as any kind of fatalism and grim submission to inevitable events which were overtaking Him. Just as the ending of our lives, through illness or old age, is not to be met in this way, but rather as a conscious giving of life to the Father.

"Whom do you seek?" is again another question which jumps out of the record to challenge all hearers and readers; as if to say 'And whom do *you* seek?'. He knew they knew, and that they knew that He knew... So why ask the question? It was surely to elicit in them the words and understanding that 'We seek Jesus'. For these are the words the Gospel writers place on the lips of those who wished to believe in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). The Lord's desire to witness to all men, to attempt to save even His persecutors, stands as all time a challenge to us to emulate in evangelism and by all means seeking to share the Gospel with all. Paul in his trials caught the spirit of all this, in attempting to even convert his judges.

18:5- see on Mt. 26:75; Jn. 18:17.

*They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth-* As noted on :4, the Lord had elicited from them the statement 'We seek Jesus', which is associated with belief in Him. He was by all means seeking to convert them even at that dark hour.

*Jesus said to them: I am he (Judas, the one who betrayed him, was standing with them)-* The Lord was a well-known public figure in Jerusalem. The way Judas kissed the Lord to identify Him to them may however indicate that some of these Roman soldiers were not aware of Him. "I am he" was clearly a reference to the Yahweh Name. He had put the position in their mouths: 'We seek Jesus'. And in answer to that search, He presented Himself as the fullness of God manifest in flesh.

18:6 *When he said to them: I am he, they drew back and fell to the ground-* His declaration of the Yahweh Name (see on :6) was accompanied by some kind of theophany, so that they fell to the ground, just as Saul did before the encounter with the glorified Jesus. To now arrest 'the man with the face of God' was going to be difficult for them; it would involve a wilful denial of the obvious.

18:7 *Again he asked them: Whom do you seek? And they said: Jesus of Nazareth-* As noted previously, the Lord was seeking to convert them, eliciting from them the statement that 'We seek Jesus', which is elsewhere found on the lips of believers in Him (Mt. 28:5; Jn. 1:38; 20:15). But now they had seen His face flash with the glory of God, and had fallen to the ground before Him, He urged them not to do the apparently psychologically inevitable, but to stop in their tracks and continue seeking Him in truth. This desire to convert them, to help them even at that late stage to pull out of their nose dive to condemnation, reveals so much about the whole spirit of the Lord.

18:8 *Jesus answered: I told you that I am he. If therefore you seek me, let these go their way-* So often we read that the Lord told the Jews that He was God's Son, but they refused to believe. The same words are found in 10:25: "I told you and you believed not". And so it was now; the Lord had told them, shown them through the theophany that "I am", but they refused to believe. He had set up a situation whereby they were going to do to Him what they knew was wrong, and they knew He realized that. And so He asks them for a small favour- to let the disciples go free. Again, His understanding of human psychology was magnificent. He so knew and knows us, and we can therefore in all ways be assured that His judgment will be just, and will take into total account every psychological nuance and factor when judging us.

18:9 *That the word might be fulfilled which he spoke: Of those whom you have given me I lost not one-* This suggests that the Lord's 'keeping' of the disciples in His lifetime was physical as

well as spiritual (17:12), and this explains why when speaking about their forthcoming tribulation at the hands of the world, He assures them that His physical departure will not mean that He will not continue to "keep" them; see on 16:4. For He would do so through the ministry of the Comforter, the advocate, the legal counsel for the defence.

18:10 *Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus-* The Lord knew that Peter had a sword / knife hidden in his garment when in Gethsemane. But He did nothing; He didn't use His knowledge of Peter's weakness to criticise him. He knew that the best way was to just let it be, and then the miracle of healing Malchus must have more than convinced Peter that the Lord's men should not use the sword. For their Master had healed, not murdered, one of the men sent to arrest Him. The Lord perhaps knew what Peter would do, for it was not hard to guess, knowing his temperament. The healing of Malchus' ear was therefore planned; for usually the Lord did not address human need but only did His "works" as a witness to His Heavenly origins; John's Gospel records this several times. The miracle was therefore yet another desperate appeal to those arresting Him to not go ahead with their plan. They did so having witnessed directly the Lord's Divine authentication. They were totally culpable, although they would have later given the excuse that they had followed a multitude to do evil; for to break ranks at that stage was indeed difficult.

18:11 *Jesus said to Peter: Put the sword into its sheath. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not drink it?-* In prayer earlier, the Lord had totally accepted the cup, despite asking for it to be removed (Mt. 26:39). So Peter's resistance to the idea of the Lord drinking the cup was in fact shared by the Lord, but He consented. We see here yet another of John's cameos of the Lord's utter humanity and connection with men. Peter had intended to kill Malchus, and only by dodging the blow aimed at his head did he survive, although the sword blow removed his ear. For all time we see that violent resistance to evil is not the Christian way.

18:12 *So the detachment of temple guards and their chief captain and the magistrates' attendants of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him-* The word for "detachment" could mean there were a few hundred armed men present; so Peter's attempt to murder Malchus was futile. But he may well have known Malchus, for John knew the high priest, whose personal servant Malchus was. It is not impossible that Peter aimed for him in particular to settle some old perceived score.

18:13 *And led him to Annas first. For he was father in law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year-* All through the record, we see the Jews' disobedience to the law. A high priest was to be for life, and there were not to be joint high priests nor agreement they could have power just for a specific period. Likewise weapons were not to be carried at the time of the feasts, but these men were armed.

18:14 *It was Caiaphas that had counselled the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people-* The record in John places particular blame upon Caiaphas, who is called "the prince of this [Jewish] world", who had particular responsibility for the Lord's death. This statement placed here implies again that it was Caiaphas who was behind it all.

18:15 *Simon Peter followed Jesus-* The Lord had specifically told Peter that he could not follow Him (13:36). If Peter had given due weight to the Lord's words and not overrated his

own strength, he would not have followed, and led himself into temptation too great for him. This basic tendency to assume we shall not give in to temptation is very much part of us as humans, and in the Biblical record we have so much encouragement to face up to the fact and humble ourselves in recognizing it.

*And so did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest; and he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest-* John, the disciple beloved by his Lord, brings out the apparent paradox- that he was 'on friendly terms with the High Priest', the great 'satan' of the early Christians, Caiaphas being presented as "the prince of this world" with especial responsibility for the Lord's death; and yet also 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. When John knew full well that the Lord Jesus had taught that a man cannot be friends of both Him and of the persecuting world. Again we see the Gospel preachers / writers bringing out their own weakness as a platform upon which to appeal to other weak people to likewise believe as they had done. Quite how it was that John knew Caiaphas isn't clear; it could be that his family fishing business provided salt for the temple and therefore he knew Caiaphas from business dealings. If indeed Salome was John's mother and also the sister or relative of Mary the Lord's mother, then he may well have had priestly connections in the family.

*18:16 But Peter was standing outside the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept watch at the door-* If John was known to the high priest and his servants, he would have been known as a disciple of Jesus. His identification with Peter as his friend was therefore a quite obvious invitation for everyone to assume that Peter was also a disciple of the Lord. And just a few hours ago, he had attempted to murder Malchus, who would have been known to all in the yard. Any denial from Peter about his association with the Lord, let alone claiming he had never heard of Him, was doomed to failure. If only he had not followed, accepting the Lord's warning of 13:36 that he could not follow Him yet, he would have gotten into the wretched situation he did. And we can retro analyse our own failings in just the same way.

*18:17 The maid keeping watch at the door said to Peter: Are you also one of this man's disciples? He said: I am not!-* Again the challenge comes out of the record to all hearers and readers: 'Are you one of this man's disciples?'. Although the Lord was not standing amongst them, all the talk was about "this man". Again we see His utter humanity. That the girl would speak like this is utterly credible and again reminds us that the Biblical record is true. These words were actually said, these things really happened.

The failure of Peter is effectively emphasized by the very structure of the Gospel accounts. John frames the interrogation of the Lord as happening alongside the interrogation of Peter. The Lord peerlessly and bravely witnesses to the Truth, and is condemned to death for it; whilst Peter flunks the issue time and again to save his own skin. Whilst the Lord unflinchingly declares His identity before the High Priest, Peter is presented as doing anything to deny his identity as a disciple. Peter's denials are presented by the records as if in slow motion, for the reader to gaze upon in detail. Peter's denial "I am not" is placed by John in purposeful juxtaposition to the Lord's brave self-identification in Gethsemane: *ego eimi*, "I am" (Jn. 18:5,17). And yet this 'setting up' of the leader of the early church as a failure was done by the early church writers, ultimately inspired as they were! The Gospel writers were *glorifying* in their weakness and their Lord's supremacy. They were standing up for their unity with Him by grace, but openly and pointedly proclaiming the vast mismatch between them and Him.

18:18- see on Mt. 26:75; Lk. 22:32.

*Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals. For it was cold, and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself-* The extra information about the fire being of charcoal coals was in order to highlight the similarity with the Lord's later appearance to Peter, again by a charcoal fire, where the three denials are as it were undone by three assertions of loyalty. "The servants and the officers" refers to the very same group who had just arrested the Lord in the garden. In the full Passover moon, they would surely have discerned Peter, and known that it was he who had tried to murder Malchus their colleague. These background factors made Peter's attempts to deny the Lord all the more hopeless, just as hopeless as trying to defend the Lord against a few hundred armed men by trying to kill one of them. Peter is thereby presented as not simply hot-headed, but rather simple, not thinking through the obvious outcome of situations. And yet he, the one with simple loyalty and the sins of a simple man, was the one chosen to establish the Lord's church. The record thereby appeals to the simple, that the Lord's way and even responsibility in His church is for them too.

18:19 *The high priest asked Jesus about his disciples and his teaching-* The Lord knew that Peter was out there in the yard and would deny Him three times. And yet when asked about His disciples, He speaks so positively about them (see on :21). The legal ground for condemnation was the Lord's claims in relation to God and the destruction of the temple. These were all issues directly connected with Him personally rather than His disciples, who were in any case not present to answer for themselves. So it could be that the questioning about them was a way of humiliation before coming to the actual allegations. He had converted a rag tag band of fishermen and simple folk like Peter, who had now fled from the garden. He had made no disciples, apparently. And the masses had turned against Him because of His purposeful disappointment of their Messianic expectations in His parody of a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The cross is realistically intended to be lived out in daily experience. The record of the crucifixion and trials of the Lord are framed in language which would have been relevant to the first hearers of the Gospel as they too faced persecution and suffering for their faith. John's account of the interrogation of the Lord by the Jewish leaders, accusing Him of being a false prophet, was surely written in the way it was to provide encouragement to John's converts [the "Johannine community" as theologians refer to it] to see how their court appearances before the Jews were in fact a living out of their Lord's cross. They too were to 'speak openly to the world' and 'bear witness to the truth before the world', living out the cross in the way in which they responded to the great commission.

18:20 *Jesus answered him: I have spoken openly to the world. I often taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together, and have never spoken in secret-* Again we see how "the world" in John refers specifically to the Jewish world, "all the Jews". From what the Lord says here, He did not teach one thing in public and another more secretly to the disciples. He did not give them special knowledge which the masses were forbidden. As taught so often in John, the Lord was the open manifestation of truth to all; He was the light, shining in darkness. There was nothing "secret" about what He stood for. He likewise asks us to be a city set on a hill, which cannot be kept secret (Mt. 5:14), being the light of the world as He was. Our witness to Him should likewise be open and direct; so much of the 'social Gospel' approach is indirect and amounts to doing the same good works

done by unbelievers, without the direct and up front manifestation of the light which was characteristic of the Lord's witness.

18:21 *Why do you ask me? Ask those that have heard me what I spoke to them. Behold, these know the things which I said-* The Lord was rather critical of the disciples when speaking directly with them, especially concerning their lack of understanding and recall of His previous teachings. But in prayer to the Father in chapter 17 and now in talking about them to others, He is extremely positive about them; just as He is about us with all our weaknesses of understanding and behaviour. He states here that those who heard Him, His disciples (:19), could tell anyone what He had taught. He is setting up a parallel between His teaching and that of the disciples, knowing that soon they were to continue His teaching work in the world.

Peter would have reflected how his denial had been in spite of the fact that the Lord had prayed he wouldn't do it- even though He foresaw that Peter would. Just a short time before the denials He had commented, probably in earshot of Peter and John, "ask those that have heard me, what I spake unto them". Perhaps He nodded towards them both as He said it, to encourage them to speak up rather than slip further into the temptation of keeping quiet. He had used the same phrase earlier, just hours before: "These things have I spoken unto you" (Jn. 16:33).

18:22 *And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying: Do you answer the high priest so?-* "Struck" is the word used in the LXX of the Messianic Is. 50:6 "I gave my cheeks to blows". Perhaps, in the spirit of giving His life and not having it taken from Him, the Lord offered his cheek; although see on :23. This was totally unprovoked; perhaps the officer was over eager to ingratiate himself to the high priest. Or perhaps he was Malchus, or some other beneficiary of the Lord's healing work who wanted to demonstrate that he was not a secret Jesus sympathizer.

18:23 *Jesus answered him: If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil, but if well, why do you hit me?-* The Lord did not literally 'turn the other cheek', as we might have expected if He intended us to take His words of Mt. 5:39 literally. His words were aimed at helping that officer come to believe in Him; to ask himself whether the Lord had ever at any time spoken evil. He wanted the man to realize that his behaviour in hitting Him was dictated by a desire to please others; the Lord was inviting the man thereby towards freedom in Him.

18:24 *Annas then sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest-* The 'hearing' was very early in the morning; the appearance before Annas was a kind of pre-trial hearing, which was not required by any law. Presumably it was done in an attempt to give the impression of having done everything in a hyper correct legal sense. We see a theme in the record of the Jews being so careful to give an appearance of legal obedience whilst they were breaking the most major principles of both Divine and Roman law.

18:25 *Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him: Are you also one of his disciples? He denied and said: I am not!-* As noted on :17, His "I am not!" compares unfavourably with the Lord's statement "I am", and shamelessly open declaration of Himself as He always had. The "also" could imply that the conversation had turned around others who were the Lord's disciples. John was known to the high priest, and presumably to his entourage, in that he had got the girl to allow Peter in to the compound. The talk would naturally have turned to how John was one of his disciples- and then quite naturally, to his

friend Peter. As noted on :18, Peter displays quite some simple-mindedness in not seeing that denial was pointless and deeply unconvincing.

18:26 *One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter cut off, said: Did I not see you in the garden with him?*- Caiaphas and his entourage were riddled with nepotism; there were not even 10,000 people living in Jerusalem, according to Joachim Jeremias, and many who worked in a certain sphere would have been surrounded with friends and relatives as co-workers. And again, Peter ought surely to have realized that he was now inside a locked compound with a crowd of people who were friends and relatives of the very crowd whom he had just confronted in the garden. His situation was hopeless, and as noted on :18, his basic intelligence cannot be highly rated in allowing himself into that situation. But from that simple man came the baptism of thousands and the establishment of the Lord's church.

18:27 *Peter denied again; and immediately the cock crew-* John's account of Peter's denial of the Lord is to me very beautifully crafted by him to reflect his own weakness, lest the focus be left purely upon the failure of Peter. He [alone of the evangelists] records how he knew a girl who kept the door to the High Priest's palace, and how he was even known to the High Priest. He speaks to the girl, and she lets Peter in. Then, she recognizes Peter as one of the disciples, that he had been with Jesus, and he makes his shameful denial. But John's point is clearly this: he, John, was known to the same girl, and to Caiaphas- but they never accused *him* of having been with Jesus. Because they sadly didn't make the connection between John and Jesus. Yet when they saw Peter- they knew him as an upfront disciple of Jesus. And when Peter ran out in fear and shame, John remained in the High Priest's palace- unrecognized and unknown as a disciple of Jesus. The door girl must have realized that John and Peter were connected- because John had asked her to let Peter in. But she never made the accusation that John also had been one of Jesus' followers. In all this, John reveals his own shame at his lack of open association with the Lord. Significantly, Acts 4:13 records how the Jews later looked at Peter and John "and they took knowledge of them [i.e. recognized them, as the girl had recognized Peter], that they [both!] had been with Jesus". This is the very language of those who accused Peter of having 'been with Jesus'. John learnt his lesson, and came out more publicly, at Peter's side, inspired by his equally repentant friend. It's an altogether lovely picture, of two men who both failed, one publicly and the other privately, together side by side in their witness, coming out for the Lord.

18:28 *They lead Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium; but it was early, and so they did not enter into the Praetorium, that they might not be defiled and might eat the Passover-* Again we see the extreme hypocrisy of men so caught up with legalistic obedience, whilst committing the worst crime of all time. "Early" is the term used technically of the fourth watch, 3-6 a.m. The appearance before Annas was clearly staged, a show trial if ever there was one. "In capital cases, sentence of condemnation could not be legally pronounced on the day of trial"; and many other such legal requirements were broken. The fear of defilement was through contact with the Gentile soldiers who were abusing the Lord. "That they... might eat the Passover" is surely proof enough that the last supper was a Passover-like meal, but not "the Passover" of the 14th Nissan. The Lord is portrayed as developing a new Israel, with a new priesthood and different central symbols; He was able to change and reinterpret the Passover with ease.

18:29 *Pilate went out to them, and said: What accusation do you bring against this man?-* He went out to them as they would not go in to him lest they defile themselves. The inspired

record hangs together with great credibility down to the finest details. Pilate faced the same problem as Paul's judges faced. It was simply not clear what this man's crime was.

18:30 *They answered and said to him: If this man were not an evildoer, we should not have delivered him up to you-* The Jews were careful not to be too specific, because they knew that they had no concrete case against the Lord. Peter lived the rest of his life under the deep impression of the events of this time, which occurred whilst he was denying his Lord. He uses the same word in 1 Pet. 2:12: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation". "Visitation" is literally 'the day of looking at', using the same word as used about how the Lord turned and looked at Peter after his third denial. Peter's idea is that just as the Lord was falsely accused of being "an evildoer", so would all those in Him. His sufferings are therefore not to be viewed from a distance, but taken into our lives; our experiences result in our being connected with Him in His time of crisis. The Greek word for "evildoer" used here only occurs four other times in the New Testament, and all of them are in 1 Peter. Consciously or unconsciously, the things of the Lord's passion were in Peter's heart, as they should be in ours.

18:31 *Pilate replied to them: Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law. The Jews said to him: It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death-* Pilate is repeatedly presented here as on the back foot, and nervous about dealing with the Lord. He is portrayed in history as utterly conscienceless. And so he probably was- but the person of the Lord Jesus is such that it provokes the conscience of every person, even those who appear to have no religious interest nor conscience. The fact is, every human being has a conscience, because it is intrinsic to our being human. And as noted on 15:22, our preaching of the Lord Jesus penetrates directly to that conscience. Pilate is a great example of this. The Jews had already judged the Lord as worthy of death, but their ability to execute people had been taken away from them, meaning that they had to pass over such cases to the Romans to decide, and to execute if they considered legitimate.

18:32 *That the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should die-* The Lord designed to die by crucifixion and yet also at the hands of the Jews. He therefore arranged things so that the plan to kill Him, and the responsibility for it, was squarely with the Jews; and yet it was to be the Gentiles who put Him to death, and through crucifixion. He therefore set Himself up to be so hated by the Jews on account of their rejection of Him that they would desire to kill Him; and to effect that, they would have to hand Him over to the Romans, who would then kill Him by crucifixion. This was all the Lord's design, part of His wilful giving of His life and not having it taken from Him (10:18), not being overtaken by events, nor in that sense murdered. He was master of the entire situation from start to finish, arranging it all so that the players all exercised their own freewill, and did what they did despite His personal efforts to lead them to repentance.

18:33 *Pilate therefore went into the Praetorium and called Jesus, and said to him: Are you the King of the Jews?-* The Jews were seeking the death penalty on the basis that the Lord was setting Himself up as a king in opposition to Caesar. And yet according to their law, this was not a capital offence, in fact it was no crime at all. Their whole legal and logical case against the Lord had no consistency nor integrity at all.

The records are in fact written in such a way as to encourage us to re-live the crucifixion process as it were in slow motion. The record of the trials likewise is written in a way which



encourages us to imagine it and live it out in our imaginations in slow motion. Donald Senior has pointed out how John's account of the trial scenes alternate between what is happening "inside" and "outside":

- (1) "Outside" - The Jewish leaders hand Jesus over to Pilate, Jn. 18:28-32
- (2) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 18:33-38
- (3) "Outside" - Pilate declares Jesus innocent, 18:38-40
- (4) "Inside" - The Roman soldiers scourge and mock Jesus, 19:1-3
- (5) "Outside" - Pilate again declares Jesus not guilty, 19:4-8
- (6) "Inside" - Pilate interrogates Jesus, 19:9-12
- (7) "Outside" - Pilate delivers Jesus to crucifixion, 19:13-16.

18:34 *Jesus answered: Do you say this of yourself, or did others tell it to you concerning me?*- The Lord was interested in the conversion of even Pilate, just as Paul was for his judges. The Lord of course knew the answer to His question- Pilate was saying this because others had told him. And yet He wishes Pilate to genuinely ask himself the question in his own heart: 'Who really is this Jesus? Is He a King?'

18:35 *Pilate answered: Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you to me. What have you done?*- Pilate avoids the question just as the Lord avoids Pilate's question. This is not a typical interaction between a judge and the accused. The Lord is taking the initiative and seeking by all means to persuade Pilate, who instead of pushing for an answer to his question about "Are you the King of the Jews?" moves on to another question. Perhaps he did not push for an answer because he knew in his own conscience that before him stood a true, Divine King. And he did not wish to dwell on the question 'Who are You?' because in his conscience he knew. Pilate distances himself from personal guilt in the matter by saying that it was the Jews who had delivered the Lord to him, and he was not a Jew and so had had no part in it. This protestation of innocence by an otherwise conscienceless man, even when he sat in the position of power, all indicates how the Lord was touching even his conscience.

18:36 *Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but my kingdom is not from here-* I suggested on :35 that Pilate was persuaded in his conscience that the Lord was indeed a Heavenly King, and he did not push for answer to his question about the Lord's kingship because in his heart, he knew the answer and wanted to move on. As a judge he had every right and necessity to not let the accused avoid a question. But he allows the Lord to not answer on that point. Perceiving this, the Lord now returns to this theme of His kingship, using His next opportunity to speak to return to it, even though what He says about it is not an answer to the question just addressed to Him ["What have you done?"]. The fact He claimed to have a Kingdom was a sign that He considered Himself a King. But it was not a Kingdom in the secular sense, and was not characterized by fighting for Him. But His servants just *had* tried to fight, to this very end! Thus He imputed righteousness to His men and was very positive about them to others.

18:37- see on Jn. 15:27.

*Pilate replied to him: Are you a king then? Jesus answered: You say that I am a king. To this end have I been born, and to this end I came into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice-* Pilate as a Roman procurator cannot let this claim to kingship go without comment. For Caesar was to be accepted as the only king in any

form. Again we see the Lord as psychological master of the whole situation. Pilate had not stated that the Lord was a King; but He perceived that this was in fact what Pilate had come to believe. See on :31,33,36.

The Lord told Pilate in the context of His upcoming death that He had come into this world to bear witness to the truth- and this was the basis upon which His Kingdom stood. And the cross was the supreme witness and exhibition of the truth. The Lord personally was the truth, the light; His person was a testimony to truth. His Kingdom, the community who accepted Him as their King, were those who heard His voice, who accepted the word which was Him as a person. In 12:27, the cross is again "this cause" for which He came. His death was therefore a witness, a testimony, to the finest and ultimate Truth of God.

18:38 *Pilate said to him: What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them: I find no crime in him!*- The famous question "What is truth?" is another example of how phrases are used in the gospel records which as it were jump off the page and confront all hearers or readers. We all must ask this question, and visually, we can perceive that the Lord standing in front of such a questioner was Himself the answer. For He is presented in John as "the truth". The implication could be that Pilate perceived this, for his rhetorical question is immediately followed by his conviction that there was "no crime in him". The conscienceless Pilate would have had no problem in agreeing to execute a troublemaker; for he is recorded as ordering the murder of random people for no good reason at all. But here he sees no crime in the Lord and is careful not to behave like this. Clearly, his conscience had been touched.

18:39 *But you have a custom, that I should release to you one prisoner at the Passover. Will you have me release to you the King of the Jews?*- Matthew and Mark make it clear that Pilate was surprised they did not want the Lord released, and he remonstrated with them as to how they could wish the Lord crucified when He had done nothing wrong (Mk. 15:14). It seems that Pilate misjudged the mood of the masses; he assumed they were all pro-Jesus. He was not aware that the Lord's parody of the triumphal entry had dashed their Messianic hopes, and they were now very angry with Him. Pilate had assumed that this whole thing was just a matter of envy on the part of the priests (Mk. 15:10). Pilate's offer to release the Lord was an attempt to drive a wedge between the masses and the Jewish leadership; but he failed to realize that the leadership had persuaded the masses and they were themselves disillusioned with the Lord.

18:40 *Therefore they cried out: Not this man but Barabbas! (Now Barabbas was a bandit)*- Both Barabbas and the thieves are described with the same Greek word, translated "robber" (Jn. 18:40; Mk. 15:27). The Lord uses the same word when He points out that His persecutors were treating him as a "robber" (Mt. 26:55; Mk. 14:48; Lk. 22:52); He seems to be aware that what the experience He is going through is setting up Barabbas as a kind of inverse type of Himself, the true 'Son of the Father' (= 'Barabbas'). Those low, desperate men, the dregs of society, were types of us.

The crucified Christ is portrayed as King of criminals, King of the basest sort, enthroned between them, taking the place of their leader Barabbas, who ought to have been where the Lord was. Barabbas especially becomes a symbol of us all. According to Jewish tradition at the time (*Pesach* 8.6) "They may slaughter the Passover lamb... for one whom they [the authorities] have promised to release from prison". The Passover amnesty freed a man justly condemned to death- on account of the death of the lamb. We can imagine the relief and joy

and almost unbelief of Barabbas, as he watched or reflected upon the crucifixion of Jesus—that he who rightfully should have been there on the cross, was delivered from such a death because of the cross of Christ. The image of condemned prisoners being released due to the death of Messiah is an undoubted Old Testament figure for our redemption from slavery; those locked in the dark dungeon see great light, etc.

## CHAPTER 19

*19:1 So Pilate had Jesus scourged- Having been flogged until the skin was left hanging in bloody shreds (Josephus), His clothes would have stuck to the skin. Taking the clothes off would have ripped some shreds away. The process of dressing and undressing would have done the same. And then the cross was laid on that bare back. It seems from the synoptics that Pilate did this in the hope this would placate the Jews and he would not need to crucify Him. Again we see the power of encounter with the Lord to touch the hardest conscience.*

*19:2 And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple garment-* The thorns would have penetrated the scalp into the network of blood vessels there, producing a flow of blood onto the mock-kingly garment.

*19:3 And they came to him, and said: Hail, King of the Jews! And they struck him with their hands-* Note the continuous tenses. The Lord's experiences of suffering are depicted as going on and on, as if in endless waves. When we get that sense in our far smaller sufferings, we are fellowshipping Him there and then. The striking was "upon the cheek", according to some texts. The otherwise strange paradox of Mic. 5:1 was fulfilling: "They shall strike the judge of Israel upon the cheek". He stood there as their judge; throughout all His sufferings and final death, He was in fact supremely in control, as their judge. For of this period He had stated: "Now is the judgment of this world", and He was the judge. See on :13.

*19:4 Pilate went out again to the Jews, and said: Look, I bring him out to you, so you may know that I find no crime in him-* Again we see the hard conscience of Pilate touched by the encounter with the Lord, putting this otherwise callous man on the back foot. Again we note that Pilate "went out... to the Jews", lest they be defiled by as it were coming in to a Gentile house; recall Peter's reticence at entering the home of Gentile Cornelius.

*19:5 Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. And Pilate said to them: Behold the man!-* This was indeed sarcasm; the Lord stood there as a pathetic and bedraggled figure. But Pilate said it not so much out of spite toward Him, but as a desperate attempt to again persuade the Jews that he had humiliated this man sufficiently, and there was no point in crucifying Him. Yet again we see the desperation provoked in that hard man's conscience.

The mocking "behold the man..." would have been seen by the Lord as a reference to Zech. 6:12, where He is foreseen as a Priest crowned with silver and gold, introduced to Israel with the same phrase: "Behold the man...". The Lord would have taken encouragement that in the Father's eyes, He was crowned there and then in glory, as He magnified His priestly office. But it would have seemed so, so different in the eyes of those mocking men. As Son of God, He was an intellectual genius without compare, and He applied His genius to the Father's word. He would have been conscious of all these links, and so much more. This way of His didn't seem to leave Him in His time of dying. And His awareness would doubtless have been a tremendous encouragement to Him. God likewise can control our trials so that we take strength from them in accordance with our appreciation of His word.

*19:6 When the chief priests and the servants saw him, they cried out: Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Take him yourselves and crucify him. For I find no crime in him-* Pilate's repeated statement that he found no crime in the Lord was unwise from a secular point of view; for he was publicly going on record as saying he was authorizing the

crucifixion of an innocent man. The only reason for saying this was because he was making a genuine protest of conscience. The Jews likewise had a conscience. The more Pilate drew their attention to His innocence, the louder and more insistently they cried for His crucifixion. This of itself indicates the unease of their own consciences. All concerned are presented as culpable, rather than just doing a job. We see here how submission to the crowd mentality, following a multitude to do evil, is still absolutely culpable before God. And in our similar situations we must be ever aware of this. For we like sheep go astray, led into sin by reason of our part in the herd... but we still go astray, and for those sins committed like sheep, the Lord had to die as He did.

19:7 *The Jews answered him: We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God-* The Mosaic death penalty for false prophets / teachers did not exactly correspond with the charge laid against the Lord, of being God's Son. We note that their issue was not that He claimed to be God. If they felt they had any real evidence for that claim, they would have surely used it now. But even they realized, as Trinitarians ought to, that the Lord was not claiming that. He had clarified their claim to that effect in chapter 10, stating that no, He was only claiming to be the Son of God. And such terms could be used about men without being in the least blasphemous.

19:8 *When Pilate heard this he was even more afraid-* If this were any other case, Pilate would likely have shrugged or even laughed. Just another nutty person with delusions of grandeur. But the great fear that came upon him is indication that he subconsciously joined the dots and realized that this claim was indeed true. Yet again, we are encouraged that encounter with the Lord touches the consciences of the hearers. And we can therefore preach Him knowing that for all the apparent show of disinterest, we are touching people. And that is why people's body language changes distinctly when they are handed a tract about Him; if it were advertising something to buy, or a show at the local park, their body language is quite different.

19:9 *And he went back into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus: Where are you from? But Jesus gave him no answer-* Pilate took the Lord back inside, away from earshot of the Jews, to ask Him more about this "Son of God" claim; for it had touched his conscience. This question is strange. It leads nowhere really, if asked from a purely secular perspective. I suggest that the conscience of a man as hardened as Pilate was being touched, and he sensed that the Lord was indeed from God, or had Divine origins. Hence his question. The Lord's silence was because His whole personality was an answer to the question, for He had shown in His life and showed in His whole personality that He was God's Son.

Because the Lord was so excluded from society (see on Jn. 8:42), He would have been so focused upon His Heavenly Father. And that would have been felt and perceived. Reflect how the Centurion muttered: "Truly this was the Son of God". The Lord's creation of a new family was radical then; and it's just as radical today. In passing, the Lord must have been so tempted to say that Joseph was his father. It would've made things *so* much easier for Him. Just as we are tempted to effectively deny our Heavenly Father, and act like we're just the same as this world. According to the rabbinic writing *Qiddushin* 4:2, a fatherless person must remain silent when asked "Where are you from". And this is exactly what Jesus did when asked this very question here in Jn. 19:9. This refusal to call Joseph His father cost Him His life. He refused to call Himself the son of Joseph. Indeed, E.P. Sanders makes the point that the fatherlessness of Jesus not only meant that He would not have been counted as a child of

God or son of Abraham; because of these exclusions, He would have been put in the category of “a sinner”. If Joseph did indeed abandon Mary, she would have been classified as “a whore”, and Jesus would have been the “son of adultery”, putting Him in the same “sinner category”. In this we see a wonderful outworking of how God having a son resulted in that Son being counted as a sinner, even though He was not one. He was treated as “a sinner”, and thereby He came to know how we feel, who truly are sinners.

*19:10 Pilate said to him: Why do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have the power to release you and have the power to crucify you?*- Even on a secular level, the situation was such that actually Pilate did not have that power. He either capitulated totally to the Lord's cause, or allowed his supposed "power" to be overridden by the circumstance and manipulation from the Jews. And the Lord had precisely set up the whole situation, so that Pilate would have to crucify Him- although built into the whole game plan there was the genuine appeal to Pilate and the possibility that he would repent and become a Christian. We marvel at how it all worked out, remembering that this Lord is our Lord, and works in a similar way in our lives- directing and manipulating circumstance, whilst leaving the players concerned completely free to repent and come to Him. Those parts of our life path which we don't understand are simply the bits where His arrangement of things is so complex that it is beyond our comprehension. But the end result in view is our salvation.

*19:11 Jesus answered him: You would have no power against me unless it was given to you from above. So the man that delivered me to you has the greater sin-* As noted on :9, the Lord made no comment about who He was, for it was obvious. But He does respond to this issue of power. The one who delivered the Lord to Pilate was Caiaphas, and he here is credited with the greatest culpability for the crucifixion. This would explain why he is earlier spoken of as "the prince of this [Jewish] world", singled out for particular judgment. Although Judas betrayed / delivered / handed over the Lord to the Jews, it was Caiaphas who handed Him over to Pilate. The similarity of the language is to demonstrate that Caiaphas also handed over / betrayed the Lord, and was even more culpable than Judas. In this sense, the devil / satan, the great adversary to the Lord, Caiaphas and the system he represented, had used Judas as a tool. By making the point that Caiaphas had greater sin than Pilate, the Lord was as it were comforting Pilate; demonstrating that it was He and not Pilate who was in complete control of events.

The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18). Often it is possible to see in His words allusions to even seven or eight OT passages, all in context, all relevant. Reflect how His response to Pilate “you would have no power against me” was a reference to the prophecy of Daniel 8, about Rome becoming mighty “but not by his own power”. Or how His crucifixion “near to the city” (Jn. 19:20) connected with Jerusalem thereby being guilty of His blood (Dt. 21:3).

It is inevitable that to someone of His intellectual ability as the Son of God, to a man with His sense of justice and with His knowledge of the Jews and their Law, everything within Him would have cried out at the protracted injustices of His trials. He had the strong sense within Him at this time that He was hated without cause, that the Jews were "my enemies *wrongfully*" (Ps. 69:4). "Are you come out as against a thief...? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and you laid no hold on me" (Mt. 26:55). "Why do you ask me? Ask them

which heard me... If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why do you smite me?" (Jn. 18:21-23). All these indicate a keen sense of injustice. It must have welled up within Him when He saw the servant come with the bowl of water for Pilate to solemnly wash his hands in. Yet His response was one of almost concern for Pilate, lest he think that the guilt was *solely* on him (Jn. 19:11; cp. His concern for Judas' repentance, Jn. 13:27). The Lord did not just passively resign Himself to it with the sense that all would have to be as all would have to be. He struggled with the injustice of it all. Some form of anger even arose, it would seem. This fact must have pushed Him towards that dread precipice of sin. His possession of human nature and the possibility of failure meant that there were times when He was much nearer sin than others. But He didn't just keep away from the precipice, as He didn't spare Himself from being tired and tested by the crowds and thereby drawn closer to the possibility of spiritual failure. He came into this world to show forth the Father's glory, and to do His will was His meat and drink. This hangs like a tapestry to the whole crucifixion event.

19:12 *Upon this, Pilate sought to release him-* The Lord had told him that he did indeed have "sin" over this matter, although Caiaphas had greater sin. And there was something in Pilate that didn't want to sin or be held guilty by the power "from above" (:11) which was clearly involved in all this.

*But the Jews cried out, saying: If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone that makes himself a king speaks against Caesar!-* On one hand, there was Pilate's desire not to sin or be held guilty before God. On the other, there was the manipulation of the crowd, the desire to retain office, and not offend our secular superiors. And that voice, as with so many, was more powerful than the voice of the *logos* of encounter with Jesus.

19:13 *When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha-* The judgment seat of Christ is not a means by which the Father and Son gather information about us, consider it and then give a verdict. It will be for *our* benefit. Our behaviour is constantly analysed by them and 'judged'. The idea of sitting upon a judgment seat or giving judgment doesn't necessarily involve the idea of weighing up evidence. To 'judge' can mean simply to pronounce the final verdict, which the judge has long since known; not to weigh up evidence (consider Mt. 7:2; Jn. 3:18; 5:22; 7:24,51; 8:15,16,26; 16:11; 18:31; Acts 7:7; 23:3; 24:6 Gk.; Rom. 2:12; 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:31; 2 Thess. 2:12; Heb. 10:30; 13:4; 1 Pet. 4:6; James 5:10,22). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17).

It is grammatically possible to read Jn. 19:13 as meaning that Pilate sat Him (Jesus) down on the judgment seat, on the pavement, replete with allusion to the sapphire pavement of Ex. 24. The Gospel of Peter 3:7 actually says this happened: "And they clothed him with purple and sat him on a chair of judgment, saying, Judge justly, King of Israel". See on 1 Pet. 2:23. This would fit in with how it was as "the judge of Israel" at this time that the Lord was smitten on the cheek; see on :3. Now was "the judgment of this world", and the Lord was judge.

The whole account of the crucifixion in John shows how the Lord gave His life up of Himself; the Jews and Romans had no power to take it from Him, and throughout John's accounts of the trials and crucifixion, it is apparent that it is the Lord and not His opponents who is in total control of the situation. Even though 'the [Jewish] Devil' is seen as a factor in Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:27,30), it is clear that Jesus was delivered up [s.w. 'betrayed'] by the "determinate counsel [will] and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It wasn't as if God fought a losing battle with a personal Satan in order to protect His Son from death. The way that the Lord Jesus is 'sat down upon' the Judgment Bench, as if He is the authentic judge (Jn. 19:13), is an example of how the Lord Jesus is presented in John as being totally in control; His 'lifting up' on the cross is portrayed as a 'lifting up' in glory, enthroned as a King and Lord upon the cross. Likewise 'Gabbatha' means an elevated or lifted up place; the Lord there was lifted up too, that He might draw all believing eyes toward Him. Other examples of John bringing out this theme of the Lord being in control are to be found in the way He confronts His captors (Jn. 18:4), questions His questioners (Jn. 18:20,21,23; 19:11), gets freedom for His followers (Jn. 18:8), and makes those come out to arrest Him fall to the ground.

The mention that Jesus stood before Pilate "in a place that is called the Pavement" (Jn. 19:13) reminds us of Ex. 24:10, where Yahweh was enthroned in glory on another 'pavement' when the old covenant was made with Israel. The New Covenant was inaugurated with something similar. "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) would have been easily perceived as an allusion to the way that Yahweh Himself as it were dwelt between the cherubim on the mercy seat (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1). And yet the Lord Jesus in His death was the "[place of] propitiation" (Heb. 2:17), the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. "There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat... of all things which I will give thee in commandment" (Ex. 25:20-22). In the cross, God met with man and communed with us, commanding us the life we ought to lead through all the unspoken, unarticulated imperatives which there are within the blood of His Son. There in the person of Jesus nailed to the tree do we find the focus of God's glory and self-revelation, and to this place we may come to seek redemption. See on Jn. 19:19.

19:14 *Now it was the preparation of the Passover-* And indeed the Passover lamb was being prepared by these awful sufferings. The Lord's last supper was therefore a Passover-style meal, but not the Passover of 14 Nissan.

*It was about the sixth hour, and he said to the Jews: Behold, your King!*- Pilate really ought to have figured by now that if he wanted to keep his job and placate the Jews, he had to crucify the Lord. But still his desperate conscience tried to get the Lord released. He was indeed being sarcastic by presenting the bedraggled figure of Jesus as King of the Jews. He was desperately reasoning that they could hardly accept such a figure as their king. Their response of :15 is evidence that they considered Pilate's words as an attempt to get them to rethink their obsession with crucifying the Lord.

19:15 *They cried out: Away with him! Away with him!*- The Greek means literally 'to lift up'; again the Lord would have taken encouragement from the fact that effectively His crucifixion was a lifting up in glory, from God's perspective. And He had used the same word in saying that His life was not to be taken "away" from Him, but He would give it of Himself (10:18). He was total master of the situation. And there are times when others may apparently have power over us, where we appear to be victims of a total collapse situation all around us, or circumstances are going to take us away, maybe from life itself. But if we are consciously



giving our lives to the Lord, then we are not being swamped or taken away by circumstance, but like the Lord, remain masters of our life's path.

*Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered: We have no king but Caesar!*- This recalls how Israel rejected God's Kingship for that of a human king. This public statement of loyalty to Caesar was exactly what the orthodox Jews objected to making. But they made it now because of their utter obsession with destroying Him. Such obsessions, born out of a bad conscience, result in all principles being thrown to the wind.

19:16 *Therefore he delivered him to them to be crucified*- Pilate's guilt here is plainly stated, especially as he himself realized he had the power to release the Lord. He delivered Him "to their will" (Lk. 23:25), tacitly accepting that their will was stronger than his; although all this happened according to the will of the Father and Son. The Gospels carefully omit any record of Pilate pronouncing a judgment of condemnation upon the Lord, as was required and usual. He did not do so because of the deep weight of conscience within him.

This handing over of the Lord to crucifixion was ultimately done by God, the "power" behind and through Pilate. There is an unmistakable Biblical link between the term "Son of God", the idea of God giving, and the death of the Lord Jesus. Whatever else this means, it clearly shows the pain to God in the death of His Son. Paul only uses "Son of God" 17 times- and every one is in connection with the death of the Lord. And often the usages occur together with the idea of God's *giving* of His Son to die- "He who did not spare His own son but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). This sheds light on the otherwise strange use of another idea by Paul- that Jesus was 'handed over' to death (Rom. 4:25; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:2,25). It was the Father who ultimately 'handed over' His Son to death. The idea of God's Son being *sent* to redeem us from sin is perhaps John's equivalent (1 Jn. 1:7; 4:10; Jn. 3:16). Jesus was the Son whom the Father sent "last of all" to receive fruit (Mk. 12:6)- and it is reflection upon God's giving of His Son on the cross which surely should produce fruit in us. For we can no longer live passively before such outgiving love and self-sacrificial pain. And we are invited to perhaps review our understanding of two passages in this light: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son... to redeem" (Gal. 4:4) and "God sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [a sin offering] condemned sin, in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). These verses would therefore speak specifically of what happened in the death of Christ on the cross, rather than of His birth. For it was in the cross rather than the virgin birth that we were redeemed and a sin offering made. It was on the cross that Jesus was above all in the exact likeness of sinful flesh, dying the death of a sinful criminal. The "likeness" of sinful flesh is explained by Phil. 2:7, which uses the same word to describe how on the cross Jesus was made "in the likeness of men". We can now better understand why the Centurion was convicted by the sight of Christ's death to proclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God" (Mk. 15:39).

19:17 *So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called the place of a skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha*- They "took" or Gk. 'received' Him; but the prologue states that they received Him not (1:11).

Tradition has it that the victim had to hold their hands out to receive the stake, which they then had to carry. The Lord's prophecy of Peter's crucifixion thus describes it as Peter stretching out his hands and being led to his death (Jn. 21:18). Yet the Lord emphasized in His teaching that we must *take up* the cross, as He did (Mk. 8:34; 10:21). This might just suggest that in line with the Lord's willing death, giving up of His life rather than it being

taken from Him, He bent down and picked up the stake before the soldiers had the chance to offer it to Him. I imagine doing this in a deft manner. The deftness of the way He broke that bread apart and held the cup comes out in Mt. 26:26. He knew what that breaking of bread was going to mean. His willingness would have been such a contrast to the unwilling hesitation of the thieves and other victims. The soldiers must have been blind indeed to still mock Him, despite all these indications that He was more than mere man. That piece of wood that was laid upon Him by the Father, however the Lord physically took it up, represented our sins, which were laid upon Him (Is. 53:6); your laziness to do your readings early this morning, my snap at the woman in the bus, his hatred of his mother in law... that piece of wood was the symbol of our sins, every one of them. This is what we brought upon Him. It was our laziness, our enmity, our foolishness, *our weak will*... that necessitated the death of Jesus in this terrible way. He went through with it all to make an end of sins" (Dan. 9:26). Will we do our little bit in responding? The marks of His sufferings will be in Him eternally, and thereby we will be eternally reminded of the things we now only dimly appreciate (Rev. 5:6; Zech. 13:6). The walk from the courthouse to Golgotha was probably about 800m (half a mile). One of the soldiers would have carried the sign displaying the Lord's Name and crime. The thieves were probably counting the paces (maybe the crowd was chanting them?). You know how it is when doing a heavy task, 'Just three more boxes to lug upstairs... just two more... last one'. But the Lord was above this. Of that I'm sure. Doing any physically strenuous task that takes you to the end of your strength, there is that concentration on nothing else but the job in hand. Hauling a heavy box or load, especially in situations of compulsion or urgency, it becomes irrelevant if you bump into someone or crush a child's toy beneath your heavy feet. But the Lord rose above.

John's statement that "He went out, bearing the cross for Himself" as He walked to Golgotha is a real emphasis, seeing that it was *as* He came out that it was necessary for them to make Simon carry the cross. John takes a snapshot of that moment, and directs our concentration to the Lord at that moment, determined to carry it to the end, even though in fact He didn't. It is this picture of following the Lord carrying *His* cross which the Lord had earlier asked us to make the model of our lives. We are left to assume that the two criminals followed Him in the procession. They were types of us, the humble and the proud, the selfless and the selfish, the two categories among those who have been asked to carry the cross and follow the Lord in His 'last walk'.

The word John uses for 'bearing' is translated (and used in the sense of) 'take up' in 10:31. It was as if John saw as significant the Lord's willingness to take up the cross Himself, without waiting for it to be forced upon Him as it probably was on the other two. And there is a clear lesson for us, who fain would carry something of that cross. And yet the similarity of meaning within this word for 'taking up' and 'bearing / carrying' is further instructive. The Lord picked it up and was willing to carry it, but didn't make it to the end of the 'last walk', through understandable human weakness. Amidst the evident challenge of the cross, there is interwoven comfort indeed (as there is in the Lord's eager and positive acceptance of the thief, Joseph and Nicodemus, and the wondrous slowness of the Father's punishment of those ever-so-evil men who did the Lord to death).

'Golgotha' meaning 'The place of the skull' or even 'The skull of Gol[iath]' may well be the place near Jerusalem where David buried Goliath's skull (1 Sam. 17:54). "Ephes-Dammim", where David killed Goliath, meaning 'border of blood' suggests 'Aceldama', the "field of

blood". Goliath coming out to make his challenges at morning and evening (1 Sam. 17:16) coincided with the daily sacrifices which should have been offered at those times, with their reminder of sin and the need for dedication to God. The thoughtful Israelite must surely have seen in Goliath a personification of sin which the daily sacrifices could do nothing to overcome.

“The crossbar was carried... weighing 34 to 57 kg., was placed across the nape of the victim's neck and balanced along both shoulders. Usually the outstretched arms then were tied to the crossbar”. This means that the Lord would have had His shoulders bowed forward as He walked to Golgotha, with both His hands lifted up against His chest. He evidently foresaw this in some detail when He described His mission to man as a shepherd carrying His lost sheep on both shoulders. Let's forever forget the picture of a happy, quiet lamb snugly bobbling along on the shepherd's shoulders. We are surely meant to fill in the details in the parables. The sheep, his underside covered in faeces and mud, would have been terrified; in confusion he would have struggled with the saviour shepherd. To be carried on His shoulders would have been a strange experience; he would have struggled and been awkward, as the shepherd stumbled along, gripping both paws against His chest with His uplifted hands. This was exactly the Lord's physical image as He stumbled to the place of crucifixion. He evidently saw the cross as a symbol of us, His struggling and awkward lost sheep. And every step of the way along the Via Dolorosa, Yahweh's enemies reproached every stumbling footstep of His anointed (Ps. 89:51). It was all this that made Him a true King and our unquestioned leader- for on His shoulders is to rest the authority of the Kingdom (Is. 9:5), because He bore His cross upon the same shoulders.

*19:18 There they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one and Jesus between them-* He is presented as King of criminals of the basest kind; see on 18:40.

John's Gospel has many references to Moses, as catalogued elsewhere. When John records the death of the Lord with two men either side of Him, he seems to do so with his mind on the record of Moses praying with Aaron and Hur on each side of him (Ex. 17:12). John's account in English reads: “They crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one” (Jn. 19:18). Karl Delitzsch translated the Greek New Testament into Hebrew, and the Hebrew phrase he chose to use here is identical with that in Ex. 17:12. Perhaps this explains why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't mention that the two men on either side of the Lord were in fact criminals- he calls them “two others” (Jn. 19:18) and “... the legs of the first and of the other” (Jn. 19:32). Thus John may've chosen to highlight simply how there were two men on either side of the Lord, in order to bring out the connection with the Moses scene.

It makes a good exercise to read through one of the records, especially John 19, and make a list of the adjectives used. There are virtually none. Read a page of any human novelist or historian: the pages are cluttered with them. Hebrew is deficient in adjectives, and because of this it often uses 'Son of...' plus an abstract noun, instead of an adjective. Thus we read of a "son of peace" (Lk. 10:5,6), or "a man of tongue" (Ps. 140:11 RVmg; AV "an evil speaker"). The Hebrew language so often reflects the character of God. And His artless self-expression is no clearer seen in the way He inspired the records of the death of His Son. The record of the death of God's Son is something altogether beyond the use of devices as primitive as adjectives. The way in which the actual act of impaling is recorded as just a subordinate clause is perhaps the clearest illustration of this. The way Mary thinks the risen Lord is a gardener is another such. Or the weeping of the women, and Joseph, and Nicodemus

(presumably this happened) when the body was taken from the cross, as the nails were taken out: this isn't recorded. Likewise, only Matthew records the suicide of Judas; the Father chose not to emphasize in the records that the man who did the worst a man has ever done or could ever do- to betray the peerless Son of God- actually went and took his own life (and even made a mess of doing that). If it were my son, I would have wanted to emphasize this. But the Almighty doesn't. In similar vein, it is almost incredible that there was no immediate judgment on the men who did the Son of God to death. The judgments of AD70 only came on the next generation. Those middle aged men who stood and derided the Saviour in His time of finest trial: they died, as far as we know, in their beds. And the Roman / Italian empire went on for a long time afterwards, even if God did in fact impute guilt to them for what their soldiers did. Another hallmark of God's Hand in the record is that what to us are the most obvious OT prophecies are not quoted; e.g. Is. 53:7: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth". A human author would have made great capital from such detailed fulfilments. But not so the Almighty. Hebrew, along with all the Semitic languages, has no superlatives. God doesn't need them. And the record of the cross is a classic example. The record of the resurrection reflects a similar culture. The actual resurrection isn't ever described [in marked contrast to how it is in the uninspired 'gospels']. Instead we read of the impact of His resurrection upon His disciples.

The crucifixion of Christ was at 9 a.m. The text suggests there may have been a gap of minutes between them arriving at the place and the actual nailing. He would have willingly laid Himself down on the stake, whereas most victims had to be thrown down on the ground by the soldiers. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. Likewise He *gave* His back to the smiters when they flogged Him; He gave His face to them when they spoke about pulling out His beard (Is. 50:6). Men usually clenched their fists to stop the nails being driven in, and apparently fingers were often broken by the soldiers to ease their task. Not a bone of the Lord was broken. We can imagine Him willingly opening His palms to the nails; as we, so far away from it all, should have something of a willing acceptance of what being in Him demands of us. It may be that He undressed Himself when they finally reached the place of crucifixion. In similar vein, early paintings of the flogging show the Lord standing there *not* tied to the flogging post, as victims usually were. As He lay there horizontal, His eyes would have been heavenwards, for the last time in His mortality. Perhaps He went through the business of thinking 'this is the last time I'll do this... or that...'. How often He had lifted up His eyes to Heaven and prayed (Jn. 11:41; 17:1). And now, this was the last time, except for the final raising of the head at His death. "While four soldiers held the prisoner, [a Centurion] placed the sharp five inch spike in the dead centre of the palm... four to five strokes would hammer the spike deep into the rough plank and a fifth turned it up so that the hand would not slip free" (C.M. Ward, *Treasury Of Praise*). If it is indeed so that a Centurion usually did the nailing, it is a wondrous testimony that it was the Centurion who could say later that "truly this was the Son of God". The very man who actually nailed the Son of God was not struck dead on the spot, as a human 'deity' would have done. God's patient grace was extended, with the result that this man too came to faith.

The sheer and utter reality of the crucifixion needs to be meditated upon just as much as the actual reality of the fact that Jesus actually existed. A Psalm foretold that Jesus at His death would be the song of the drunkards. Many Nazi exterminators took to drink. And it would seem almost inevitable that the soldiers who crucified Jesus went out drinking afterwards. Ernest Hemingway wrote a chilling fictional story of how those men went into a tavern late

on that Friday evening. After drunkenly debating whether "Today is Friday", they decide that it really is Friday, and then tell how they nailed Him and lifted Him up. "When the weight starts to pull on 'em, that's when it gets em... Ain't I seen em ? I seen plenty of 'em . I tell you, he was pretty good today". And that last phrase runs like a refrain through their drunken evening. Whether or not this is an accurate reconstruction isn't my point- we have a serious duty to seek to imagine what it might have been like. Both Nazi and Soviet executioners admit how vital it was to never look the man you were murdering in the face. It was why they put on a roughness which covered their real personalities. And the Lord's executioners would have done the same. To look into His face, especially His eyes, dark with love and grief for His people, would have driven those men to either suicide or conversion. I imagine them stealing a look at His face, the face of this man who didn't struggle with them but willingly laid Himself down on the wood. The cross struck an educated Greek as barbaric folly, a Roman citizen as sheer disgrace, and a Jew as God's curse. Yet Jesus turned the sign of disgrace into a sign of victory. Through it, He announced a radical revaluation of all values. He made it a symbol for a brave life, without fear even in the face of fatal risks; through struggle, suffering, death, in firm trust and hope in the goal of true freedom, life, humanity, eternal life. The offence, the sheer scandal, was turned into an amazing experience of salvation, the way of the cross into a possible way of life. The risen Christ was and is just as much a living reality. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jewish Christians from Rome because they were agitated by one Chrestus; i.e. Jesus the Christ. Yet the historian speaks as if He was actually alive and actively present in person. In essence, He was. All the volumes of confused theology, the senseless theories about the Trinity. would all have been avoided if only men had had the faith to believe that the man Jesus who really died and rose, both never sinned and was also indeed the Son of God. And that His achievement of perfection in human flesh was real. Yes it takes faith- and all the wrong theology was only an excuse for a lack of such faith.

Several crucifixion victims have been unearthed. One was nailed with nails 18c.m. long (7 inches). A piece of acacia wood seems to have been inserted between the nail head and the flesh. *Did the Lord cry out in initial pain and shock?* Probably, as far as I can reconstruct it; for He would have had all the physical reflex reactions of any man. But yet I also sense that He didn't flinch as other men did. He came to offer His life, willingly; not grudgingly, resistantly give it up. He went through the panic of approaching the pain threshold. The nailing of the hands and feet just where the nerves were would have sent bolts of pain through the Lord's arms every time He moved or spoke. The pain would have been such that even with the eyelids closed, a penetrating red glare would have throbbled in the Lord's vision. Hence the value and intensity of those words He did speak. The pulling up on the nails in the hands as the cross was lifted up would have been excruciating. The hands were nailed through the 'Destot gap', between the first and second row of wrist bones, touching an extra sensitive nerve which controls the movement of the thumb and signals receipt of pain. They would not have been nailed through the palms or the body would not have been supportable. It has been reconstructed that in order to breathe, the crucified would have had to pull up on his hands, lift the head for a breath, and then let the head subside. The sheer physical agony of it all cannot be minimized. Zenon Ziolkowski (*Spor O Calun*) discusses contemporary descriptions of the faces of the crucified, including Jehohanan the Zealot, whose crucifixion Josephus mentions. Their faces were renowned for being terribly distorted by pain. The Lord's face was marred more than that of any other, so much so that those who saw Him looked away (Is. 52:14). That prophecy may suggest that for the Lord, the crucifixion process hurt even more. We suggest later that He purposefully refused to take relief from pushing down on the 'seat', and thus died more painfully and quicker. Several of

the unearthed victims were crucified on olive trees. So it was perhaps an olive tree which the Lord had to carry. He would have thought of this as He prayed among the olive trees of Gethsemane (perhaps they took it from that garden?). I would not have gone through with this. I would have chosen a lesser death and the achieving of a lesser salvation. I would have had more pity on myself. But the Lord of all did it *for me*, He became obedient *even* to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8), as if He could have been obedient to a lesser death, but He chose this ultimately high level. I can only marvel at the Father's gentleness with us, that despite the ineffable trauma of death, the way He takes us is so much more gentle than how He allowed His only begotten to go.

Despite much prior meditation, there perhaps dawned on the Lord some 'physical' realizations as to the nature of His crucified position: the utter impossibility of making the slightest change of position, especially when tormented by flies, the fact that the hands and feet had been pierced in the most sensitive areas; the fact that the arms were arranged in such a way so that the weight of the body hung only on the muscles, not on the bones and tendons. The smell of blood would have brought forth yelping dogs, circling birds of prey, flying insects...an incessant barrage of annoyances, things to distract the Lord's mind. As we too also face. He would have realized that the whole process was designed to produce tension in every part of the body. All His body, every part of it, in every aspect, had to suffer (and He would have realized the significance of this, and seen *all* of us as suffering with Him). The muscles were all hopelessly overworked, cramps due to the maldistribution of blood would have created an overwhelming desire to move. All victims would have writhed and wriggled within the few millimetres leeway which they had, to avoid a splinter pushing into the back lacerated from flogging... But my sense is that the Lord somehow didn't do this. He didn't push down on the footrests for relief, He didn't take the pain killer, He didn't ask for a drink until the end, when presumably the others accepted. Every muscle in the body would have become locked after two hours or so. Every part of His body suffered, symbolic of how through His sufferings He was able to identify with every member of His spiritual body- for "we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones" (Eph. 5:30). He had perhaps foreseen something of all this when He likened the killing of His body to the taking down of a tent / tabernacle- every bone and sinew, like every pole and canvass, had to be uprooted, 'taken down' (Jn. 2:19,21).

The moment of lifting the stake up vertical, probably amidst a renewed surge of abuse or cheering from the crowd, had been long foreseen and imagined by the Lord. "If, if I be *lifted up*..." (Jn. 12:32). He foresaw the physical (and spiritual) details of the crucifixion process in such detail. Recall how He foresaw that moment of handing over to death. And yet still He asked for the cup to pass, still He panicked and felt forsaken. If the theory of the cross was so hard to actually live out in practice for the Lord, then how hard it must be for us. The Lord's descriptions of Himself as being 'lifted up' use a phrase which carried in Hebrew the idea of exaltation and glory. As He was lifted up physically, the ground swaying before His eyes, His mind fixed upon the Father and the forgiveness which He was making possible through His sacrifice, covered in blood and spittle, struggling for breath... He was 'lifted up' in glory and exaltation, to those who have open eyes to see and hearts to imagine and brains to comprehend.

Imagine yourself being crucified. Go through the stages in the process. The Lord invited us to

do this when He asked us to figuratively crucify ourselves daily. Consider all the language of the sacrifices which pointed forward to the final, supreme act of the Lord: poured out, pierced, parted in pieces, beaten out; the rock smitten... and this is the process which we are going through, although the Father deals with us infinitely more gently than with His only Son.

19:19 *Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And there was written: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews*- Did Pilate write it in his own handwriting? Did they use the same ladder to place the inscription which Joseph later used to retrieve the body? Why do the records suggest that the inscription was placed after the stake had been erected? Was there initial resistance from the Jews? Was He impaled with the placard around His neck, and then the ladder was put up, and a soldier lifted it off and nailed it above His head? "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would have used words whose first letters created the sacred Name: YHWH. Perhaps this was why there was such opposition to it. "King of the Jews" would have been understood as a Messianic title. Either Pilate was sarcastic, or really believed it, or just wanted to provoke the Jews. In any case, somehow the Yahweh Name was linked with the Messiah: King of the Jews. The Name was declared in the Lord's death, as He had foretold (Jn. 17:26). Forgiveness of sins is through baptism into the Name (Acts 2:38), as even in OT times forgiveness was for the sake of the Name (Ps. 79:9). And yet through the cross and blood of Christ is forgiveness made possible. His blood and death therefore was the supreme declaration of God's Name; through His cross the grace and forgiveness, love, salvation and judgment implicit in the Name was all enabled and revealed in practice. Ps. 22:22 prophesied that "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation [*ekklesia*, LXX]". It was to us His brethren that the Name was declared; in the eyes of an unbelieving world, this was just another crucified man, a failure, a wannabe who never made it. But to us, it is the declaration of the Name. It was and is done in the midst of the ecclesia, as if the whole church from that day to this beholds it all at first hand. And our response is to in turn "Declare his righteousness" (Ps. 22:31), in response to seeing the Name declared, we declare to Him...in lives of love for the brethren. For the Name was declared, that the love that was between the Father and Son might be in us.

It is possible to argue that "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" written in Hebrew would require the use of words, the first letters of which created the word YHWH:

y Jesus- Yeshua

h The Nazarene- Ha'Natzri [cp. "the sect of 'The Nazarene(s)', Acts 24:5]

v and King- u'Melek

h of the Jews- Ha'Yehudim

giving the Yahweh Name:

hvhy

This is why the Jews minded it so strongly when the title was put up. Pilate's retort "What I have written I have written" may well have been an oblique reference to 'I am that I am'. It was his attempt to have the last laugh with the Jews who had manipulated him into crucifying a man against whom there was no real charge. It was as if the Lord suffered as He did with a placard above Him which effectively said: 'This is Yahweh'. The Name was declared there, as the Lord had foreseen (Jn. 17:26). The declaration of Yahweh's Name to Moses in Ex. 34:6 thus becomes a foretaste of the Lord's crucifixion. Some LXX versions render Ex. 34:6 as 'Yahweh, Yahweh, a man full of mercy...'. In the crucifixion of the man Christ Jesus the

essence of Yahweh was declared. And we, John says with reference to the cross, saw that glory, as it were cowering in the rock like Moses, *full* of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14 cp. Ex. 34:6 RV).

There are other reasons for thinking that there was the supreme manifestation of Yahweh in the cross of His Son:

- It has been observed that the blood of the Passover Lamb on the lintels of the doors at the Exodus, three sides of a square, would have recalled the two repeated letters of 'Yahweh' (see above panel), as if His Name was manifested in the blood of the slain lamb.
- Yahweh laid on the Lord the iniquity of us all, as if He was present there when the soldiers laid the cross upon the Lord's shoulders (Is. 53:6).
- Yahweh had prophesied of what He would achieve through the crucified Christ: "I am, I am: He that blots out thy transgressions" (Is. 43:25 LXX). He declares His Name as being supremely demonstrated in His forgiveness of our sins through and in the Lord's cross.
- Jehovah-Jireh can mean "Yahweh will show Yah" (Gen. 22:14), in eloquent prophecy of the crucifixion. There Yahweh was to be manifested supremely.
- Paul speaks of how the cross of Christ should humble us, so that no flesh should glory in God's presence (1 Cor. 1:29); as if God's presence is found in the cross, before which we cannot have any form of pride.
- The LXX uses the word translated "propitiation" in the NT with reference to how God forgave / propitiated for Israel's sins for His Name's sake (Ex. 32:14; Ps. 79:9). That propitiation was only for the sake of the Lord's future death, which would be the propitiation God ultimately accepted. Having no past or future with Him, Yahweh could act as if His Son's death had already occurred. But that death and forgiveness for "His name's sake" were one and the same thing. The Son's death was the expression of the Father's Name.
- There was a Jewish tradition that the only time when the Yahweh Name could be pronounced was by the High Priest, when he sprinkled the blood of Israel's atonement on the altar. The Name was expressed in that blood.
- Zech. 11:13 speaks of Yahweh being priced at thirty shekels of silver by Israel. But these words are appropriated to the Lord in His time of betrayal. What men did to Him, they did to the Father.
- The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father.
- The blood of the sin offering was to be sprinkled "before the LORD, before the veil" (Lev. 4:6,17). Yet the veil was a symbol of the flesh of the Lord Jesus at the time of His dying. At the time of the sprinkling of blood when the sin offering was made, the veil [the flesh of the Lord Jesus] was identifiable with Yahweh Himself. The blood of the offerings was poured out "before Yahweh" (Lev. 4:15 etc.), pointing forward to how God Himself, from so physically far away, "came down" so that the blood shedding of His Son was done as it were in His presence. And who is to say that the theophany that afternoon, of earthquake and thick darkness, was not the personal presence of Yahweh, hovering above crucifixion hill? Over the mercy seat (a symbol of the Lord Jesus in Hebrews), between the cherubim where the blood was sprinkled, "there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee" (Ex. 25:22). There we see the essence of God, and there in the cross we hear the essential word and message of God made flesh.
- The smitten rock was an evident type of the Lord's smiting on the cross. And yet in Deuteronomy especially it is made clear that Israel were to understand Yahweh as their rock. And yet "that rock was Christ". God Himself said that he would stand upon the rock as it was smitten- presumably fulfilled by the Angel standing or hovering above / upon the rock, while Moses smote it. And yet again it is Yahweh who is described as smiting the rock in Ps. 78



and Is. 48:21. He was with Christ, directly identified with Him, at the very same time as He 'smote' Him.

See on Mt. 26:65; Jn. 1:14; 3:14; 8:56; 13:37; 16:25,32; 19:13; Acts 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:20.

19:20- see on Jn. 19:11.

*This title many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin and in Greek-* As noted on :19, the Jews objected to the Hebrew title because the first letters of the four words used spelled the memorial Name, YHWH. The point is made here that crucifixion was public. If we are to die with the Lord, and share His cross, then our commitment to Him likewise must be public. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. The tendency in our age is to be secret Christians, showing sympathy for His cause from behind our screens. But the essence of Christianity is to make a public declaration as the Lord did; and John's Gospel has a theme of secret believers either turning back to their surrounding world, or coming out openly for the Lord.

19:21 *The chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate: Do not write, The King of the Jews; but that: He claimed, I am King of the Jews-* Pilate seems to have sincerely believed that the Lord was indeed Israel's king and Son of God; throughout 19:1-15 I have pointed out his struggle with his own conscience. This insistence of writing the title as he did was perhaps a rather pathetic attempt to make at least some statement of support for the Lord.

19:22 *Pilate answered: What I have written I have written-* As noted on :19, perhaps an allusion to the YHWH Name, 'I will be that I will be', which was spelled out by the first letters of the four Hebrew words used for the title.

19:23 *The soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat. Now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout-* This was all prefigured in how Joseph lost his garment before he went into the pit and before he went to prison (Gen. 39:13). Presumably there were many soldiers around. The temple guard which was seconded to the Jews (Mt. 27:65) was doubtless there in full force, lest there be any attempt to save Jesus by the crowd or the disciples. And yet Jn. 19:23 suggests there were only four soldiers, each of whom received a part of His clothing. This must mean that there were four actually involved in the crucifixion: one for each hand and foot. He had signs of nails (plural) in His hands. We are left to meditate as to whether He was nailed hand over hand as tradition has it (which would have meant two very long nails were used); or both hands separately.

It is likely that the Lord was crucified naked, thereby sharing the shame of Adam's nakedness. The *shame* of the cross is stressed (Heb. 11:26; 12:2; Ps. 31:17; Ps. 69:6,7,12,19,20). And we are to share those sufferings. There *must*, therefore, be an open standing up for what we believe in the eyes of a hostile world. Preaching, in this sense, is for all of us. And if we dodge this, we put the Son of God to a naked shame; we re-crucify Him naked, we shame Him again (Heb. 6:6). He was crucified naked, and the sun went in for three hours. He must have been cold, very cold (Jn. 18:18). Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirokritika* 2.53) confirms that the Romans usually crucified victims naked. Melito of Sardis, writing in the 2nd century, writes of "his body naked and not even deemed worthy of a clothing that it might not be seen. Therefore the heavenly lights turned away and the day darkened in order

that he might be hidden who was denuded upon the cross" (*On the Pasch* 97). The earliest portrayals of the crucified Jesus, on carved gems, feature Him naked.

There is reason to think that the Jews put the Lord to the maximum possible shame and pain; therefore they may well have crucified Him naked. T. Mommsen *The Digest Of Justinian* 48.20.6 reports that "the garments that the condemned person is wearing may not be demanded by the torturers"- the fact that they gambled for His clothes shows that the Lord was yet again treated illegally (quite a feature of the records) and to the maximum level of abuse. We not only get this impression from the Biblical record, but from a passage in the Wisdom of Solomon (2:12-20) which would have been well known to them, and which has a surprising number of similarities to the Lord's life amongst the Jews:

"Let us lie in wait for the virtuous man, since he annoys us and opposes our way of life, reproaches us for our breaches of the law and accuses us of playing false...he claims to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a son of the Lord. Before us he stands, a reproof to our way of thinking, the very sight of him weighs our spirits down; His way of life is not like other men's...in His opinion we are counterfeit... and boasts of having God as His father. let us see if what he says is true, let us observe what kind of end he himself will have. If the virtuous man is God's son, God will take his part and rescue him from the clutches of his enemies. *Let us test him with cruelty and with torture, and thus explore this gentleness of His and put His endurance to the proof. Let us condemn him to a shameful death* since he will be looked after- we have his word for it".

Susan Garrett lists several Greek words and phrases found in the Gospel of Mark which are identical to those in this section of the Wisdom of Solomon. It would seem that Mark was aware of this passage in the Wisdom of Solomon, and sought to show how throughout the Lord's ministry, and especially in His death, the Jews were seeking to apply it to Him in the way they treated Him. See Susan Garrett, *The Temptations Of Jesus In Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) p. 68.

The idea of the Lord being subjected to the maximum pain and mocking must, sadly, be applied to Seneca's description of how some victims of crucifixion were nailed through their genitals (*Dialogi* 6.20.3). In this sense the paradox of Is. 53 would have come true- through losing His ability to bring forth children, the Lord brought forth a huge multitude of spiritual children world-wide. It's an honour to be one of them.

There seems to have been something unusual about the Lord's outer garment. The same Greek word *chiton* used in Jn. 19:23,24 is that used in the LXX of Gen. 37:3 to describe Joseph's coat of many pieces. Josephus (*Antiquities* 3.7.4,161) uses the word for the tunic of the High Priest, which was likewise not to be rent (Lev. 21:10). The Lord in His time of dying is thus set up as High Priest, gaining forgiveness for His people, to 'come out' of the grave as on the day of Atonement, pronouncing the forgiveness gained, and bidding His people spread that good news world-wide.

19:24 *They said to each other, Let us not tear it but cast lots for it, to determine whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled, which said: They divided my garments among them, and for my robe they cast lots-* The robe was not to be torn, *schizein*. There was to be no schism in it. Ahijah tore his garment into twelve pieces to symbolize the division of Israel (1 Kings 11:30,31). The Lord's coat being unrent may therefore be another reflection of how His death brought about unity amongst His people (Jn. 11:52; 17:21,22). Before Him, there, we simply cannot be divided amongst ourselves. Likewise the net through which the Lord

gathers His people was unbroken (Jn. 21:11). Note how all these references are in John- as if he perceived this theme of unity through the cross. Note the focus of the soldiers upon the dividing up of the clothes, whilst the Son of God played out the ultimate spiritual drama for human salvation just a metre or so away from them. And our pettiness is worked out all too often in sight of the same cross. As those miserable men argued over the clothes at the foot of the cross, so when Israel stood before the glory of Yahweh at Sinai, they still suffered "disputes" amongst themselves (Ex. 24:22 NIV cp. Heb. 12:29). So pressing and important do human pettinesses appear, despite the awesomeness of that bigger picture to which we stand related.

The prophecy quoted is Ps. 22:18, where the Psalmist speaks as if he is observing the parting of his garments before his own eyes. This had an incredibly accurate fulfilment in how the Lord from His impaled position was able to view this happening before Him.

*19:25 These things the soldiers did. There was standing by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene-*

The Torah required "two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15); yet Roman law disallowed women as witnesses. Significantly, the Torah didn't, although later Jewish law did. The records of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are carefully framed to show that there were always two or three witnesses present- and they are all *women*:

	<b>Cross</b>	<b>Burial</b>	<b>Resurrection</b>
<b>Matthew</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, Mother of the sons of Zebedee	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"	Mary Magdalene, "the other Mary"
<b>Mark</b>	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of Joses	Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Salome
<b>Luke</b>			Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James

The emphasis is surely deliberate- women, the ones who were *not* witnesses according to the world, were the very witnesses chosen by God to testify the key truths concerning His Son. And His same approach is seen today in His choices of and amongst us.

It is entirely possible that the sister of Jesus' mother mentioned in the account of the crucifixion ("His mother's sister") is to be identified with the woman named Salome mentioned in Mark 15:40 and also with the woman identified as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" mentioned in Mt 27:56. If so, and if John the Apostle is to be identified as the beloved disciple, then the reason for the omission of the second woman's name becomes clear; she would have been John's own mother, and he consistently omitted direct reference to himself or his brother James or any other members of his family in the fourth Gospel. Therefore "behold your mother" meant he was to reject *his* mother and take Mary as his mother, to alleviate the extent of her loss. Finally Mary came to see Jesus as Jesus, as the Son of God, and not just as her son. This was her conversion- to see Him for who He was, uncluttered by her own perceptions of Him, by the baggage of everything else. And so it can be with us in re-conversion. We each must face the reality of who Jesus really is, quite apart from all the baggage of how we were brought up to think of Him: the Sunday School Jesus,

the Jesus of the apostate church, the Jesus we have come to imagine from our own human perceptions...must give way when we are finally confronted with who He really is. This line of thought is born out by a consideration of Mk. 15:40,41: "There were also women beholding from afar: among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the little and of Joses, and Salome; who, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him: and many other women which came up with him unto Jerusalem". Jesus had two brothers named James and Joses (Mt. 13:55). If the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture means anything, then we can fairly safely assume that the Mary referred to here is Mary the mother of Jesus. It was perhaps due to the influence and experience of the cross that His brother James called himself "the little", just as Saul changed his name to Paul, 'the little one', from likewise reflecting on the height of the Lord's victory. So within the crowd of women, there were two women somehow separate from the rest- "among whom were both Mary Magdalene, and Mary". Mary Magdalene was the bashful ex-hooker who was almost inevitably in love with Jesus. The other Mary was His mother. Understandably they forged a special bond with each other. Only Mary Magdalene had fully perceived the Lord's upcoming death, hence her anointing of His body beforehand. And only His Mother had a perception approaching that of the Magdalene. It's not surprising that the two of them were somehow separate from the other women. These women are described as following Him when He was in Galilee; and the mother of Jesus is specifically recorded as having done this, turning up at the Cana wedding uninvited, and then coming to the house where Jesus was preaching. The description of the women as 'coming up' (the idiom implies 'to keep a feast') with Him unto Jerusalem takes the mind back to Mary bringing Jesus up to Jerusalem at age 12. But my point is, that Mary is called now "the mother of James...and of Joses". The same woman appears in Mk. 16:1: "Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James...had bought sweet spices that they might come and anoint him". Earlier in the Gospels, Mary is always "the mother of Jesus". Now she is described as the mother of her other children. It seems to me that this is the equivalent of John recording how Mary was told by Jesus at the cross that she was no longer the mother of Jesus, He was no longer her son. The other writers reflect this by calling her at that time "Mary the mother of James" rather than the mother of Jesus. The way that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene rather than to His mother (Mk. 16:9) is surely God's confirmation of this break between Jesus and His earthly mother.

The whole structure of the records of the crucifixion are to emphasize how the cross is essentially about human response to it; nothing else elicits from humanity a response like the cross does. Mark's account, for example, has 5 component parts. The third part, the centrepiece as it were, is the account of the actual death of the Lord; but it is surrounded by cameos of human response to it (consider Mk. 15:22-27; 28-32; the actual death of Jesus, 15:33-37; then 15:38-41; 15:42-47). John's record shows a similar pattern, based around 7 component parts: 19:16-18; 19:22; 23,24; then the centrepiece of 25-27; followed by 19:28-30; 31-37; 38-42. But for John the centrepiece is Jesus addressing His mother, and giving her over to John's charge. This for John was the quintessence of it all; that a man should leave His mother, that Mary loved Jesus to the end... and that he, John, was honoured to have been there and seen it all. John began his gospel by saying that the word was manifest and flesh and he saw it- and I take this as a reference to the Lord's death. Through this, a new family of men and women would be created (Jn. 1:12). See on Lk. 23:48.

19:26 *When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he said to his mother: Woman, behold your son!*- Unearthed victims of crucifixion seem to have been impaled on stakes about 10 feet high. The cross would not have been as high as 'Christian' art usually represents it. The

feet of the Lord would only have been about 4 feet above ground. His mother and aunty stood by the cross- the tragedy of His mother being there needs no comment. She would have seen the blood coming from the feet. Her head would have been parallel with His knees. His face marred more than the sons of men (Is. 52:14), sore from where His beard had been pulled off (Is. 50:6), teeth missing and loose, making His speech sound strange, fresh and dried blood mixing... and His mother there to behold and hear it all. She must have thought back, and surely He did too; for He was only a man. Mother around the house as a child, mending clothes, getting food, explaining things, telling Him about Simeon's prophecy, of how a sword would break her heart as well as His. This isn't just emotional speculation. Ps. 22:9,10 emphasizes the Lord's thoughts for His mother and His babyhood with her: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou keptest me in safety (AVmg.- a reference to Herod's persecution) when I was on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". The temptation would have been to go on and on. Was I too hard on her in Cana? How I must have stung her when I said "Behold *my mother* and my brethren" are these half-hearted, superficially interested people (Mt. 12:49). She was the best mother I could have ever had. Like any man would think. And He was a man. Not a mere man, but a man. I wonder if He said those words of breakage, of severance, between Him and her, because these feelings welling up within Him were affecting His concentration on the Father.

"*But* there stood by the cross..." makes the connection between Mary and the clothes. It seems that initially, she wasn't there; He looked for comforters and found none (Ps. 69:20- or does this imply that the oft mentioned spiritual difference between the Lord and His mother meant that He didn't find comfort in her? Or she only came to the cross later?). His lovers, friends and kinsmen stood far off from Him (Ps. 38:11), perhaps in a literal sense, perhaps far away from understanding Him. If Mary wasn't initially at the cross, John's connection between the dividing of the clothes and her being there would suggest that she had made the clothes. In any case, the four women at the cross are surely set up against the four soldiers there- who gambled over the clothes. Perhaps the other women had also had some input into the Lord's clothing.

If indeed Mary and the few with her came from standing far off to stand by the cross, they were sharing the spirit of Joseph and Nicodemus: 'In the light of the cross, nothing, nothing, absolutely *nothing* really matters now. The shame, embarrassment nothing. We will stand for Him and His cause, come what may'.

I can only ponder the use of the imperfect in Jn. 19:25: 'There were standing' *may* imply that Mary and the women came and went; sometimes they were there by the cross, sometimes afar off. Did they retreat from grief, or from a sense of their inadequacy, or from being driven off by the hostile crowd or soldiers, only to make their way stubbornly back? Tacitus records that no spectators of a crucifixion were allowed to show any sign of grief; this was taken as a sign of compliance with the sin of the victim. He records how some were even crucified for showing grief at a crucifixion. This was especially so in the context of leaders of revolutionary movements, which was the reason why Jesus was crucified. This would explain why the women stood afar off, and sometimes in moments of self-control came closer. Thus the Lord looked for comforters and found none, according to the spirit of prophecy in the Psalms. And yet His mother was also at the foot of the cross sometimes. For her to be there, so close to Him as she undoubtedly wished to be, and yet not to show emotion, appearing to the world to be another indifferent spectator; the torture of mind must be meditated upon. Any of these scenarios provides a link with the experience of all who would walk out against the wind of this world, and identify ourselves with the apparently hopeless cause of the crucified Christ. The RV of Jn. 19:25 brings out the tension between the soldiers standing there, and the fact that: "But there

stood by the cross of Jesus his mother...". The "but..." signals, perhaps, the tension of the situation- for it was illegal to stand in sympathy by the cross of the victim. And there the soldiers were, especially in place to stop it happening, standing nearby...

John taking Mary to his own home *may* not mean that he took her away to his house in Jerusalem. In any case, John's physical home was in Galilee, not Jerusalem. "His own (home)" is used elsewhere to mean 'family' rather than a physical house. This would have involved Mary rejecting her other sons, and entering into John's family. Spiritual ties were to be closer than all other. This must be a powerful lesson, for it was taught in the Lord's final moments. Whether we understand that John took Mary away to his own home (and later returned, Jn. 19:35), or that they both remained there to the end with the understanding that Mary was not now in the family of Jesus, the point is that the Lord separated Himself from His mother. The fact He did this last was a sign of how close He felt to her. She was the last aspect of His humanity which He had clung to. And at the bitter end, He knew that He must let go even, even, even of her. Jn. 19:28 speaks likewise as if the Lord's relationship with His mother was the last part of His humanity which He had to complete / fulfil / finish. For it was "after this", i.e. His words to His mother, that He knew that "all was now finished".

And yet another construction is possible. It would seem that John *did* have a house in Jerusalem. Mary was John's aunty, and so she was already in his 'house' in the sense of family. This might suggest that the Lord didn't mean John was to accept Mary into the family, as they were already related. It is reasonable to conjecture that perhaps He sent her away to John's house, for *her* benefit. He didn't want her to have to see the end. For me, if I had been in His situation, I would have preferred to die with her there. At least there was the one and only human being who knew for sure, and He knew she knew for sure, that He was the Son of God. She was the one, on earth, that He could be certain of. She had pondered all these things for 34 years. And He knew it. But if He sent her away for *her* benefit, we have yet another example of the Lord rejecting a legitimate comfort; as He rejected the pain killer, the footrests, the opportunity to drink before He asked for it ...indeed, the cross itself was something which He chose when other forms of obedience to the Father's will may have been equally possible.

The thoughts presented here concerning Mary offer several possibilities, not each of which can be what really happened; not least concerning the question of for how long she stood by the cross. But this, to my mind, doesn't matter. Each man, yes, each and every one of us, must go through the process of the cross in his own mind, and thereby be inspired. These are only thoughts to help on the way. The whole record is designed, it seems, to provoke reverent meditation. One can only, for example, meditate in a vague way on what Mary's feelings will be when she rises from the sleep of death to see her son. As we will recognize Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, so surely she will have that sense that "this is my boy". Reflecting upon the Lord's relationship with His mother as He died leads us a little deeper into His tension and ineffable sadness which the cross crystallized. His soul was sorrowful unto death in Gethsemane, as if the stress alone nearly killed Him (Mk. 14:34). "My soul is full of troubles, and my life (therefore) draweth nigh unto the grave" (Ps. 88:3). Is. 53:10-12 speaks of the fact that Christ's *soul* suffered as being the basis of our redemption; the mind contained within that spat upon head, as it hung on that tortured body; this was where our salvation was won. Death is the ultimately intense experience, and living a life dedicated to death would have had an intensifying effect upon the Lord's character and personality. Thus He jumped at His mother's request for wine as being a suggestion He should die there and then (Jn. 2:4). So many men reached their most intense at the end of their lives: Moses spoke Deuteronomy, Paul and Peter wrote their finest letters then. And the Lord was matchlessly superb at His end. He reached a peak of spirituality

at the end, to the point where He showed us, covered in blood and spittle and human rejection as He was, what the very essence of God really was. He declared the Name of Yahweh in the final moments of His death.

A mother always feels a mother to her child. That's basic human fact. The way the Lord as it were ended that mother-child relationship with Mary thereby carries all the more pain with it. The way the Gospel records refer to Mary as the mother of others amongst her children, e.g. "Mary of James" (Lk. 24:10) shows the Gospel writers paid tribute and respect to this break that had been made. Perhaps this explains why the brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, chose not to identify themselves as the brothers of Jesus- Jude calls himself the brother of James (Jude 1), and James identifies himself as a servant of Jesus (James 1:1). In this way they both reflected the way that human relationship to Jesus now meant nothing at all.

It's been observed by many that what a man needs most as he dies... is not to face death alone. To have someone with him. The way the Lord sent Mary and John away from Him at the very end is profound in its reflection of His total selflessness, His deep thought for others rather than Himself. It also reflects how He more than any other man faced the ultimate human realities and issues which death exposes. He wilfully faced them alone, the supreme example of human bravery in the face of death. And He faced them fully, with no human cushion or literal or psychological anaesthesia to dilute the awful, crushing reality of it. Remember how He refused the painkiller. And through baptism and life in Him, we are asked to die with Him, to share something of His death, the type and nature of death which He had... in our daily lives. Little wonder we each seem to sense some essential, existential, quintessential... loneliness in our souls. Thus it must be for those who share in His death. I'm grateful to Cindy for a quote from a wise doctor, Kurt Eissler: "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him". How inadvertently profound that thought becomes when applied to the death of our Lord, and to us as we imagine ourselves standing by and watching Him there. "What you can really do for a person who is dying, is to die with him".

We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Son of God, to truly begin to enter into them. The least we can do is to meditate upon their different facets, and begin to realize that if the cross really does come before the crown, then we can expect a life which reflects, in principle at least, the same basic agonies. The relationship between the Lord and Mary brings home two crystal clear points: Firstly, the sheer human pain and pathos of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ and those near Him; and secondly, the way in which He had to sacrifice His closest human relationship for the sake of His devotion to God.

There is something ineffably, ineffably sad about the fact that the mother of Jesus was standing only a meter or so away from Him at the foot of the cross. Absolutely typical of the Biblical record, this fact is recorded by John almost in passing. This is in harmony with the way the whole crucifixion is described. Thus Jn. 19:17,18 seems to focus on the fact that Jesus bore His cross to a place called Golgotha; the fact that there they crucified Him is mentioned in an incidental sort of way. Mark likewise: "And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments..." (Mk. 15:24). In similar vein the agony of flogging is almost bypassed in Mt. 27:26: "and when he had scourged Jesus...".

Simeon had early prophesied Mary's feelings when he spoke of how her son would be "spoken against" and killed: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul *also*" (Lk. 2:35). This means that the piercing of Christ's soul was felt by His mother at the same time. And so we picture that woman in her 50s at the cross, with a lifetime behind her of meditating upon God's words, meditating upon

the strange road her life had taken, a road travelled by no other woman, keeping *all* these things in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51; implying she didn't open up to anyone), a lifetime characterized by a deep fascination with her firstborn son, but also characterized by a frustrating lack of understanding of Him, and no doubt an increasing sense of distance from His real soul. Recall how when Mary asked Jesus for wine at the feast, He saw in her mention of wine a symbol of His blood. She asked for wine, on a human level; and He responded: 'Woman, what have I to do with you, can't you see that the time for me to give my blood isn't yet?'. They were just on quite different levels. It seems almost certain that Christ was crucified naked. If we crucify him afresh (Heb. 6:6), we put him to an "open" or naked (Gk.) shame. The association between shame and the crucifixion is stressed in Ps. 22 and Is. 53; and shame is elsewhere connected with nakedness.

We know that the Jews felt that Christ was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier; this is recorded to this day in the Mishnah. They had earlier taunted Him about this (Jn. 8:19). Translating into dynamic, modern English, it is not difficult to imagine the abuse they shouted at Him as He hung on the cross. Their mocking of His claim that God was His Father was doubtless related to this. And there can be no doubt that their scorn in this direction would have fallen upon Mary too. The sword that pierced Christ's soul on the cross was the sword of the abuse which was shouted at Him then (Ps. 42:10); and the piercing of Christ's soul, Simeon had said, was the piercing of Mary's soul too. In other words, they were both really cut, pierced, by this mocking of the virgin birth. Neither of them were hard and indifferent to it. And the fact they both stood together at the cross and faced it together must have drawn them closer, and made their parting all the harder. She alone knew beyond doubt that God was Christ's father, even though the Lord had needed to rebuke her for being so carried away with the humdrum of life that she once referred to Joseph as His father (Lk. 2:33). For everyone else, there must always have been that tendency to doubt. Ps. 22:9,10 were among Christ's thoughts as He hung there: "Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly". If dying men do indeed think back to their childhood, His thoughts would have been with His mother.

She had sought Him *sorrowing* when He was 12, all her life she had been plagued by this problem of knowing He was righteous, the Son of God, her Saviour, and yet she didn't fully understand Him. How deeply would the pain of all this hung over her as she watched Him in His time of dying. Doubtless she had (on the law of averages) lost other children, but this one was something special. She was a woman a real mother, and her special love for Jesus would have been noticed by the others. This probably had something to do with the fact that all her other children had rejected Christ as a "stranger", i.e. a Gentile; perhaps they too believed that this Jesus was the result of mum's early fling with a passing Roman soldier (Ps. 69:8). Inevitably people would have commented to Mary: "He's a lovely boy, isn't he". And although one doesn't sense she was arrogant in any way, her motherly pride would have risen. For He was a lovely boy, ever growing in favour with men, rather than falling out of favour with some over the petty things of village life. Remember how we sense her motherly pride surfacing at the wedding in Cana. At the cross she would have recalled all this, recalled Him as a clinging 5 year old, being comforted by her in childhood illnesses, recalled making and mending His clothes- perhaps even the cloak the drunk soldiers were gambling over. And as she beheld Him there, covered in blood and spittle, annoyed by the endless flies, alone in the darkness, evidently thirsty, with her helpless to help beneath- surely her mind would have gone back 34 years to the words of the Angel: "He shall be great". "He shall be great". And then the mental panic to understand, the crying out within the soul, the pain of incomprehension of death.

There is a great sense of pathos in those words of Jesus: "Woman behold thy son". It sounded first of



all as if Jesus was saying 'Well mum, look at me here'. But then she would have realized that this was not what He was saying. We can almost see Him nodding towards John. He was rejecting her as His mother in human terms, He was ceasing to be her son, He was trying to replace His sonship with that of an adopted son. The way He called her "Woman" rather than mother surely reflects the distance which there was between them, as He faced up to the fact that soon He would leave human nature, soon His human sonship would be ended. In passing, note how He addresses God at the end not as "Father" but "My God"- as if His sharing in our distance from God led Him to feel the same. Hence His awful loneliness and sense of having been forsaken or distanced from all those near to Him. "Behold thy mother ...behold thy son" suggests Jesus was asking them to look at each other. Doubtless they were looking down at the ground at the time. We get the picture of them looking up and catching each other's eye, then a brief silence, coming to understand what Jesus meant, and then from that hour, i.e. very soon afterwards, John *taking* Mary away. We are invited to imagine so much. The long, long discussions between them about Jesus, punctuated by long silences, as they kept that Passover, and as they lived together through the next years. Above all we see the pathos of them walking away, backs to Jesus, with Him perhaps watching them.

All this would have contributed to His sense of being forsaken. The disciples forsook Him (Mt. 26:56), His mother had now left Him, and so the words of Ps. 27:9,10 started to come true: "Leave me not, neither forsake me, O God... when my father and my mother forsake me". All His scaffolding was being removed. He had leaned on His disciples (Lk. 22:28), He had naturally leaned on His mother. Now they had forsaken Him. And now His mother had forsaken Him. And so He pleaded with His true Father not to leave Him. And hence the agony, the deep agony of Mt. 27:46: "My God, my God, Why hast *thou* (this is where the emphasis should be) forsaken me?". The disciples' desertion is a major theme, especially in Mark 15 (written by Peter, the most guilty?). The young man followed, but then ran away; Peter followed, but then denied (Mk. 14:51,54); all the disciples fled (:50); Joseph and Nicodemus denied Him (:64). By instinct, we humans want someone by our side in the hospital the night before the operation, in the nursing home as death looms near, or in any great moment of crisis. The Lord needed, desperately, His men with Him. Hence the hurt, undisguised, of "could you not watch with me one hour?".

Col. 2:11-15 describe the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus as His 'circumcision'. The cross did something intimate and personal to Him. Through the process of His death, He 'put right off the body of his flesh' (RVmg.). He shed His humanity. The saying goodbye to His mother, the statement that she was no longer His mother but just a woman to Him, was, it would seem, the very last divesting of 'the body of his flesh'. It seems to me that such was His love of her, so strong was His human connection to her who gave Him His human connection, that the relationship with her was the hardest and in fact the final aspect of humanity which He 'put off' through the experience of crucifixion. And this is why, once He had done so, He died.

There cannot be any of us who are not touched by all this. We are asked to fellowship the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. What can we expect but a sense of pathos in our lives, broken and sacrificed relationships, the loss of the dearest of human love. There seems to be a growing group of believers in their 20s -50s, some happily married, well blessed with the things of this life, who seem to preach a gospel of happy-clappy belief, of tapping each other under the chin and speaking of how much joy and happiness their religion gives them. And those who don't experience this are made to feel spiritually inferior. Yet that 'other' group are, world-wide, growing into the majority of the body of Christ. A real meditation upon the cross of our Lord and the frequent exhortations by Him to share in it places all this in perspective. We must suffer with Him if we are to be glorified with Him in His

Kingdom. The joy and peace of Christ which is now available is the joy and peace which He had in His life, a deep joy and peace from knowing that we are on the road to salvation. Know yourselves, brethren and sisters. Search your lives. If we are truly, truly trying to share the cross of Christ, if we are beginning to know the meaning of self-sacrifice, of love unto the end, we will know the spirit of Christ on that cross, "the lonely cry, the anguish keen". We will be able to share His mind, to know the fellowship of His spirit, of touching spirits with Him. And in that is joy and peace beyond our ability to describe.

*19:27 Then he said to the disciple: Behold, your mother! And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home-* I take the comment that John therefore took her to his own [home] as meaning His own house, back in Jerusalem (Jn. 19:27). The same construction is used in Jn. 16:32 cp. Acts 21:6 as meaning house rather than family. "Took to" is a verb of motion as in Jn. 6:21. His feelings for her were so strong, so passionate, that He saw it could distract Him. He wanted to stay on earth with her, and not go to His Heavenly Father. This accounts for His again using the rather distant term "Woman", and telling her that now, He wasn't her Son, John was now, and she wasn't His mother, she must be John's mother. And many a man has chosen to leave mother for the sake of the Father's work, as Hannah sacrificed her dear Samuel, to be eternally bonded in the gracious Kingdom to come. And even if one has not done this in this form, there is scarcely a believer who has not had to make some heart wrenching break with family and loved ones for the Lord's sake. Only His sake alone could inspire men and women in this way.

*19:28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now finished, so that the scripture might be accomplished, said: I thirst-* This wasn't just ingenious thinking on the spur of the moment. Victims lived for around two days on the crosses, but this was only due to a regular supply of liquid being handed up to them. One wonders if the person who organized the drink was one of the relatives of the thieves, or perhaps His own relatives. Surely His mother and aunt and Mary had come prepared to do all they could for Him in this final agony. They knew what the relatives of the crucified had to do. The thieves had probably received liquid already during the ordeal. But our sense must be that the Lord didn't. Perhaps His mother even suggested it, with an inward glance back to the sweet days of early childhood: "Do you want a drink? I can get you one". But as He refused the painkiller, as He refused to push down on the footrests, so He refused to quench His thirst.

Note that the sponge was placed on a hyssop plant, which is only 50cm. long at the most. This is internal evidence that the cross was quite low, and the Lord's feet only a few feet above the ground. The Lord Jesus began to quote Psalm 22 in His final moments on the cross, and He earnestly desired to complete the quotation. He asked for something to wet His throat so He could complete the last few verses. This indicates not only His earnest desire to say out loud "It is finished" with all that meant, but also the level of His thirst. Every word He spoke out loud was an expenditure of effort and saliva. He was intensely aware of this. He realized that unless He had more moisture, He just would not be able to speak out loud any more. And yet He so desperately wanted His last words to be heard and meditated upon. His sweat in the Garden had been dropping like blood drops; the nervous tension of bearing our sins sapped moisture from Him. There would have been a loss of lymph and body fluid to the point that Christ felt as if He had been "poured out like water" (Ps. 22:14); He "poured out his soul unto death" (Is. 53:12), as if His sense of dehydration was an act He consciously performed; He felt that the loss of moisture was because He was pouring it out Himself. This loss of moisture was therefore due to the mental processes within the Lord Jesus, it was a

result of His act of the will in so mentally and emotionally giving Himself for us, rather than just the physical result of crucifixion.

The Psalms, especially 22, indicate the extent of His dehydration- largely due to the amount of prayer out loud which He did on the cross ("The words of my *roaring*"). Heb. 5:7 speaks of His strong crying and tears (again an expenditure of moisture) while on the cross; and Rom. 8:26 alludes to this, saying that our Lord has the same intensity in His present mediation for us. The physical extent of His thirst is expressed by that of Samson, when in an incident typical of Christ's conquest of sin on the cross, he nearly died of thirst in the midst of a spectacular victory (Jud. 15:18). A perusal of that incident will enable us to enter into the thirst of our Lord a little more.

The Messianic Psalms also speak of the great spiritual thirst of the Lord Jesus in His sufferings. The intensity of His physical thirst therefore reflected His spiritual thirst, His desire to be with the Father, His desire to finish His work and achieve our salvation. We are better able to imagine His physical thirst than His spiritual thirst. Yet we are surely intended to see in that physical thirst a cameo of His desire for spiritual victory, His thirsting after God's righteousness.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been me meat...while they continually say unto me (on the cross), Where is thy God?" (Ps. 42:1-3). Christ's thirst was to come and appear before God. Appearing before God is Priestly language. Now He appears in God's presence in order to make mediation for us (Heb. 9:24), and He will appear again as the High Priest appeared on the day of Atonement, bringing our salvation. This means that Christ thirsted not so much for His own personal salvation, but for ours; He looked forward to the joys for evermore at God's right hand (Ps. 16:11)- i.e. the offering up of our prayers. How this should motivate us to pray and confess our sins! This is what our Lord was looking forward to on the cross. This is what He thirsted for.

"O God... my God (cp. "My God, my God")... my soul thirsteth after thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is" (Ps. 63:1)- cp. Christ as a root growing in a spiritually dry land on the cross (Is. 53:1)

"I stretch forth my hands unto thee (on the cross): my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land" (Ps. 143:6).

The thirsty land surrounding Christ on the cross represented spiritually barren Israel (Is. 53:1; Ps. 42:1-3); but the Lord Jesus so took His people upon Him, into His very soul, that His soul became a thirsty land (Ps. 143:6); He felt as spiritually barren as they were, so close was His representation of us, so close was He to sinful man, so fully did He enter into the feelings of the sinner. In the same way as Christ really did feel forsaken as Israel were because of their sins, so He suffered thirst, both literally and spiritually, which was a punishment for Israel's sins:

"Thou shalt serve thine enemies... in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Dt. 28:48). This is an exact picture of Christ on the cross. And Paul likewise

alluded to this language when describing his own sufferings for the sake of taking the Gospel to Israel (2 Cor. 11:27), as if he too felt that he was a sin-bearer for Israel as Christ had been. This is to be understood in the same way as his appropriating to Himself the prophecies concerning Christ as the light of the Gentiles. This is so relevant to the cross.

"They shall not (any more) hunger or thirst" (Is. 49:10) occurs in the context of comforting Israel that they will no longer be punished for their sins.

"Ye are they that forsake the Lord... therefore... ye shall be hungry... ye shall be thirsty... ye shall be ashamed" (Is. 65:11,13). This too is exactly relevant to the cross.

"Let (Israel) put away her whoredoms... lest I... set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst" (Hos. 2:3).

"I will send a famine in the land, not a... thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord... in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Am. 8:11,13).

This literal and spiritual thirst which was a punishment for Israel's sins came upon the Lord Jesus. He genuinely felt a thirst for God, He really felt forsaken, *as if* He had sinned, He truly came to know the feelings of the rejected sinner. And because of this He really is able to empathize (not just sympathize) with us in our weakness, to enter right into the feelings of those who have gone right away from God, as well as those who temporarily slip up in the way (Heb. 5:2).

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19:29 *Nearby was a vessel full of vinegar. So they put a sponge full of the vinegar upon a hyssop stick, and held it to his mouth-* As noted on :28, the hyssop stick would not have been more than 50 cm. long at the most; so the Lord was not that high above the ground, contrary to the impression given by Catholic architecture, with crucifixes lifted far above the ground.

19:30 *When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said: It is finished! And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit-* The suggestion is that His humanity was such that He needed at least some moisture in order to utter His final words. That perhaps is all there is to His request for a drink.

All crucified men bow their heads on death. The record of this therefore suggests that He lifted up His head to the Father, and then nodding His head towards His people, gave His Spirit towards them- those who had walked out across the no man's land between the crowd and the soldiers, those who stood there declaring in front of all their allegiance to this crucified King. Yet the spirit of Christ is essentially the mind and disposition of Christ rather than an ability to perform miracles etc. The power to be like Him is passed to us through an inbreathing of His example on the cross. In this sense, the Lord's lifting up in glory on the cross enabled Him to impart His Spirit to us (Jn. 7:37-39). Notice that Christ gave up His last breath of His own volition- the withdrawal of a man's Spirit by God, as with the withdrawal of the Spirit gifts, is to be seen as God's judgment of man. Gen. 6:3 LXX and RVmg. implies this. This cry *was* the giving up of the Spirit. He gave His life, it wasn't taken from Him. As He wasn't pushing down on the footrests, breathing was agonizingly difficult. I suggest He took one last great breath, with head uplifted, the nails tearing at that sensitive nerve in His hands as He did so, and then He felt His heart stop. In that last two seconds or so, He expired in the words "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". Thus He *gave* His life- for us. The centurion, when he saw *how* He died (Mk., NIV), believed. The display of self-mastery, of

giving, of love so great, *so* free, was what made that man believe (perhaps he was Cornelius?). It has been observed that the phrase "He gave forth His spirit" is unique; death isn't described like that in contemporary literature. "Nowhere in antiquity is death described as the giving forth of one's spirit" (I. de la Potterie, *The Hour of Jesus* (New York: Alba House, 1989) p. 131).

This was a final victory cry. The spirit of the New Testament is that the cross was a pinnacle of victory, not of temporal defeat. There is no way that Christ was just muttering the equivalent of 'Well, that's it then'. "It is finished" encompassed so much. That tiny word "it", not even present in the Greek or Aramaic which Jesus actually spoke, compasses so much; the whole purpose of God. So we ask the question: *What* was finished? The key to this question is in Jn. 17:4: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do". "The work" is therefore parallel with Christ's glorification of God. "It is finished" therefore reflects Christ's appreciation that He had now totally glorified His Father. But we need to ponder what exactly it means to glorify God. The glory of God refers to the characteristics intrinsic in God's Name; thus when Moses asked to see God's glory, the attributes of the Name were declared to him. Christ understood that in His death He would manifest God's Name / character to the full, although of course He had also manifested it in His life: "I have declared unto them (the believers, not the world) thy name, and *will declare it*" in His forthcoming death (Jn. 17:26).

It is a major theme of John's Gospel that God was glorified in the death of the Lord: "Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from Heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" at the cross (Jn. 12:28)

"Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him (i.e. the achievement of God's glorification was internal to Jesus, within His mind, where characteristics are found). If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him" on the cross (Jn. 13:31,32)

"And now, O Father, glorify me with thine own self (i.e. your fundamental being and character) with the glory which I had with thee...I have manifested thy name" (Jn. 17:5,6).

"I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it" on the cross (Jn. 17:26).

Christ's perfect character is only appreciated by the believers, and therefore it is only to them that God's Name / glory / very own self is revealed by Christ's example. It was to us that God's glory was finally revealed in the death of Christ. To those who wanted to see it, there was almost a visible righteousness exuding from Christ in His time of dying. "Truly this man was the Son of God... Certainly this was a righteous man" (Mk. 15:40; Lk. 23:46) was the response of the Centurion who was "watching Jesus"; and collating the Gospels, it seems he said this twice. "It is *finished*" implies that Christ's manifestation of the Father was progressive. He was "made *perfect*" by His sufferings, only becoming the author of our salvation when He had finally been perfected by them (Heb. 2:9; 5:8,9). This surely teaches that Christ died once He had reached a certain point of completeness of manifestation of the Father. If we accept this, we should not think of Christ just hanging on the cross waiting to die. He was actively developing His manifestation of the Father's characteristics, until finally He sensed He had arrived at that totality of reflection of the Father. Likewise in our carrying of the cross we are not just passively holding on until the Lord's return or our death. We should be actively growing; for surely we only die once we have reached, or had the opportunity to reach, a certain point of spiritual completeness. This may well explain why some believers die young relatively soon after baptism; they reach their intended

completeness, and are therefore taken away from the grief of this life. The perfection of Christ's manifestation of the Father was steadily progressing until at the point of death He completely manifested Him. Thus at Christ's most forlorn and humanly desperate point, utterly exhausted, with no beauty humanly that we should desire Him, utterly despised, rejected and at best misunderstood by every human being, the Lord Jesus at that point was supremely manifesting the Father; He was manifesting God's very own self at that point when He cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:5). It is axiomatic from this that the Gospel of God will be generally rejected by men. The Lord foresaw that His cross would be the final consummation of God's plan in that He at times almost spoke as if He saw His death as His glorification. Thus He speaks of the cross as a going to the Father (Jn. 16:16,17,28). The description of Him as the snake *lifted up* in the wilderness is in the context of Christ ascending to Heaven (Jn. 3:12-14), as if the lifting up of the snake was a reference to both the crucifixion and ascension of the Lord.

At the point the Lord expired, He laid down His life. So close was the link between Father and Son at this point, so deeply was God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, that John could later comment: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because *He* laid down His life for us: and we ought (in response) to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16). The love of Christ and the cross are paralleled in 2 Cor. 5:14. To behold Christ there at the end, to imagine the sound of those words "It is finished", to begin to sense Christ's spiritual supremacy at that point, should deeply motivate us. Christ loved us with a love which was love "unto *the end*" (Jn. 13:1)- the same word translated "finished" in "It is finished". As Christ said that, His love for us was complete, it was love unto the end, love right up to and beyond the limits of the concept of love. And we are actually asked to imagine that love, the growth of it for us until it was finished, perfected in the laying down of His life- and respond to it.

The Lord thought as much: "I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it (in his forthcoming death, cp. Jn. 12:26): *that* the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn. 17:26). "In this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 Jn. 3:16). Herein was the definition of love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and gave His son for our sins (1 Jn. 4:10). By beholding the finished perfection of the Lord Jesus, the spirit of Christ will dwell in us, and the love of God will be deeply in our hearts. There is almost a mystical power in reflecting upon the example of the Lord Jesus on the cross; somehow by beholding His glory, His matchless display of God's righteousness at the end, we will start to reflect that glory in our very beings. "We all, with open (RV "unveiled") face beholding as in a glass the glory (moral attributes, the peerless character) of the Lord (Jesus), are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit (mind and influence) of the Lord (Jesus)" (2 Cor. 3:18). Time and again is it stressed that the Lord did all this "for us". Jn. 10:14,15 link His knowing of us His sheep, and His giving His life for us. It was because He knew us, our sins, or kind of failures, who we are and who we would be, and fail to be... that He did it. And knowing our brethren, building understanding and relationship with them, is how and why we will be motivated to the same laying down of life for them.

But the work finished by the Lord Jesus was not just the faultless display of God's characteristics. The Son's manifestation of the Father was to the end that we might be saved

(a point fundamental to an appreciation of the Gospel). The work that Christ ended when He cried "It is finished" was the execution of the whole will of God; for the work that He finished was God's will: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of... my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Jn. 4:32,34). The will of God is that we might be sanctified, counted as righteous, and ultimately given salvation (1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 10:10). "I came down from heaven... to do... the will of him that sent me... and this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which *seeth* the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life" (Jn. 6:38-40). God's will is that we should "see", i.e. understand, the righteousness of Christ, and believe that this will be imputed to us, and thereby we can be saved. To have an appreciation of the righteousness of Christ is therefore something absolutely essential for us to develop.

To achieve that fullness of righteousness and salvation for us meant more to the Lord Jesus than physical food; His great physical hunger in John 4 was bypassed by the fact that He was bringing about the salvation of a fallen woman. He had a baptism, i.e. a death and resurrection, to be baptized with, and He was "straitened until it be *accomplished*" (Lk. 12:50), the same word translated "finished" in Jn. 19:30. He agonized throughout His life, looking ahead to that moment of spiritual completion. The more we appreciate this, the more we will be able to enter into His sense of relief: "It is finished / accomplished". And this too should characterize our lives; ever straining ahead to that distant point when at last we will attain that point of spiritual completeness. The incident with the Samaritan woman in John 4 was recognized by Jesus as but a cameo of His whole life; our salvation through His perfect manifestation of the Father was the end in view, it was this which was all consuming for Him. He was not motivated solely by a desire *firstly* for His own salvation, as some of our atonement theologians have wrongly implied. His meat and drink was to do the Father's work and will, which was to save us through imputing Christ's righteousness to us. This is what motivated His obedience, His perfection; it was our salvation which was the last thing in His human consciousness as He cried "*It is finished*". His attitude, both at the start of His ministry and in His approach to His death, was "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God... by the which will we are sanctified (counted righteous) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10).

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" ultimately finished when the Lord cried "It is finished" (Jn. 17:4; 19:30; it alludes to several Old Testament passages. Daniel 9:24 had prophesied that Messiah's sacrifice would "finish transgression... make an end of sins... make reconciliation for iniquity... bring in everlasting righteousness... and to anoint the Most Holy", as if a new sanctuary were being inaugurated. In prospect, the whole concept of sin was destroyed at the point of Christ's death, the devil (sin) was destroyed, the opportunity for us to have the everlasting righteousness of Christ imputed to us was opened up. "It is finished" may well have been uttered with an appreciation of this passage (for surely Dan. 9 was in the mind of our dying Lord). In this case, Christ died with the final triumphant thought that our sinfulness had now been overcome. Surely this should inspire us to a fuller and more confident, joyful faith in this.

Ex. 40:33 describes how Moses "reared up" the tabernacle, representing us (2 Cor. 6:16); "So Moses finished the work" God had given him to do. Dt. 31:24 likewise speaks of Moses finishing the work. The Hebrew for "reared up" is also used in the context of resurrection and glorification / exaltation. As our Lord sensed His final, ultimate achievement of the Father's

glory in His own character, He could look ahead to our resurrection and glorification. He adopted God's timeless perspective, and died with the vision of our certain glorification in the Kingdom. This fits in with the way Psalms 22 and 69 (which evidently portray the thoughts of our dying Lord) conclude with visions of Christ's "seed" being glorified in the Kingdom. There are a number of passages which also speak of the temple (also representative of the ecclesia) being a *work* which was *finished* (e.g. 2 Chron. 5:1). In His moment of agonized triumph as He died, the Lord Jesus saw us as if we were perfect. Surely, surely this should inspire us to have the confidence that this is still how He sees us, both individually and collectively? The mystery of God will ultimately be "finished" in the Kingdom (Rev. 10:7); and yet on the cross Christ could see that effectively "It is finished" at that point, in that the way had now been made absolutely certain. So confident was the Lord in the power of His sacrifice, so great was His sense of purpose and achievement! And nothing has changed with Him until this day.

"It is finished" has some connection with the Lord loving His people "to the very end" (Jn. 13:1- *eis telos*). To the end or completion of what? Surely the Lord held in mind Moses' last speech before he died. Then, "Moses had finished writing all the words of this Law in a book, even to the very end (LXX *eis telos*)" (Dt. 31:24). It was Moses' law which was finished / completed when the Lord finally died. Again we marvel at the Lord's intellectual consciousness even in His death throes. The fact He had completed the Law was upmost in His mind. This alone should underline the importance of never going back to reliance upon that Law, be it in Sabbath keeping or general legalism of attitude.

Putting all this together, we see our Lord realizing that He had achieved the perfect reflection of the Father's glory, His character; He had finished the work the Father had given Him to do. He knew that the perfection of that manifestation which He had achieved would be imputed to us, and therefore He looked forward to us as if we were perfect, He foresaw our salvation, He saw us in the Kingdom. It is quite possible that in some sense the Lord Jesus had a vision of us in the Kingdom. It can be noted that Christ's working of the work of God is associated with His miracles. Each of them was part of the work which the Father had given Him to finish (Jn. 5:36). The Lord's miracles were not motivated by a desire to do solve the need of this present evil world; they were "signs" which spoke of the Father's character; they were a progressive manifestation of the glory of the Father in order to deepen the faith of the disciples (Jn. 2:11). This is why each of them can be seen as deeply parabolic, teaching so much about the character / glory of the Father. Any temporal physical help which they provided was only an incidental by-product.

The progressive nature of the Lord's manifestation of God's glory through the miracles is suggested by Jn. 2:11: "This *beginning* of miracles did Jesus... and manifested forth his glory". Likewise Matthew's Gospel has at least four references to the fact that the Lord "finished" or "ended" revealing God's words (Mt. 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), using the same word as in Jn. 19:30 "It is finished". His words were a manifestation of the Father's glory / character. Thus in Jn. 17 the Lord associates His manifestation of the Father's Name / glory with His (progressive) giving of the Father's words to the disciples. Thus at the very end He must have felt that now He had reached the end of that progressive revelation, now He was manifesting the fullness of God, a God who *is* love- as He hung naked, covered in blood and



spittle, totally misunderstood, deserted by His superficial disciples. At that point He was fully, fully, completely, manifesting the Father.

In His final physical agony, the mind of our Lord was full of thoughts of our salvation. Such was the extent of His devotion to us. It has taken us hundreds of English words to just begin to enter into the intensity of spiritual thinking which was going on in the mind of our Lord. And yet He asks us to share His cross, to run our whole life with endurance even as He endured on the cross (Heb. 12:1,2), to personally enter into His sufferings; to be likewise filled with an overpowering concern for the salvation of others and the reflection of God's character in our own. It seems that Paul was able to enter into the mind of the Lord Jesus in this. "This also we wish, even your perfection" (2 Cor. 13:9), your finishing, your rearing up as a perfect tabernacle; this was Paul's attitude to spiritually weak Corinth. "I have *finished* my course" (2 Tim. 4:7) uses the same word as in Jn. 19:30 ("It is *finished*"). 2 Tim. 4 has a number of other allusions to Christ's final sufferings. As the Lord felt He had finished the work just before He actually had (Jn. 17:4), so did Paul in 2 Tim. 4; He felt He had entered into that sense of finishing which his Lord had on the cross. Our aim is to be perfected, to come to the full knowledge of Christ, "unto a perfect man (a finished man; the same word as in "It is *finished*"), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12,13). As our Lord moved towards that point of ultimate spiritual completeness, so do we too. At last we will attain that perfection, at last we too will know the feeling of "It is finished" - as a result of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

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19:31 *The Jews, because it was the preparation day, and so that the bodies should not remain on the cross upon the Sabbath (for the day of that Sabbath was a high day), asked of Pilate that their legs be broken so that they might be taken away-* Dt. 21:23 forbade bodies of those accursed by God from hanging overnight. Again, we see their masking of their awful consciences by legalistic obedience to God's laws and their own fences around those laws. This is what legalism is- a mask for a bad conscience over more fundamental failures. When hard line legalists are exposed as caught up in major sin, we should not be surprised. It is in fact to be expected that their legalism is but a cover for a guilty conscience in other areas.

John is at pains to point out that the Passover was coming on, as if he wishes us to be aware that the last supper was not the Passover, and the breaking of bread service was not the same as the Passover, but based upon it. He is ever seeking to show his Jewish readers that a new Israel, with new symbolisms and meanings, has been created. That Sabbath is here called "a high day", literally, 'the day of that Sabbath was great' (as in 7:37). Perhaps here John is implying that the Lord's death made this the greatest Sabbath; and thereby removed the need for literal observance of it.

19:32- see on :18.

*Therefore the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other that was crucified with him-* The legs were broken so that the victim could no longer rest their weight on the *sedile*, the piece of wood protruding from the cross on which they could rest their weight in

order to get temporary relief and yet prolong their sufferings. The strange reference to "the first and... the other" may invite us to consider that "the first" was the repentant thief.

19:33 *But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they did not break his legs-* He was so evidently dead; it was absolutely plain to the world that the Lord had died. Any ideas of a swoon theory are stopped dead in their tracks by this. He was not even worth a hammer blow to the legs, because He was so evidently dead.

19:34 *However one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out of his side-* The great theme of John has been that the Lord died in order to give us His life, His Spirit. That life, that spirit, has been likened to water in the account of the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4, and also in 7:38,39, where we learn that the Spirit was to be given at the Lord's glorification. His death was central to that, indeed His lifting up on the cross could be read as a lifting up in glory from God's perspective. The life blood and water which flowed out from Him, having breathed His breath / spirit outward towards His misunderstanding and unspiritual disciples, all speaks of the gift of His life and spirit toward us. The gift of His life to us means that it lives within us, which is what is achieved by the gift of the Spirit to each believer. The connection is being made with the smitten rock out of which there flowed spring water for God's people (Ex. 17:6). The water in John chapters 4 and 7 represents the gift of the Spirit made possible by the Lord's death. His Spirit was Him; the Comforter passages have explained that the coming of the Spirit was effectively His coming to His people. This is why 1 Jn. 5:6 explains that the Lord Jesus personally came to the believers through the water and the blood. The fountain of water and blood, representing His Spirit and His life, represented Him personally coming to His people.

A connection of thought arises from the word "pierced". Simeon had prophesied that a sword would pierce Mary's heart as it also pierced that of Christ her son (Lk. 2:35). This is one reason for thinking that Mary may still have been at the cross when the Lord died. It could be that John took her to his home, arm round her shoulders as she wrestled with the desire to take one last motherly look back, and then returned himself to the cross; and then Mary crept back, almost hot on his heels, or perhaps choosing another route, and hiding somewhere in the crowd where neither her son nor John, her new son, would see her. To me, this has the ring of truth about it. Simeon's prophecy, as that sweet baby in cheap cloths lay cradled in his arms, seems to imply that *as* the Lord's heart was pierced, so would his mother's be. Are we to conclude from this that there was a heart-piercing groan within her, as she saw the spear head enter and the blood flow out? Each time they called out 'Come down from the cross!', her heart must have been in her mouth. Would He? She had learnt the lesson of Cana, not to pressurize Him for convenient miracles; not to catch His eye as if to say 'Go on, do it, for my sake'. But nonetheless, because she was only human, she would have hoped against hope. But now, the finality of death forced itself upon her. And her heart was pierced in that moment. Yet Yahweh Himself had prophesied, years before: "They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*... and shall be in bitterness for *him*" (Zech. 12:10). The use of pronouns here seems to mean that God was in Christ on the cross, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor. 5:19). When the Son was pierced, so was the Father. And so at the moment of that sword-thrust, we see the connection of both parents with their suffering Son. As He was pierced, so were the Father and mother. Here we see the wonder and yet the tragedy of the Divine family. We have a very rare insight into the relationship between the Father and Mary. The notion of personal pre-existence and total Deity of Christ destroys this beauty and mystery. Indeed, the whole relationship between the

Lord and His mother and Father is surpassingly beautiful, once His nature is correctly understood. There is so much one could speculate and yet dares not hardly think or say (e.g. whether the Lord appeared to His mother after the resurrection; what their relationship will be in the Kingdom).

The description of blood and water flowing has raised the question as to whether the Lord had been fasting, or had emptied His bowels in Gethsemane, before the crucifixion. It has been suggested that for this to have happened the Lord would have been pierced from the right hand side above the fifth rib, piercing the right auricle of the heart (from which the blood came) and also the pericardium, from where the serum came which appeared like water. However there are critics of these suggestions, which leaves the possibility that the flow of blood and water was in fact a miracle- hence John's insistence that yes, he actually saw this happen. And he says that he records it so that we might believe. The implication is that meditation upon the cross is what inspires faith, as well as conviction of sin and repentance. The way the Lord's blood flowed out from His heart is highly evocative of powerful lessons. He gave out from the very core and foundation of His being. We may serve God in good deeds, in writing books, in labouring for Him, without any real demand being made on our innermost self. The challenge of the cross is to give from the very centre and fountain of our life, our very selves, our person, our most vital soul.

*19:35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe-* It is difficult to tell if a body is dead or not. But there was something about the Lord's corpse which somehow shone forth the message that He had given up His life. Do we not get the sense here of a man, even under inspiration, grasping for adequate words and finding there are none? This is an experience beyond the paradigm of verbal description. There are links between the concept of 'truth' and the cross. In Ps. 60:4 God's Truth is displayed on the banner (s.w. "pole", on which the snake was lifted up). John struggled with words, even under inspiration, to get over to us the tremendous truth and reality of what he witnessed at the cross. God is the ultimate Truth, and the cross was the ultimate declaration of His Truth. John's speaking and writing up of his Gospel was his testimony; and the Comforter passages have stressed that the Spirit bears witness through our witness. In the account of the Lord's death, the Spirit is appealing to all who hear of it.

"That you may believe" predicates faith upon acceptance of the fact the Lord really died. It is by Him there that we believe in God (1 Pet. 1:21). Apologetics do not give faith, and in that sense they are largely a waste of time, and at best a poor crutch for faith. We are invited to look at the death of the Lord on the cross- and believe, believe all that is implied in it. This may be scoffed at as intellectually weak, what is called 'fideism'. But it is what the Bible teaches and it is simply true to observed experience. We either believe He died as He did, with all the Biblically recorded claims about the significance of that death- or we do not. If we do believe, and those who do not believe in it are struggling against their consciences, then all falls into place; we come to Biblical "faith".

*19:36 For these things happened so that the scripture might be fulfilled: A bone of him shall not be broken-* The prophecy of Ps. 34:20 about not a bone of the Lord being broken is here clearly applied to Him. But the context is clearly about all of us- any righteous man. The preceding verse speaks of how the Lord delivers the righteous man out of all his tribulations- and this verse is applied to other believers apart from the Lord Jesus in Acts 12:11 and 2 Tim.

3:11,12. The chilling fact is that we who are in the body of the Lord are indeed co-crucified with Him.

We are the Lord's body, of His flesh and bones (Eph. 5:30). Crucifixion was designed to torture the bones; and yet none was broken. We suffer in Him, but shall not be finally broken. As the Passover lambs were being killed, the Lord died; and it was critical that not a bone of the Passover lambs be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12). John seems so keen to point out that the Lord died as the Passover lamb, and Paul perceives this when stating that He is "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). For no bone of the Lord to be broken, the nails driven through His hands [the Greek can refer to the arms or wrists too] would not have been large, and would probably have been driven through the 'Destot gap', the set of nerves in between the large wrist bones. The pain would have been intense at that point. The rough hammering of the nails through that point would have paid no attention to detail; but those hammer blows were Divinely guided so that no bone broke. And this would have been even more amazingly guided for the nails driven through the feet not to break a bone. It was only by the Lord refusing to relieve the pain by pushing down on the *sedile* that He avoided breaking any bones.

19:37- see on Jn. 1:14.

*And again another scripture says: They shall look on him whom they pierced-* The Lord's death was effectively Israel's judgment. The Jewish world was judged then by Him. There, in that naked, abused body and infinitely tormented yet righteous mind, there was displayed the judgments, the character, the very essence of God; and the utter condemnation of the flesh, the devil, the prince of this world. Those judgments were displayed in front of a world which stood before it self-condemned. The prophecy of Zech. 12:10 concerning looking on the pierced Messiah is quoted in Rev. 1:7 concerning the judgment seat; and yet in Jn. 19:37 concerning the cross. See on Jn. 12:42. Looking on Him there is what they shall do in the condemnation of the last day. And standing before Him there, beholding Him, we know our judgment too; for He died for us who believe in Him, that whoever looks toward Him in faith shall be saved. It is as simple as that.

The death of the High Priest was paralleled with a man standing before the judgment for his crime in Josh. 20:6 RV. This surely prefigured how the Lord's death was and is effectively our judgment. Further connection between the cross and the judgment is found in considering Zech. 12:10, which states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. And so it has been observed that the cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn't obey His word, and those whose weeping isn't recorded, but who stood and watched and thought; the people who beat their breasts in repentance, and those who mocked as to whether Elijah would come to save the Lord.

19:38 *And after these things Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus (but secretly for fear of the Jews), asked of Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. Therefore he came and took his body away-* John's Gospel emphasizes how

secret believers either turned back to the surrounding world, or were provoked by the cross to 'come out' in full faith. It is twice stressed that Joseph was on the Sanhedrin council. So was Nicodemus (Jn. 3:2). Yet the whole council unanimously voted for the crucifixion (Mk. 14:64). "The whole Sanhedrin" (Mk. 15:1 NIV) agreed the High Priests' plan of action. They *all* interrogated Him and "the whole multitude of them" led Jesus to Pilate (Lk. 22:66,70; 23:1). This is some emphasis. Joseph "was not in agreement" with them, we are told, but it seems this was a position held within his own conscience. It was only the actual cross which brought faith into the open. "You shall not be in agreement with the wicked as an unjust witness" (Ex. 23:1) probably tore out his heart. It may be that these men weren't present and that the Jews broke their own law, that the death sentence must be unanimously agreed. However, I have an intuitive sense (and nothing more) that these men voted for the Lord's death; and that they went along with the discussion in which "all" the council were involved, as to which incidents in His life they could remember for which they could condemn Him (Mk. 14:55). They may not have consented to what was done in their hearts, but they still went along with it all on the surface. Acts 13:28,29 is at pains, almost, to associate Joseph, Nicodemus and the rest of the Sanhedrin: "*They* have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though *they* found no cause of death in him, yet desired *they* Pilate that He should be slain... *they* took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre". The text records that they desired Pilate for the death of Jesus; but the very same Greek words are used to describe how Joseph desired Pilate to let him have the body of Jesus (Mt. 27:58)- as if to show how Joseph openly undid his request for the crucifixion, by requesting the body. They were secret disciples, fearing the loss of standing among the Jews. It was only after the Lord's death that they came out in the open. It seems to me that they voted for the Son of God to die. But in His grace, the Father emphasizes in the record that Joseph was a good man, and a just; a disciple, although secretly. The grace of God shines through the whole record. Thus only Matthew speaks about the suicide of Judas; the other three records are silent. A human god would inevitably have stressed that the betrayer of His Son went out in shame and took his own life. But the God of all grace is higher than reflecting vindictiveness in His word.

If the Lord died at 3p.m. and sunset was at 6p.m., there were only three hours for Joseph to find Pilate, gain a hearing, make his request, for Pilate to verify that the body was dead, and then for Nicodemus to buy the spices and for the burial to be done. Joseph and Nicodemus must have decided almost immediately what they were going to do. And the lesson for us: Beholding the cross makes us see what we ought to do, it becomes urgently apparent, and then we give our all, with the spirit of 'nothing else matters', to achieve it as far as we can. But we can enter into their thoughts: I wish I'd done more for Him while He was alive, and now, even now, because of the pressure of time, I just can't bury and honour this body as I'd like to. All these things are against me. The self-hate and loathing and regret would have arisen within them, mixed with that love and devotion to the Lord of all grace. And there would have been an earnest desire for God to accept what little they could do, with time, the surrounding world, the Jewish culture, the unchangeable past, and their own present natures, all militating against the height of devotion they fain would show.

The body was sometimes granted to very close relatives. Joseph is now showing his open affinity with this crucified man. At that time, he didn't firmly believe in the resurrection. For sheer *love* of this crucified man, he was willing to sacrifice his standing in society, his economic position, risk his life, grovel before the hated Pilate to beg (Lk.), crave (Mk.) the body. This was something which only the close relatives of the crucified could presume to

do. But he felt already that new relationship to the Lord, and whether or not He would ever be raised he wanted to show openly to the world his connection with Him, come what may. This was the effect of the Lord's death upon him.

19:39 *And there came also Nicodemus, he who came to him at the first by night; but now he brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds 45kg weight-* Nicodemus and Joseph not only did something which placed them outside the religious and social elite of Israel. They humbled themselves in front of that cross. Joseph grovelled before Pilate for the body, he walked out into that no man's land between the crowd and the cross. Nicodemus bought 300 pounds of spices, far greater than the amount used at the most lavish royal burials of the time. The cost of this would have been colossal; equivalent to tens of thousands of dollars. And he did this on the spur of the moment; he bought it in the three hours between the Lord's death (3p.m.) and sunset (6p.m.). He didn't count the cost, thinking that OK, he'd given up his place in the society and economy, and would now have to live frugally on what he had for the rest of his days. No. Like the widow, he gave what he had, his capital, which many would have more 'prudently' kept for the rainy days ahead. To realize such a huge sum he must have run around in those hours, selling all he had for ridiculous prices (something similar to scenes in *Schindler's List*). The holiday was coming on, and nobody was really in the mood for business. His wife, family, friends, colleagues... would have considered crazy, But all the time, beating in his brain, would have been the sense: 'Now, nothing, *nothing else* really matters at all'. It's been observed: "If the aloe and myrrh were in dried or powdered form, a whole row of sacks would be necessary to carry this weight, and Nicodemus must have had assistance to be able to transport the load. The transport would have been even more difficult if the substance was dissolved in wine, vinegar or oil". Remember the Feast was coming on. To marshal such labour would have been so difficult and attracted so much attention and consternation. The Roman *litra* or pound was about 12 ounces, so 100 pounds (Jn. 19:39) would have been about 75 imperial pounds. Such a weight would fill a considerable space in the tomb, forming a mound which would smother the corpse. Such was their love. It was common for kings to have such large amounts of spices (e.g. Jer. 34:5). Those men were showing their belief that Jesus truly was Lord and King for them. To believe Jesus is Lord and King is not something which we can painlessly or cheaply believe. It demands our all. And there is no reason to think that Joseph 'got away with it'. The *Acts of Pilate* 12 reports that the Jews became so hostile when they heard that Joseph had asked for Jesus' body that they imprisoned him. It should be noted that Joseph didn't do what he did for hope of a future reward. The cross itself was enough to motivate him to give all purely for love of the Lord Jesus; not for any future hope. It could be that the reference to how he "waited for the Kingdom of God" when he begged for the body (Mk. 15:43) suggests that he had lost hope for the future Kingdom at that time, he had earlier waited for it, but now he simply lived life for love of Jesus. And this should be our attitude if we are for some reason denied the Kingdom ahead; that, simply, we love Jesus, and would give our lives for Him all the same, Kingdom or no Kingdom. We who are baptized into both the death *and burial* of the Lord have a like senseless grace and love lavished upon us too (Rom. 6:3,4; Col. 2:10-12). In passing, the question arises as to *why* Nicodemus bought such a huge amount of spices. Perhaps it is the nature of true devotion to behave in a humanly senseless way. Alternatively, the use of spices was to keep the body from decaying. It could be that he vaguely understood the promise of Ps. 16:10, that the Lord's body would not see corruption (cp. Jn. 11:39), and thought that by his own extreme efforts he could bring this about. Despite his misunderstanding of that passage, his lack of faith and comprehension of the resurrection, all the same his devotion was accepted. There is significant extra-Biblical information about

Nicodemus. Josephus mentions him as a distinguished man in *Wars of the Jews* II, 20 and IV, 3,9. He is mentioned in the Talmud [*Gittin* 56a] as Nakdimon ben Gurion, one of the three richest nobles in Jerusalem. The Talmud also mentions a story about his daughter [*Ketuboth* 66a]. It relates that one day when Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai was riding out of Jerusalem, he spoke to a poor young beggar woman, and discovered that she was Nicodemus' daughter. He recalled that her father had lost his fortune, and had not practiced deeds of charity. This rather confirms our picture of Nicodemus. He did indeed lose his fortune, and his previous mean spiritedness was radically transformed by his experience of the outgiven life and love of Jesus. In the light of that, he gave away all. And the powerful impact of the cross of Christ can likewise banish all carefully calculated meanness from our hearts too, and concretely result in real generosity.

The life of radical grace is infectious. Mary's lavish anointing of the Lord may well have been what inspired Nicodemus to so lavishly prepare the Lord's body for burial. The vast quantities of spices he used was more than that used in the burials of some of the Caesars. He too must have bankrupted himself to anoint the Lord's body. That two people did this within a week of each other is too close a similarity to be co-incidental. Surely the nature of Mary's giving inspired that of Nicodemus. Paul likewise writes of how the generous commitments of the Corinthian ecclesias had "inspired very many" to generosity (2 Cor. 9:2). And we too, in our abundant responses to God's super-abundant grace, will inspire each other likewise.

19:40 *So they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as it is the custom of the Jews to bury-* As we will note in chapter 20, the way the linen cloths and napkin were found still wrapped neatly is significant. For the myrrh would have made the linen stick to the Lord's body like glue. He did not have to fight His way out of them, nor was He somehow extricated from them by sympathizers and the corpse removed. Rather His very emergence from those cloths was itself part of the miracle of resurrection. The surrounding customs involved removing body parts; and the Romans burnt their dead. Only the Jews buried the entire body.

19:41 *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb wherein no one had lain-* Twice it is stressed that the tomb was near to where the Lord died (:42). Perhaps the Lord would have known that He would be buried there, and would have perhaps viewed the tomb from His elevated position on the cross. The Father provided encouragement to the Lord throughout His traumas, as He does to us in ours in ways great and small. The tomb had had no previous contact with a dead body, and so was ritually clean. This may be of no final consequence, because the Lord had been ritually defiled in about every way possible, but John maybe mentions this to try to make his Jewish audience as comfortable as possible. We too are to state truth as it is, but also be all things to all our hearers, as Paul was.

19:42 *There, because of the Jews' preparation day, they laid Jesus (for the tomb was nearby)-* See on :41. Again John emphasizes that the Passover was coming on and therefore the last supper had not been a Passover meal. He is writing to and for Jews who were ever tempted to remain or return to Judaism. His point is that feasts like Passover had had their total fulfilment in the Lord's death. The way John, as a Jew writing to and for Jews, speaks of "the Jews' preparation day", along with other references to "the Jews", shows the chasmic gulf which he felt there to be between Christianity and Judaism.





## CHAPTER 20

20:1 *Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb-* Mary came seeking the Lord early in the morning... and this inevitably takes our minds to some OT passages which speak of doing just this:

- “O God, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory” (Ps. 63:1,2). The resurrection of Jesus showed clearly both the power (2 Cor. 13:4) and glory (Rom. 6:4) of the Father. For Mary, life without her Lord was a dry and thirsty land. This was why she went to the grave early that morning. She was simply aching for Him. And she had well learnt the Lord’s teaching, that her brother’s resurrection had been associated with the glory of the Father (Jn. 11:40). She went early to the tomb to seek the Father’s glory- so the allusion to Ps. 63 implies. She was the one person who had actually believed in advance the Lord’s teaching about resurrection. And yet even she was confused- half her brain perceived it all and believed it, and was rewarded by being the first to see the risen Lord; and yet another part of her brain was simply overcome with grief, believing that the gardener had somehow removed the body some place else. And our own highest heights of spiritual perception are likewise shrouded by such humanity too.

- “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17) is written in the first instance of wisdom. And yet the Lord Jesus has “wisdom” as one of His titles (Mt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 1:24,30). Mary sat at the Lord’s feet to hear His wisdom; to her, she showed in practice what it means to comprehend Jesus as “the wisdom of God”. She anxiously heard His words. And thus she sought Him early... because she so wanted to hear His wisdom again. Of course, she loved Him. But that love was rooted in respect and almost an addiction to His wisdom. It was this that she loved about Him, and it was this which led her to the grave early. And it was this which led her to the honour of being the first to see the risen Jesus.

- “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of *our* soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early” (Is. 26:8,9) makes the same connection between seeking the Lord early, and loving His words.

John’s record seems to reflect how he saw parallels between himself and Mary in their witness to the resurrection. They both “came to the tomb” (Jn. 20:1,4), stood outside, “stooped” and looked into the tomb (Jn. 20:5,11), “beheld... saw” (Jn. 20:5,12). Yet Mary was the first to see the risen Lord. The testimony of a woman didn’t count in the 1st century world, and yet God chose her to be the first witness. In doing so, He was teaching that the work of witness and the sheer power of what we are witnesses to can transform the most hesitant and inappropriate person into a preacher of the irrepressible good news, even with the whole world against them. It’s as if John is saying in his account of the Gospel that Mary was in some ways his pattern; he and her were to be connected. He wasn’t ashamed to thus identify himself with the witness of a woman. Ps. 68 is prophetic of the Lord’s death and resurrection. Verse 18 is specifically quoted in the New Testament about His ascension. Verse 11 predicts that: “The Lord gave the word: the women that publish the tidings are a great host”. This primarily concerns the publishing of the Lord’s resurrection, although the imagery is based upon the singing of Miriam and the women of Israel after the Red Sea deliverance. Clearly enough, women were to play a major part in the witness to the Lord’s resurrection. This was shown by the women being commanded to go tell their brethren that

the Lord had risen indeed. And yet there is ample evidence that it was women who in practice were the more compelling preachers of the Gospel in the first century ecclesia. The simple fact is that God delegated to women the duty of witnessing to what was for Him the most momentous and meaningful act in all His creation- the raising of His Son from the dead. He was clearly making a point- that those whose witness this world may despise, are those He uses. And in this we can take endless personal encouragement, beset as we are by our own sense of inadequacy as preachers.

John's record presents the resurrection through the eyes of Mary Magdalene. She went alone to the tomb while it was yet dark. This doesn't contradict the other accounts, which pick up the story at sunrise, when all the women were together there.

20:2 *She ran to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him!*- Mary Magdalene was the first believer to call Jesus "the Lord"- despite His repeated teaching that this was His true position. They had called Him "Lord and Master" but not *the* Lord. Her example soon spread to her less perceptive brethren- for they likewise soon were speaking of Him as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:25; 21:7). Although the resurrection made Him Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), yet to her, it was as if He was risen and glorified already. This is an indication to me that she did really believe He would rise, but her humanity, her grief, the intensity of the moment, led her to act and speak as if this wasn't the case. Consider all the descriptions of Jesus as "the Lord" even during His ministry; so certain was He that He would indeed be made Lord and Christ- and realize, how the fact Mary Magdalene too called Him "Lord" before seeing the proof of His resurrection indicates that she shared this perception.

20:3 *Peter with the other disciple therefore went out and went to the tomb-* Given the disrespect of women as witnesses, we see a humility here in them not only taking her seriously, but running in response to her word (:4). They set an example for all church leaders, one which was all the more radical in their age.

20:4 *They ran there together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came first to the tomb-* Here we have another of the unusual usage of tenses which is characteristic of the Gospels. The imperfect here should be translated "they were running", inviting us to play Bible television with the narrative, seeing it unfolding before our eyes, seeing them running. John is displaying humility in recording that he outran Peter, running faster because he was perhaps younger or fitter; and yet going straight on to say that although he may have been faster in human terms, he was far slower than Peter in spiritual terms, for Peter was the first to enter the tomb and see the evidence for the Lord's resurrection (:5,6).

20:5 *Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, but he did not enter-* Each of the Gospel writers reveals a sense of inadequacy about themselves or the disciples, this self-criticism, in different ways. The preaching of the twelve disciples is really an admission of their own weaknesses. For example, John mentions that when he and Peter arrived at the tomb, he [John] "did not go in", but Peter did, and therefore believed before he did. We see here John's gentle humility, and reflection in his own preaching of how he esteemed others better than himself, and of stronger faith. John says that "he saw and believed", but goes straight on to say that he at that time did not understand that Jesus must rise from the dead (:8,9). He surely means that he *later* believed, but not right then.

20:6 *Simon Peter arrived behind him and entered into the tomb, and he saw the linen cloths lying there-* Peter and John went to the tomb after having first of all disbelieved Mary

Magdalene (Lk. 24:11). The state of the linen cloths was what provoked John's faith (:8); for it is John who notes the huge quantity of myrrh used to embalm the Lord's body, and "myrrh... glues linen to the body not less firmly than lead" (Leon Morris, *John* p. 736). The fact the cloths were neatly placed as they were was therefore a powerful evidence that the Lord had risen, and not been extricated from the cloths by any human effort.

*20:7 And the napkin that had been upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself-* As noted on :6, for napkin to be rolled up meant the body had miraculously come out of them; for the myrrh would have glued them to the body in such a way that a person reviving and fighting their way out of the wrappings would have torn them; and they were neatly rolled up, not torn.

It does us good to reflect soberly and deeply upon the events of the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. To reconstruct in our own minds what really happened, that we might know Him the better. That on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, 1970 years ago...there really was a man lead out to crucifixion. And that three days later, in a dark tomb, a tightly wrapped body came to life, and in a microsecond was standing outside his burial garments. The only sound would have been of the graveclothes collapsing or subsiding as the support of the body inside them was removed. The napkin wrapped around His head (cp. Jn. 11:44) would suddenly have become a crumpled turban. The clothes would have been like a discarded chrysalis from which the butterfly has emerged. John saw the linen clothes "lying", but according to one authority the Greek word can apparently stand the translation "collapsed". That John saw the clothes "lying" is repeated twice, and the first time it is placed in an emphatic position in the Greek sentence- 'He saw, as they were lying [or 'collapsed'], the linen clothes'. John also records his deep impression that the head napkin was not with the other clothes, but by itself. Apparently it was normal practice to bind the body and the head in graveclothes, but not the neck. It could be that John is saying that he was most struck by the way there was a slight gap between the collapsed body bindings and the head napkin- the gap where the neck of Jesus had been. This head napkin was "wrapped together", but here we can with fair confidence say that the Greek word means more 'twirled'. The word aptly describes the rounded shape which the empty napkin still preserved. And so John saw the stone slab, the collapsed graveclothes, and the shell of the head cloth, with a gap between the two where the Lord's neck had been. And John "saw [this] and believed". Now of course it is possible to reconstruct the whole scene otherwise. What I am saying is that in our personal following of the Lord we love, we each need to try to reconstruct for ourselves how it would have been. The artless style of the inspired records encourage us in this- one only has to compare them against the fantastic Apocryphal Gospels, with their descriptions of Jesus bursting from the tomb in power and glory, to see in the most obvious terms what is inspired and what isn't.

*20:8 Then the other disciple also entered, he who had arrived first to the tomb; and he saw and believed-* To see and believe is another challenge which comes out of the text to readers and hearers, to do just the same. To see with the eyes of faith, and believe. But John is credited with believing, when he did not yet understand the Biblical basis for the Lord's resurrection (:9), and his immediate return to his own home (:10) is presented as an action of unbelief when we compare this with 16:31,32, remembering that John rarely repeats phrases in his record unless he intends us to connect them: "Jesus answered them: Do you now believe? Behold, the hour comes, yes, has come, when you shall be scattered, every man to his own home". So John may be saying that his faith was weak, it was momentary. And that would explain the odd phrase used in the Greek; for "believed" has no object as Greek

grammar would require. It is not implied *what* he believed in; although that nuance cannot really come through in English translation.

20:9 *For as yet they did not understand the scripture that he must rise from the dead-* As noted on :8 and :9, this confirms the impression that John's 'belief' was momentary. However, a more generous interpretation is possible. It could be that John means to demonstrate here that faith in the risen Lord does not necessarily depend upon knowing or understanding the Old Testament texts which require Messiah's resurrection. For that requirement and implication is indeed there, but is hardly apparent to a casual reader or hearer; bearing in mind that most were illiterate and had no easy access to the scrolls. In this case, John would be appealing to Gentiles and illiterate Jews, the mass of first century society- and encouraging them that faith in the risen Christ is possible without any background of Old Testament theology and familiarity.

20:10 *So the disciples went away again to their own home-* As noted on :8, this is an allusion to 16:31,32, which says the disciples would do this because they did not really believe. John is appealing for faith in the empty tomb but explaining how his initial faith was momentary, and not based upon a Biblical understanding of the necessity of the Lord's resurrection. By implication he is appealing to his audience to have a faith stronger than his had initially been; and this is a very powerful way to appeal for faith from an audience.

20:11 *But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping. So, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb-* Mary "stood without", and yet the same word is used in a rather negative context elsewhere in the Gospels: Lk. 8:20 Mary and His brethren standing without; Lk. 13:25 the rejected "stand without" with the door closed, seeking for their Lord; Jn. 18:16 Peter stood at the door without. It's as if she was in the shoes of the rejected. And yet she is graciously accepted in a wonderful way by the risen Lord. And she is our representative. Her weeping likewise could be read negatively; for she ought to have gone to the tomb after three days with full faith and joy in expectation that the Lord had risen as He promised. Hence His question to her as to why she is weeping (:13,15). As noted earlier in this chapter, the Gospels are full of self-criticism of themselves as writers and their fellow disciples, stressing their weakness, and slow struggle towards the faith they now urged men and women to accept.

20:12 *And she saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain-* The scene is described in terms which recall the cherubim on either end of the "mercy seat", the blood stained cover of the ark of the covenant which Hebrews sees as so strongly representative of the Lord Jesus. As those cherubim were, it is emphasized, of the same material as the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18,19), so the now invisible Lord was of their nature; hence His association with them as noted on :13.

20:13 *And they said to her: Woman, why do you weep? She said to them: Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him-* This comment on her weeping could be taken as a rebuke; see on :11. The Lord will soon repeat verbatim these Angelic words to Mary: "Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn. 20:13,15). Likewise, when He appears to the women in Mt. 28:9,10, He repeats the Angel's words of Mt. 28:5,7. This indicates the unity which He felt with the Angels especially after His resurrection; see on :12.

20:14 *When she had said this, she turned herself around and saw Jesus standing there; but did not know that it was Jesus-* She apparently perceived they were Angels (:12); but her focus on the Lord was so great that she was not impressed with that. All she wanted was Him. The later New Testament frequently tackles the Jewish obsession with Angels, to the point that the Christian Jews were losing their focus upon the Lord Jesus. And here in visual terms John addresses that issue, by presenting Mary as so focused upon the Lord that even meeting two white Angels was of no interest to her compared to her focus upon Him.

Jewish women were not supposed to talk to men in public. The fact that Mary addresses the man whom she thinks of as “the gardener” shows how her love for Jesus, her search for Him, led her to break out of gender roles. She perceived that through His death, there was now neither male nor female, but a new kind of family (Jn. 20:14,15).

It is emphasized that Mary Magdalene beheld the cross of Jesus (Mk. 15:40)- the same word is used about how she came *to see* the sepulchre (Mt. 28:1); and now she *saw* Jesus standing (Jn. 20:14). People beheld the spectacle of the crucifixion (Lk. 23:48) and repented, smiting their breasts in recognition of their sinfulness. She was representative of us all. John’s Gospel is full of references to the crucifixion, and especially the idea of ‘seeing’ / perceiving its’ real meaning. The prologue invites us too to be amongst those who “beheld his glory”. “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (Jn. 6:40) connects with the idea of looking unto the bronze snake (which represented Christ on the cross) and receiving life. “And he that seeth [on the cross] seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (Jn. 12:45,46). Note again the linkage between seeing and believing; which Jn. 3 applies to belief in the crucified Jesus, as Israel had to believe in the bronze snake on the pole. The light of the world was defined in Jn. 3 as the light of the cross. In seeing / perceiving Christ on the cross, we perceive the essence of God- for the Father was so intensely manifested in the Son. There, God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. The emphasis on Mary Magdalene being the one who beheld the cross, the one who perceived the things of the Lord’s death and resurrection, is surely to set her up as our example. For we can look at the cross without perceiving the glory and wonder it all, neither perceiving the urgency of the imperative in the things which were so uniquely crystallized there. She, the one with former 'demons' and a sinful past, and a mere woman, in the eyes of her world, is set up as a pattern for all who shall see the Son in faith.

20:15 *Jesus said to her: Woman, why do you weep?-* This could be understood as a rebuke, seeing she ought to have known that after three days the Lord would rise again. See on :11. Note too that the Lord repeats the Angelic words to her, showing His connection with them now by nature; see on :12,13.

*Whom do you seek?-* This is another of those questions which fly out of the page to challenge every reader or hearer; whom do *we* seek? He was still the same Jesus. The Lord was recognized by the Emmaus disciples in the way that He broke the bread. How He broke a loaf of bread open with His hands *after* His resurrection reflected the same basic style and mannerism which He had employed *before* His death. Not only the body language but the Lord's choice of words and expressions was similar both before and after His passion. He uses the question "Who are you looking for?" at the beginning of His ministry (Jn. 1:38), just before His death (Jn. 18:4) and also now after His resurrection. And the words of the risen Lord as recorded in Revelation are shot through with allusion to the words He used in His

mortal life, as also recorded by John. See on Jn. 21:5,20. "Whom do you seek?" are words He had used three times in His ministry (Jn. 1:38; 18:4,7). He used words which she ought to have recognized as a catch phrase of the Lord, and thereby have realized that it was the Lord speaking to her. She did, eventually, make the connection; she lived up to the spiritual potential which the Lord realized in her. She replies by exclaiming: Rabboni! When three years earlier the Lord had "*turned* [as He did again to Mary]... and saith... What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi...' (Jn. 1:38). And now Mary sees the similarity which the Lord has set up, and joyfully realizes the reality of His resurrection through it.

*She, supposing him to be the gardener-* That God's Son could be a normal working class person actually says a lot about the humility of God Himself. Jn. 5:17 has been translated: "My Father is a working man to this day, and I am a working man myself". No less an authority than C.H. Dodd commented: "That the Greek words could bear that meaning is undeniable". I find especially awesome the way Mary mistakes the risen Lord for a lowly gardener- He evidently dressed Himself in the clothes of a working man straight after His resurrection, a far cry from the haloed Christ of high church art.

*Said to him: Sir, if you have taken him from here, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away-* Mary addresses the gardener as "sir", but this is the same Geek word [*kurios*] as is translated "Lord" a few verses earlier, when she describes Jesus as "the Lord" (Jn. 20:2,15). It seems to me that she half knew that this person standing there was Jesus. She was half expecting it. "They have taken away the Lord" (:2) almost sounds as if she felt Him to be alive and already made Lord and Christ. But the sheer grief of the situation distracted her from seeing that it was really Him. In this kind of thing there is, to me at least, the greatest proof of inspiration. It is all so real and therefore credible. She couldn't dare believe that her wildest hope of every grieving person was actually coming true. And in this we surely see some echoes of the slowness to believe that we have actually made it which it seems there will be after the judgment seat experience.

Her desire to remove the Lord's body may appear strange, seeing He had been buried in an expensive new tomb. She was surely not thinking straight anyway, for it would have been hard for a woman to carry the heavily embalmed corpse of a man on her own. Where did she intend taking it? I suggest she had no concrete idea. She wanted *Him* for herself; the point of the record is that her focus was so completely upon Him. And in that she is our example, and her disorientation and impractical ideas are exactly what we would expect of someone in that mental situation. The verisimilitude of the narrative comes over so strongly.

20:16 *Jesus said to her: Mary-* The Lord's intonation and voice was just the same before and after His resurrection and change of nature. This is a profound reflection of how He is the same today as yesterday and forever.

*She turned-* She had turned away from the Angels and had looked toward the Lord, but assuming Him to be a gardener, she has turned away again, and is speaking without looking at the one she is addressing. This again presents a realistic picture both of her disorientation, and also of her desire to focus on nothing and nobody apart from her Lord. In this she is set up as our example.

*And said to him: Rabboni! Which is to say, teacher-* This was her instant response; and so we can assume she uses the title for the Lord which she usually used, and which reflects how she related to Him. He had been for her above all her Rabbi, her teacher. And the Jews

considered it wrong for a woman to be taught the Law; yet the Lord was for her above all her teacher. This strong perception of Him as teacher explains their terrible concern that He was leaving them, and they would be without a teacher; hence the comfort that the Holy Spirit would empower them not only with a sense of His personal presence, but also would teach them as He had done personally. See on 14:18.

20:17 *Jesus said to her: Don't keep touching me; for I am not right now going to ascend to the Father-* She thought that the Lord was about to ascend to the Father, understanding His previous references to 'going to the Father' as referring to an ascension through the sky to Heaven. But the Lord comforts her that she doesn't need to keep grabbing hold of Him to stop that ascension, for He was not planning on doing so immediately at that moment. This intense dislike of the idea of His ascension and desperate desire for His physical presence reflects how she totally hadn't understood His entire teaching about the Comforter in chapters 14-16. It was expedient for them that He went away to the Father, because then they would receive the gift of the Spirit, His abiding presence in their hearts which would be as if He were physically present with them, and even more profound. But the Lord is gentle, and doesn't apparently make that obvious point to her. Despite her serious inattention to His words and inadequacy of understanding on that point, He urges her to go and tell the simple good news of His resurrection to others. This is the essence of the good news, and a person can believe and preach it regardless of whether they correctly understand everything else in the Lord's teaching. Mary is the parade example of encouragement in this.

*But go to my brothers and say to them: I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God-* And she obeyed: she "went and announced..." (:18). This is the first time the Lord refers to the believers as His "brothers". He wishes to emphasize His connection with us despite the experience of resurrection and immortalization; and perhaps He felt that a new family relationship had now been forged through the gift of the Spirit working in their hearts, "the spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), now enabled by His death.

Putting this alongside the other gospel records, this is all in the context of the disciples being commanded to take the good news of the risen Lord to all men. Surely Mary is being set up as an example of obedience to that command. She overcame all her inhibitions, the sense of "Who? Me?", the embarrassment at being a woman teaching or informing men in the first century... and as such is the pattern for all of us, reluctant as we are to bear the good news. "Among the Hebrews women only had limited rights and above all could not act as witnesses". And yet, the Lord chose Mary to be the witness to His resurrection to His brethren. He turned societal expectations on their head by setting her up as the bearer of the good news to them. Why? Surely to shake all of us from the safety of our societal and human closets; that we, whoever we are, however much we feel inadequate and 'this is not for me', are to be the bearers of the Lord's witness to all men.

She was not to tell them 'Jesus is going to ascend...'. She was to use the first person. Why? Surely because in her witness she was to be to them the voice of Jesus. And so it is for us all; we are witnesses in Him, we are Jesus to the eyes both of our brethren and this world. It was so significant that a woman should be chosen to make this witness, for women were not a valid witness in Judaism (Mishnah, *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1.8). Those who feel an intrinsic inadequacy are made adequate for this work of witness. And Mary's previous mental illness (Mk. 16:9) and immoral lifestyle likewise seriously dented her credibility on a secular level.

Perhaps Mary Magdalene alone perceived [from Ps. 110?] that the Lord must ascend after His resurrection- for surely this was why she kept clinging on to Him after He rose, fearful He would there and then disappear Heavenwards. And therefore the Lord comforted her, that there was no need to cling on to Him so, for He was not just then going to ascend to the Father (Jn. 20:17). But another reading of this incident is possible, once it is realized that the OT associates clinging to another's feet with making a request of them (2 Kings 4:27).

Perhaps the Lord called the disciples His "brothers" straight after His resurrection in order to emphasize that He, the resurrected Man and Son of God, was eager to renew His relationships with those He had known in the flesh. It's as if He didn't want them to think that somehow, everything had changed. Indeed, He stresses to them that their Father is His Father, and their God is His God. He appears to be alluding here to Ruth 1:16 LXX. Here, Ruth is urged to remain behind in Moab [cp. Mary urging Jesus?], but she says she will come with her mother in law, even though she is of a different people, and "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God". This allusion would therefore be saying: 'OK I am of a different people to you now, but that doesn't essentially affect our *relationship*; I so love you, I will always stick with you wherever, and my God is your God'.

20:18- see on Mk. 3:14.

*Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples: I have seen the Lord! And she told them that he had said these things to her-*

Mary went to tell others "what she had seen and heard" (Jn. 20:18), and John in one of his many later allusions back to his Gospel uses these very words about all the apostles- "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you" (1 Jn. 1:1,3). He and the other brethren took Mary as their inspiration in the work of witness, as should we.

Mary is very convinced as to what she had witnessed; she goes and tells the others that she has actually seen the Lord in person, and that He spoke words to her which she was now telling them. By contrast, the other women spoke in more abstract terms of having seen "a vision of Angels" (Lk. 24:23), rather than saying how they actually met Angels; and likewise the disciples understood the Lord's appearance to them as them having "seen a spirit" (Lk. 24:37). But Mary is far more concrete; she was immediately convinced of the actual, personal, bodily resurrection of the Lord. To 'spiritualize' is so often really an excuse for lack of faith. And so many, from ivory tower theologians to Jews, have fallen into this error. Faith in the end is about concrete, actual things which defy all the 'laws' of our worldviews. And it was this faith which Mary showed. See on Mk. 16:9.

"I have seen the Lord" is consciously alluding to Jn. 14:19 and Jn. 16:16, where the Lord had prophesied that all the disciples would see Him. It's as if John saw her as the representative of them all. Further evidence of this is found in the way John records the Lord as saying that He calls His sheep by name, and they recognize His voice (Jn. 10:5)- and by then recording how Mary Magdalene was the one who recognized the Lord's voice when He called her name (Jn. 20:16), as if she represents all the Lord's sheep. A woman rising early and searching for the Man whom she loves, asking the watchmen whether they have seen him, then finding him, seizing him and not letting him go... this is all the fulfilment of Song 3:1-4, where the bride of Christ is pictured doing these very things. Mary Magdalene is therefore used by John as a symbol for all the believers, or at least for the Jewish Messianic community searching for



Jesus. Compare too the Lord's reassurance of Mary Magdalene with language of Is. 43:1 to the whole community of believers: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name..."

20:19 *When it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and for fear of the Jews, the doors were locked where the disciples were; and Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them: Peace to you-* The AV better reflects the Greek: "Where the disciples were assembled", or literally, 'synagogued'. The same phrase is used of church gatherings (Acts 20:7). They were unwelcome in the synagogues and persons of interest to the Jews; and so they by default became their own synagogue. But without a Rabbi / teacher. The Lord's appearance in their midst as it were gave life to their synagogue / church. He fulfilled His promise that where two or three were gathered together for His sake, He would come into their midst. The standing "in their midst" is emphasized in :26. But it is John who will later use the same word in describing how after the Lord had been slain He was represented in Heaven as a freshly slain lamb possessing the Spirit standing "in the midst" of the Heavenly elders (Rev. 5:6). That was Heaven's reflection of that very humble situation on earth, where the illustrious elders of Heaven were reflected by the frightened, weak disciples in whose midst the Lord stood. But they were to become the elders of the new people of God, with representative Angels before the throne of God, in the court of Heaven. Our weak situations on earth have their far more glorious reflections in the Heavenly throne room.

The wishing of peace was no mere formality. It was another way of wishing them peace with God through the gift of the Spirit.

20:20- see on Lk. 24:41.

*And when he had said this, he showed to them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord-* There is no mention of His feet, although crucifixion victims were usually nailed there too. Perhaps this was because in order not to break a bone of Him, the nails had not left major holes there. Their 'gladness' was in partial fulfilment of His word that their sorrow would be turned into joy when they 'saw' Him again, but I have suggested that the joy in view there more fully referred to the joy of His presence through the receipt of the Comforter in their hearts to replace His physical presence. It seems that they saw the Lord, but were not persuaded it was Him until they had seen the marks in side and hands. Mary was persuaded without being shown these. The record is continually emphasizing their weakness and slowness of faith. We also see the depth of their belief in disembodied spirits, a totally unBiblical belief. But such doctrinal failure was no reason for the Lord to break relationship with them, and neither should it be for us.

20:21- see on Jn. 17:20.

*Jesus again said to them: Peace to you. As the Father has sent me, even so send I you-* The gift of peace was no passing formality. To be given the Lord's attitude of mind, the peace He had with the Father, was part of the promised gift of the Spirit (14:27); and here we go on immediately to read of the Spirit being given (:22). That gift was therefore primarily something internal, mental, psychological, in the heart; for that is where peace exists, especially peace with God of the kind the Lord enjoyed.

Again we have a Johannine version of the great commission. As the Lord was sent into the world, so are we. This parallel means that His 'sending into the world' cannot be harnessed to support any mistaken notion of personal pre-existence or coming from Heaven to earth at birth; for as He was sent, so are we. The synoptics record the risen Lord sending the disciples to preach Him and His resurrection; just as He was sent forth to testify of Himself. They are promised the strength of the Spirit to make that witness; here they are given "peace" and the gift of the Spirit (:22). And yet the disciples were weak and fearful at this time, hence the repeated assurance of "Peace unto you!". We too receive the same commission against a backdrop of feeling so inadequate and lacking of resource to fulfil it.

20:22 *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them: Receive the Holy Spirit-* The gift of the Spirit was not and is not a once-off phenomenon, given just once in the experience of the believer. The New Testament records the believers being filled with the Spirit on various occasions, and the exhortations to allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit are proof enough that it is given in an ongoing sense. Paul says that the Corinthians had received the Spirit at baptism, but he urges them to now be spiritual, to receive it and be filled with it again. There is therefore no chronological issue with the fact that Luke places a giving of the Spirit by the risen Lord at a slightly different point in the narrative.

The breathing of the Lord recalls His breathing His last breath toward the disciples at His death; "breath" and "spirit" are the same idea. The Spirit given is therefore fundamentally the spirit of Lord Jesus, His breathing, His life. Any manifestations of it through miraculous gifts in the first century are incidental to the essential idea- which is that His breathing, His living, the spirit of His mind, is given into ours and becomes ours as it displaces all human thinking and 'spirit' within us.

20:23- see on Lk. 11:4.

*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained-* Grammatically, the "any" refers to any type or class, rather than 'any individual'. This encourages us to understand this as John's version of the great commission to take the Gospel to all kinds of people; see on :21,22. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (Jn. 20:21,23 NIV). These words have always been problematic for me, especially that last phrase. Can God's forgiveness really be limited by the forgiveness shown by fallible men? Yet if these words are taken as a record of the great commission to go and preach, and the ellipsis is filled in, things become clearer: 'I am sending you to preach the Gospel and baptism of forgiveness; if you do this and men respond, then the Gospel you preach really does have the power to bring about forgiveness. But if you don't fulfil the commission I give you to preach forgiveness, then the sins of your potential hearers will remain unforgiven'. Again, the forgiveness and salvation of others is made to depend upon our preaching of forgiveness. "Whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" becomes the equivalent of "he that believeth not shall be damned". The disciples did not go out into the world and tell some people that they were forgiven and others that they were not. There is no historical account of them doing that at all. Rather we see them going out into the world preaching the good news of forgiveness for any who wished.

Commentators have noted that the language of retaining here is similar to how the Rabbis spoke, and the basis upon which they either excommunicated or 'received into fellowship'.

The Lord is saying that this power is not in their hands, but is in the hands of the preacher of the Gospel. And instead of stipulating who is in and out, they should take the Gospel of God's radical acceptance to the world. This is a powerful challenge to latter day Judaists within Christian churches who think in exactly these categories of receiving into fellowship or putting out of fellowship. That same mentality likewise misses the focus now placed by the Lord on taking the message of fellowship with Him out into the world, and leaving God to decide who finally is 'in' or 'out' on the basis of their acceptance or rejection of His offer.

The Greek for 'retain' strictly means 'to hold / bind', and that for 'remit' means 'to loose'. This has evident connection with Mt. 16:19, where the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom (which we all possess) have the power to bind and loose, i.e. to grant or not grant forgiveness. Jn. 15:8,16 also has some reference to the great commission: "...so shall ye be my disciples... that *ye should go* [into all the world] and bear fruit, and that your fruit [converts?] should abide". The eternal life of the converts is a fruit brought forth by the preacher's obedience to his Lord's commission. Likewise through the preaching of John, he turned men's hearts- the idea of repentance, being brought about by the preacher (Mal. 4:6). 20:24 There's meaning in the fact that Thomas' other name, Didymus, is given (Jn. 20:24). 'Didymus' means literally 'the double', presumably implying he was a twin. But 'Didymus' is a form of the same Greek word we find in Mt. 28:17, describing the 'doubt', literally the doubleness, i.e. the double mindedness, which there was in the disciples. Again, the element of doubt and lack of faith is being emphasized.

20:24 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came-* His surname 'the twin' could hint at his suffering from the dual nature we all have when it comes to matters of faith; we can believe and yet disbelieve. Perhaps his absence from the group was related to his strongly expressed disbelief.

20:25 *The other disciples told him: We have seen the Lord! But he said to them: Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe-* When John records Thomas as saying "If I do not see... and put my finger... I will never believe", he is connecting back to the Lord's very similar words: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe" (Jn. 4:48). It's as if John is bringing out the weakness of faith in his friend Thomas, the struggle there was to believe, knowing it would elicit a chord in his hearers, thus building a bridge between the hearers and the preacher. And John goes on to record that there is a greater blessing for those who believe, not having seen the Lord, than there is for preachers like himself, who had believed because they had seen and touched the Lord (Jn. 20:29). It's as if John shows the utmost humility before his audience, imputing to them greater faith than he had. And Peter does likewise, alluding here when he says that his readers love the Lord, although they [unlike he] had never seen Him (1 Pet. 1:8).

20:26 *Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them, and said: Peace to you-* For the significance of His 'standing among them' see on :19. They still weren't obedient to their risen Lord- they didn't go immediately into Galilee. They remained at least eight days in Jerusalem, until the Lord Jesus appeared to Thomas there. The fact they met a week later, taking 'an eight days' as a week by the Jewish inclusive method (Mt. 17:1 cp. Lk. 9:28), suggests they had already begun meeting regularly together. His special presence during their gatherings may speak of His presence at communal gatherings of His people, although the Comforter presence is ever present in the heart of every individual believer.

20:27 *Then he said to Thomas: Reach here your finger and see my hands, and reach here your hand and put it into my side; and be not faithless but believing-* His finger was the appropriate size to enter the nail wounds, and his hand the right side to enter the spear gash in the Lord's side. "Do not persist in your disbelief, but become a believer" (Gk.). And then He pronounces to Thomas: "You have [now] believed" (Jn. 20:29, Syriac text). It's as if John is challenging his hearers and readers in the same way, and setting up his buddy 'doubting Thomas' as their pattern. John makes the point that Thomas didn't initially believe the 'preaching' of the Gospel of the resurrection by the other disciples; just as John anticipated some would not accept his account of the same Gospel on first hearing. And again, "be not faithless but believing!" jumps out of the text to challenge each of us, as do so many questions and exclamations in John's Gospel.

20:28 *Thomas answered and said to him: My Lord and my God-* Although Thomas' exaltation "My Lord and my God!" may appear an off-the-cuff gasping out of praise, can I suggest there was far more to it than that. I suggest he was alluding to or quoting Ps. 35:23: "Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, my God and my Lord" . The Lord Jesus had indeed arisen and stirred up in resurrection, and Thomas realized that it was to his judgment. When we look closer at the Psalm, it seems to reveal something of the thoughts of the Lord Jesus. He had desired God to awake to *his* need. And now Thomas shares those same thoughts, through his relationship to Jesus. And this is a very Johannine theme; that the relationship between Father and Son is to be shared by the believers, on account of the way they relate to the risen Lord Jesus. Or perhaps Thomas had Ps. 91:2 in mind: "I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge, my fortress, my God; in him will I trust". When Thomas addressed Jesus as "My Lord and my God", he was likely alluding to the way the Emperors [Domitian especially, according to Seutonius] demanded to be called " *Dominus et Deus noster*" - Our Lord and our God. Thomas was saying something radical- he was applying to the Lord Jesus the titles which those living in the Roman empire were only to apply to Caesar. And our exaltation of the Lord Jesus should be just as radical in practice. Further, note that Yahweh Elohim is usually translated in the Septuagint '*Kyrios, ho theos mou*'- Lord, my God". Am I going too far in thinking that Thomas saw in the risen Jesus the fulfilment of the Yahweh Elohim name? He would thus have been fulfilling the Lord's prophecy in Jn. 8:28: "When you lift up the Son of man, then you will realize that I Am...". Finally the disciples were grasping that "All men may honour the Son just as they honour the Father" (Jn. 5:23). Thomas' expression of praise was thus blasphemy to both Jews and Romans. A true perception of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus leads us to a unique position which cannot be accepted by any who are not truly of Him.

Again and again we have to emphasize that we read the Biblical documents at a great distance from the culture in which they were first written. It was quite understandable for a person to carry the name of their superior, without being that superior in person. And so it was and is with the Lord Jesus. To give just one of many possible confirmations of this: "[In 2 Esdras 5:43-46]... God's spokesman, the angel Uriel, is questioned by Ezra as though he were both Creator and Judge [which God alone is]. Ezra uses the same style of address to Uriel ("My lord, my master") as he uses in direct petition to God. This practice of treating the agent as though he were the principal is of the greatest importance for New Testament Christology [i.e. the study of who Christ is]". The acclamation of Thomas "My Lord and my God!" must be understood within the context of first century usage, whereas Paul says, many people were called Lord and "god" (1 Cor. 8:4-6). If we're invited by our manager "Come and meet the president", we don't expect to meet the President of the USA. We expect to meet the

president of the company. The word "president" can have more than one application, and it would be foolish to assume that in every case it referred to the President of the USA. And it's the same with the words "Lord" and "God" in their first century usage. Hence a Jewish non-Trinitarian like Philo could call Moses "God and king of the whole nation" (*Life Of Moses* 1.158)- and nobody accused him of not being monotheistic! Significantly, there is in the New Testament the Greek word *latreuo* which specifically refers to the worship of God- and this is always [21 times] applied to God and not Jesus. The worship of Jesus that is recorded is always to God's glory, and is recorded with the same words [especially *proskuneo*] used about the worship of believers (Rev. 3:9, Daniel (Dan. 2:46 LXX), kings of Israel etc. (1 Chron. 29:20 LXX)).

20:29- see on Lk. 1:45.

*Jesus said to him: Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed-* We naturally tend to think of ourselves as the referent here. And indeed we are. But the tenses here read strangely if future generations are in view; for then we would need something like 'not seen yet will then believe'. He implies there were others at that time who had not seen but had believed. The Lord knew there were some who had heard His promise of resurrection after three days, and believed it- although they had not seen Him. This means that the disciples were spiritually second class citizens at that point, even amongst the body of believers. Some had not seen and believed He had risen; they had seen, but doubted- despite the great blessing of having the Lord appear to them. This again highlights the point being made throughout all the Gospels; the disciples were weak, even amongst the other believers; and yet they came through in the end, and were used by the Lord to found His church. Peter alludes to this passage when encouraging his converts that they had not seen and yet had believed, using the same words (1 Pet. 1:8). He writes that fully aware that he was one privileged to have seen and yet whose faith was weak, and who literally 'went fishing' in disillusion even after having seen the risen Lord. The phrase 'blessed for having not seen but have believed' is found in the Rabbinic writings concerning proselytes. John continues his theme of a new Israel being developed, suggesting that the new Israel was based around the "twelve" [cp. the twelve tribes of Israel], and proselytes would be joined to them.

20:30 *Many other signs Jesus did in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book-* The context is of :29 stating that some believed without seeing the risen Lord, whereas the disciples saw Him but doubted. Here that self-critical spirit continues, with John admitting that the Lord not only appeared to them but did many signs in their presence, witnessed by them- making their slowness to believe all the more reprehensible. John concludes by saying that he has written down these signs so that "you", his audience who had not seen but whom he hoped would believe, might be better than him and the disciples- believing in what they had not seen.

20:31- see on Jn. 17:20.

*But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name-* See on :30. John's Gospel was written for the specific purpose of bringing others to faith- like most of the New Testament, it is essentially a missionary document. The gospel preached by John is what is transcribed here. We must ask

then whether any other theology is actually part of the Gospel message. Jn. 20:31 makes it clear that the purpose of John's Gospel was to bring unbelievers to faith in Christ: "This has been written in order that you may hold the faith that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that, holding this faith, you may possess life by His name". C.H. Dodd comments: "The tense of the verbs... the aorists... would necessarily have implied that the readers did not so far hold the Christian faith or possess eternal life". The gift of eternal life in John refers to the present receipt of the gift of the Spirit, the life and spirit of life lived by the Lord Jesus, the life we shall eternally live. This is why life is "in his name". There may be reference to baptism into His Name, but the "name" of a person refers to the summation of their character and being. Life is lived in "His name", living, thinking, feeling and acting as He did and does.

"That ye might believe" implies John intended his readership to be unbelievers rather than believers in the first instance. Jn. 19:35 implies that the community for whom John was writing had John as the basic source of their knowledge about Jesus, and was highly respected as their spiritual father. 'John' is therefore his inspired write-up of the Gospel he had taught his converts, and therefore it has various specific features highly relevant to them. Acts likewise seems to be written as a preaching document, recording the speeches of basic apologetics which were made to both Jews and Gentiles. The early preachers would have gone around telling the good news about Jesus Christ, and in so doing would have recited time and again His teaching and life story. John seems to suggest that he chose which miracles to record so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name" (Jn. 20:31). The implication is that he wrote his Gospel with the intention of it being used as a preaching document.

The Gospel records are transcripts of the original preaching of the Gospel delivered by e.g. Matthew or John. Thus John wrote down his gospel "*that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (Jn. 20:31). His first letter was written, it seems, to the converts which his Gospel preaching had made: "I write these things to *you who believe in the name of the Son of God* so that you may know that you have eternal *life*" (1 Jn. 5:13). It has even been suggested that John was writing in order to win converts to Christianity from a specific synagogue somewhere in the Diaspora. Another suggestion is that John is aiming at converting Samaritans or at least, a group of Gentiles perhaps associated with a synagogue. For John records how Samaritans came to Jesus, how "the world" includes them and not just Jews (Jn. 4:42); how physical descent from Abraham is irrelevant now (Jn. 8:33-41); how the true Israelite is anyone who has been born again (Jn. 1:47; 3:3-8), and John stresses that the true sheep of Jesus for whom he died are not just Jews (Jn. 10:16; 11:51,52). John records Jesus' explaining that He has already done the sowing, but the reaping of the Samaritans / Gentiles is up to us the reapers (Jn. 4:35-38). The lesson is that we must each preach the Gospel to others in a way that is relevant to them, not compromising the basic message, but articulating it in ways that connect with their needs and situation. The New Testament is simply full of encouragement and example in this.

But it could also be that John was writing to confirm the faith of those who had heard his preaching of the Gospel and been baptized. For they would have largely been illiterate and would need some way of being reminded of that in which they had believed. It is possible to translate: "That you may continue to believe".

## CHAPTER 21

21:1 *After these things Jesus manifested himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias; and he manifested himself in this way-* Mt. 28:10 sounds as if the Lord Jesus intended not to reveal Himself to the disciples until they met in Galilee. The fact He did so earlier shows that He changed plans, perhaps out of concern for their very weak faith, or perhaps simply from an overpowering love of them and desire to be with them. Jn. 21:1 stresses that He revealed Himself to them in Galilee *again*, as if the necessity for this was somehow shameful; and Jn. 21:14 notes this was the third time that the disciples as a group saw the risen Lord. Perhaps the degree of their unbelief was unexpected even to the risen Lord.

Perhaps this incident fulfils the Lord's intention to meet them on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16); but the planned meeting never happened because instead of going to the prearranged meeting place on a mountain there, they went fishing. Their going fishing might imply that they just returned to their old business. Meeting the risen Christ still didn't have a permanent effect upon them. This follows straight on from the blessing just pronounced upon those even at that time who had not seen but had believed; the disciples saw multiple times but still 'went fishing'; see on 20:29.

21:2 *There was together Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee and the sons of Zebedee and another two of his disciples-* As noted on :1, the 'going fishing' incident was shameful. The Lord had already appeared to them twice, and they had arranged a meeting on a mountain in Galilee (Mt. 28:16). But now they just go fishing, as if in disinterest or continued disbelief. Perhaps this is why the group who did this are named and shamed, by themselves, as it were.

The Gospel writers each conclude their message with some reference to their own incredible slowness to believe the very Gospel which they were now preaching to others. Between them, the preaching of the twelve makes it clear that they saw the risen Lord in Jerusalem, at least twice, were commissioned as preachers of that good news... and yet returned to Galilee in disbelief and resumed their previous occupations. And of course they recall their Lord's rebuke of them for their slowness and blindness. Truly they were appealing to their hearers on the basis of their own humanity and weakness of faith. They weren't painting themselves as immaculate, never doubting believers. They were so strongly portraying their humanity, knowing that they were appealing to men and women who were equally human and frail of faith.

21:3 - see on Mk. 10:28.

*Simon Peter said to them: I am going fishing. They said to him: We will go with you. They went out and entered into the boat, and that night they caught nothing-*

John perhaps especially brings out their blindness at this time. He describes how they were fishing on the lake, having given up, it seems, their faith in Jesus, despite His appearances to them. Yet John describes that incident in language which evidently alludes to the account in Luke 5 of the Lord's first call to them by the same lake, whilst they were fishing. Consider the similarities:

- They have fished all night but caught nothing
- The Lord tells them to cast their nets
- They obey and catch many fish

- The effect on the nets is mentioned
- Peter reacts emotionally, and in both records is called 'Simon Peter'
- The presence of "the sons of Zebedee" is mentioned both times (Jn. 21:2; Lk. 5:10)
- Jesus is called 'Lord'
- The same Greek words are used for climbing aboard, landing, the nets etc.

The point being that John is saying: 'Durr! We were so dumb, not to realize the similarities more quickly! *Of course it was Jesus!* But we were so, so pathetically slow to accept it. After the encounter by the lake in Lk. 5, Jesus made us fishers of men. But we refused to be, initially. So He had to re-commission us yet again after this second incident'. John uses the verb *helkein* to describe how they 'drew' the nets to land- the same word used elsewhere by him for people being 'drawn' to Jesus (Jn. 6:44; 12:32). He is recognizing that they had had to be re-taught the call to be fishers of men, because they had pushed off to Galilee in disbelief and disobedience to the great commission to go and catch men. Perhaps John records Peter being asked the same question "Lovest thou me?" three times, in order to show how terribly slow they all were to accept the teachings of the Lord which now they were asking others to accept.

Peter is presented as the leader of the group, and is mentioned first in the list (:2); as if to demonstrate that the one who led them fishing, in disbelief and disobedience to the command to meet in a mountain nearby (Mt. 28:16), was the very one who became the leader of the early church. Again and again, the weakness of the disciples is emphasized in their own preaching; for the Gospel records are transcripts of their preaching to others. The details of them walking to the shore and getting into the boat are recorded in detail because John wishes us to imagine the shameful incident.

21:4 *But when day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach. The disciples did not know that it was Jesus-* The record has twice described the Lord as 'standing' among them in His two appearances to them in the locked room in Jerusalem. His form should therefore have been familiar to them. If we enquire why exactly they were so slow to fully believe, despite all the evidence and appearances, there is no immediately apparent answer. It could be that they so deeply believed in ghosts and disembodied spirits that they struggled to believe in His bodily resurrection; in which case we see that false theology and worldviews can militate against a true faith in the Lord Jesus. Or it could be that as John has shown with His references to how the Lord's miracles failed to convert the Jews, literal miracle and 'seeing' are not of themselves abidingly persuasive. John was writing for those who had not seen but had believed; and he is perhaps developing the point that their lack of literally having witnessed the resurrection is no excuse for disbelief. For the disciples literally saw the Lord in several appearances, but failed to be motivated thereby to a lasting faith. They too had been given the Spirit (20:22), but still failed to believe; just as the Corinthians were given the Spirit but were not spiritual (1 Cor. 3:1). The Comforter was to make the Lord even more persuasively present in the hearts of believers than any physical presence; so perhaps John labours the point that physical meeting of Him was only inspirational to faith at the time, just as the miracles had been; lasting faith was from other sources.

21:5 *Jesus called to them: Boys, have you something to eat? They answered him: No-* Here we have a rather nice indicator of the Lord's conscious effort to show His 'humanity' even after His resurrection. The risen Lord of heaven and earth calls out to the disciples over the lake, calling them "lads". The Greek *paidion* is the plural familiar form of the noun *pais*,



'boy'. Raymond Brown comments that the term "has a colloquial touch... [as] we might say 'My boys' or 'lads' if calling to a knot of strangers of a lower social class". Why use this colloquial term straight after His resurrection, something akin to 'Hey guys!', when this was not His usual way of addressing them? Surely it was to underline to them that things hadn't changed in one sense, even if they had in others; He was still the same Jesus. Likewise the term for "something to eat" is unusual, and perhaps colloquial for 'Any nice grub'. It occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. See on Jn. 20:15.

The question was to recall His question to them, as to whether they had food to feed the multitude. The implication then was 'No, but You can provide any amount of food'. He was seeking to stir their memories and to recognize Him, as well as through the clear similarities with the earlier fishing incident noted on :3. He knew that provoking them to join the dots and see the picture was going to be far more powerful than a direct appearance to them. And that is so relevant for all today who have not had any appearance to them of the risen Lord, but all the same believe.

21:6 *And he said to them: Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you shall find. There they cast their net; and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fish-* The 'drawing in' of the nets here and in :11 implies the drawing in of the Gentiles, from all nations. It is the same word as in Jn. 12:32: "When I am lifted up from the earth [in death], I shall *draw* all men unto myself". The nets were not torn [*schizein*] in that there must be no division amongst true preachers of the Gospel who all teach the same basic Gospel- contrast this with how John frequently mentions the *schizein* which occurred amongst those who would not fully accept the Lord's message (Jn. 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). And likewise we can learn that all human resources will be provided in order to fulfil the great commission, no matter how they are stretched apparently beyond their natural limit. The 153 fish caught in the net may refer to 153 being the total number of species of fish recognized by the Greek zoologists. The Lord's cross will draw all men- i.e. men from all nations- unto Himself through our preaching, through our undivided drawing in of the nets. This means that true believers will be found to have come from every nation; the Gospel must therefore go to them all and make converts. This has only been achieved in recent times, and is a sure sign of the Lord's soon return. It shows however that basic belief in the Gospel is what is required; for no one Protestant denomination has won converts from every single nation.

The drawing in of nets is used by the Lord elsewhere as a figure for His return and judgment- only when they are all drawn in can the bad fish be cast away. So the conclusion has to be faced: there must be fish caught in the net, i.e. men and women who have responded to the true Gospel, amongst "all men", every species of humanity, before the Lord's return. If we are convicted that we teach the true Gospel, then it follows that there must be true Christian communities amongst "all men" before the Lord returns; and thus His return will be hastened by our establishment of those groups. When the Gospel goes into all the world, then shall the end come.

The disciples were unable to draw in the catch, representing response from "all nations", on their own. They needed the help of their brethren. The Lord prayed in John 17 that our unity would convert the world, and perhaps this is being again said here in more visual terms.

21:7- see on Acts 11:17.

*That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter: It is the Lord!*- The presentation of John and Peter together by John always seems in the end to Peter's glory. Here again, John is the first to realize, but Peter the first to act.

*So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat about him (for he was naked) and threw himself into the sea-* Peter's casting of himself into the sea uses the same word as just used for the casting of the nets in :6. Perhaps Peter perceived that the nets represented them, and they should be out preaching, gathering in men rather than fish; and with characteristic zeal and repentance, he cast himself into the sea as he had just cast the net into the sea. He thereby recognized that he was part of that net that should be catching men, in obedience to the great commission. Peter's wrapping of himself in his outer coat before swimming was at best clumsy. Again we get the impression of someone rather uncoordinated or not thinking through implications. And yet such was the man chosen to lead the early church.

Peter knew the Lord Jesus had risen, and he had met Him and been "glad" when he saw the Lord, and in some form had joyfully proclaimed the news to the others. The whole flavour of this record would make it seem that this was the first time Peter had met the risen Lord. But it clearly wasn't. Surely the point is that like us, we can know theoretically that Christ rose; we can be sure of it. But the personal implications in terms of confession of sin and service to that risen Lord can be lost on us, to the point that we *don't really accept* that Christ is risen, even if in theory we do know and confess it.

When Peter realized that it was Jesus standing on the shore, this was at least the third time he had met the risen Lord. But when John says "It is the Lord", Peter throws himself into the water to rush to Him as if it's the first time they have met after the denials. Surely it was a higher appreciation of what Christ's Lordship entailed that suddenly struck him at that moment, and he now rushed eagerly to Him, believing surely in His gracious forgiveness. No wonder in a month or so's time he was appealing for men to repent and accept forgiveness on the basis that really, Jesus is Lord. The Lordship of Christ convicted Peter (and all men) of both their sinfulness (as they see themselves in the peerless light of His moral majesty) and also of the reality of His forgiveness. "I am a sinful man, *O Lord*" (Lk. 5:8) is a case in point. A case could be made to argue that Peter's use of 'Master' tends to be at times when he is weak or doubting (Lk. 5:5; 8:45; Mk. 11:21); whilst he saw Jesus as a master who simply gives directives to His slaves, there was not such great inspiration to faith. But the utter and surpassing Lordship of Jesus had quite a different message. Peter's perception of Jesus as 'Lord' climaxed when he perceived that "It is the Lord!" whilst fishing on Galilee after the resurrection. His sense of the greatness of this more-than-man led him to do something counter instinctive and even absurd- he adds clothes before jumping into the water to swim to Him, in order to be attired as best he could be before Him. It would seem that He was imitating the body language of the Lord when He washed Peter's feet- he tied a towel around Him [s.w. as Peter wrapping his outer garment around him, Jn. 13:4,5 cp. 21:7].

21:8 *But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from the land, only about meters from shore), dragging the net full of fishes-* The distance given is about 90 meters. For Peter to swim this with his outer garment would have been quite exhausting for him, and he would have arrived before the Lord panting.

21:9- see on Lk. 22:32.

*So when they reached the shore, they got out of the boat; and saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon and bread-* Again by a charcoal fire (s.w. only 18:18), the three fold “do you love me?” probed Peter’s three denials, and the threefold commission to “feed my sheep” confirmed his total re-instatement to grace. Fish and bread was exactly what the Lord had miraculously provided in 6:9. They were continually being directed back to incidents in the gospels in order to demonstrate to them that the Lord was the same then, after His resurrection, as He had been during His ministry.

Anyone who has reflected on any length of ecclesial experience will realize the truth of the fact that so many of our spiritual exercises in preaching and pastoral work are in fact for *our* benefit, although we may feel that they are only for the benefit of others. This is especially true of preaching: the disciples laboured so hard to catch all the fish according to the Lord’s command, but when they reached land with all the fish, they found the Lord already had fish and prepared them for breakfast. All the labour for the fish was for their benefit: not because the Lord needed fish (cp. converts); He already had His.

Even after His resurrection, in His present immortal nature, the Lord thoughtfully cooked breakfast on the beach for His men (Jn. 21:9,12). And this is the Lord who will return to judge us. He knows how to cook fish and unleavened bread. The Lord Jesus was male, and yet in so many ways He combined feminine sensitivity with His almost heroic, classic masculinity, as the King, warrior, brave captain who gave His life for His friends. You see it even after the resurrection- He cooked a meal for the guys as they were out fishing (Jn. 21:9). From our cultural distance it’s not immediately obvious, but in first century Palestinian terms this was so obviously the work of a woman. The men fished, the woman sat on the beach preparing food for the hungry workers when they returned off night shift. But it was a man, a more than man, the exalted and risen Lord of the universe, who chose and delighted to do this very feminine, thoughtful and sensitive action of service. The incident isn’t merely an insight into the Lord’s humility even after His resurrection. It speaks of how He incorporates in His person both male and female characteristics, as the ideal and perfected humanity, the Man fully and ultimately in the image of God. And there are other examples in His life. He perhaps rejoiced to lead His disciples to the breaking of bread through setting up the sign of a man carrying a pitcher of water- which was evidently women’s work. The way the Lord held John to His breast at the last supper is likewise a classic female image.

21:10 *Jesus said to them: Bring some of the fish which you have now taken-* This detail is significant. Breakfast was ready, with His fish and bread on the fire. But He asks them to contribute *their* fish, so that the breakfast finally enjoyed included both their fish and His; even though ‘their’ fish had actually been brought to them by the Lord. We think of His teaching of bringing His sheep together with other sheep not of this fold, making one fold. The fishing incident clearly spoke of the great commission, and of how He would work together with them, so that the final harvest was a joint result of their work and His provision. They alone caught nothing, but with His help, they caught 153 fish, the number of species of fish which were understood to exist.

21:11 *Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken-* Again we see the enthusiasm and yet clumsiness of Peter; the Lord had asked for “some of the fish”, and Peter

drags the entire net full of 153 fish to the Lord. Although 153 is the numerical value of "sons of God", 153 was the number of species of fish which were understood to exist in the sea. This wrong idea was used by the Lord. These men were fishermen, who thought they knew all about fish; and He uses their incorrect science to make His point. With His help, they could bring representatives of all nations into the Gospel net. He would send fish to them; and we need to sense this too rather than preaching in our own strength, praying daily for the Lord to send people to us. The unbroken net speaks of how in the power of the Spirit, we will be provided with the resources, fully stretched as they may be, in order to fulfil His bidding in the great commission.

21:12 *Jesus said to them: Come. Break your fast. And none of the disciples did inquire of him: Who are you? Knowing that it was the Lord-* This meal looked forward to the Messianic banquet, which will be as a result of our obedience to the great commission with the Lord's direction and blessing. The Lord had to tell the disciples after the resurrection to "Break your fast" (Jn. 21:12 RV). Despite the Lord having appeared to them as recorded in John 20, they were fasting for the dead. No wonder the Lord urged them to break that fast. But the point is made, by John himself, as to how terribly slow they were to believe in His resurrection. As this was the third time He had appeared to them (:14) and they had disobeyed His command to meet them on a mountain in Galilee, instead returning to their fishing, I would have been minded to rebuke them. But there is no word of rebuke from the Lord, but rather a command to fish, and a using of them in His service. There are times when disciplining a person or again rebuking them is futile; treating them as partners and asking them to get involved in the Lord's work is the more effective way of developing their faith. And the Lord uses that method here.

He typically avoided making direct statements about who He was, notably before Pilate. His whole person and behaviour was Him, He was His word or proclamation made flesh in Himself. He had no need to proclaim His Divine Sonship in so many words; it was evident. And we see this beautifully effected here.

21:13 *Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, and the fish likewise-* Again this was to recall how He had distributed bread and fish to them in the feeding of the 5000. The implication was that they were to distribute that bread and fish wider; and perhaps they literally did so, seeing they had 153 large fish in their net. Again the Lord is seeking to point out that who He was in His earthly ministry was who He continued to be after resurrection. The process of immortalization will not obliterate personality; who we are now is who we shall eternally be. This points up the eternal importance of development in this life of personality and character, the spirit, spiritual formation.

21:14 *This was the third time that Jesus was manifested to the disciples, after he had risen from the dead-* The synoptics appear to record other appearances, so this must mean that this was the third time recorded in John that Jesus revealed Himself to them all together as a group at one and the same time. The same word for "manifested" is used when John later writes that "the life was manifested, and we have seen it and bear witness..." (1 Jn. 1:2). He has in view the resurrected Lord of life, whom they saw and handled. But the witness they were making to this 'manifestation' included a recognition in the resurrection accounts that they had been so slow to accept that 'manifestation' of life which they now urged others to accept. Again we see a humility in their witness, which would have made them very convincing and approachable as preachers and teachers.

21:15 *So when they had broken their fast, Jesus said to Simon: Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Feed my lambs-*

The Lord Jesus had already met Peter at least twice since His resurrection, but hadn't raised the obvious issue of Peter's denials. And now He does it only *after* He has first eaten with Peter. We must bear in mind that to eat together, especially to take bread and give it to others, implied acceptance and religious fellowship (the scene here is reminiscent of the breaking of bread, the same words for 'bread', 'take' and 'give' are found in Mt. 26:26). The Lord firstly fellowshiped with Peter and only then moved on to probe the issue of his disloyalty, after having first affirmed His abiding love for Peter. This is a pattern for us in dealing with others' failure. The human tendency is to demand all is resolved between us before we can move on together, but the Lord was wiser than that. He had tried to arrange circumstance to provoke Peter to himself engage with the issue- for the triple questioning, the triple invitation to work for Him, all took place by a fire of coals- just as Peter's triple denials had. We see clearly portrayed here the gentle, seeking spirit of the Lord.

"Do you love me?" was a question for Peter's benefit, not in order to give the Lord information which He didn't have. His great sensitivity to Peter led Him to foresee the obvious question in Peter's mind: 'Has He forgiven me?'. And the Lord is saying that Peter knows the answer insofar as Peter knows how much he loves Jesus, on the principle that whoever loves much has been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). The allusion back to that incident in Luke 7 is confirmed by the way that the phrase 'to love more' occurs elsewhere only there, in Lk. 7:42: "Which of them will *love* him [Jesus] *most* [s.w. "more"]". Jesus had already forgiven Peter; the answer to Peter's concern about whether he had been forgiven was really 'Yes you have, if you believe it; and if you believe it, you will love me, and according to how much you love me, you will know how much forgiveness you have received'. In all this, we see the careful sensitivity of the Lord Jesus to His people, foreseeing and feeling our doubts and fears, our questions; and responding to them in a profound way.

"You know that I love you" was met by the Lord with the comment that Peter must feed His sheep. This wasn't so much a commandment / commission, as the Lord explaining that Peter's love for Him personally would be reflected in the degree to which Peter loved the Lord's sheep. John grasped this clearly, when he underlines throughout his letters that we cannot have love for God without loving our brethren. The Father and Son are to be identified with their people.

"Do you love me more than these?" is grammatically ambiguous. The reference could be to the nets and ships, or to Peter's other brethren. On both fronts, Peter needed provoking to self-examination. For he was proud of his profession and too eager to return to Galilee and get back to work; and he had boasted earlier that "Though all men deny you, yet I will not". There are purposeful ambiguities in some parts of God's word, not every sentence is intended to have a final 'right interpretation' which stands for all time; the ambiguities are to provoke our self-examination.

21:16 *He said to him, a second time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him: Yes, Lord. You know that I love you. He said to him: Tend my sheep-* In the first two engagements, the Lord asks Peter if he 'loves' [*agape*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he

'loves' [*phileo*] Him. In the third engagement the Lord asks Peter if he really 'loves' [*phileo*] Him, and Peter replies that yes, he does *phileo* Jesus. To argue that *phileo* and *agape* are interchangeable is to miss the point here; indeed, this whole exchange would surely show that they are not. And if they are, then we wonder why the two words are used as if there is a difference. Only surface level reading would suggest they are interchangeable. For *agape* is the otherwise colourless Greek word which has been chosen in John to refer to the Lord's love for us, the new commandment being to love *as He loved us*. Peter hasn't yet grasped that, and can think only in terms of *phileo*, the love of human friendship.

21:17 *He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he asked him a third time: Do you love me? And he said to him: Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. Jesus said to him: Feed my sheep-* As noted on :16, Peter has responded to the question about whether he has *agape* for the Lord by saying that he has *phileo*. The Lord now in the third exchange as it were gives up trying to get Peter to respond to *agape* with *agape*, and probes whether he really has the *phileo*, the love of human friendship, which he professes. The Lord doesn't make any claim as to whether Peter does or doesn't have the *phileo* he professes; His response is that love for Him will be reflected in love for those in Him, His sheep. This is brought out in John's letters, where love for the Father and Son is only legitimate if we love their spiritual children, the Lord's sheep.

Peter was full of a simple, pure love for the Lord as he stood before Him. And he wanted to assure the Lord of that. But the Lord's response seems to be that love for Him is not the passion of a moment. It is shown by loving our brethren, His sheep, over a lifetime of service- as Peter went on to do.

Peter is asked to feed [give food to] the lambs (:15); then pastor / shepherd the mature sheep (:16); and now to feed [give food to] the mature sheep (:17). John took this as a command for him and to us all, for he alludes to it in his spiritual care for the young men [cp. lambs] and the more mature ["fathers"] in 1 Jn. 2:14 (Catholics are wrong to assume these words apply only to Peter). The point is that mature sheep still need feeding as they did when they were lambs, although they also need shepherding.

21:18 *Truly, truly, I say to you: When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go-* This follows straight on from the command to Peter to show his love for the Lord by how he treated the Lord's flock. The Lord seems to be saying that He knows that Peter does love Him, and that Peter will indeed give his life to caring for the Lord's sheep- and because of this, Peter will finally suffer and die, as the Lord did. This prediction of Peter's future suffering for the sake of his work for the Lord's flock is therefore the Lord's way of saying that yes, He does accept that Peter truly loves Him- because He knows how He will suffer for his love of the Lord's people.

Consider how the Lord's words to Peter here about girding himself would have offered him tremendous comfort in Acts 12:8, if he appreciated them; see note there. Jn. 21:18,19 could be taken as meaning that Peter was to die the death of crucifixion, which would be the final fulfilment of the charge to "follow me". Jn. 21:19 contains the observation that as he would be led to that place of execution, it would be a death that "you do not wish". The Lord foresaw that Peter's unwillingness to accept the cross would surface even then. One of the most well attested extra Biblical traditions about Peter is found in the apocryphal 'Acts of

Peter'. It is that as he was being led to crucifixion, the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter, and Peter asked: '*Domine, quo vadis?*'- 'Lord / Master, to where are we going?' (repeating his words of Jn. 13:36), as if somehow even then, he found the final acceptance of the cross hard. As indeed, it would be.

In Jn. 13:36, the Lord had answered the question by telling Peter that then, he wasn't able to follow Him to death. But he would do so at a later date. And that time had come, although it took a lifetime to reach. This tradition has, to me, the ring of truth about it, from all that we know of Peter's problem with the cross. And it exactly mirrors our own difficulty in facing up to the stark realities of the life of self-sacrifice and ultimate self-crucifixion to which we are called, the question of *Quo Vadis?* Only then, at the very end, did he realize that following Christ was a call to follow Him to His cross. And another extra Biblical tradition has a similar likelihood of truth: it is said that when finally Peter was brought to the place of crucifixion, he insisted on being crucified upside down, as he was unworthy to die the same death as his Lord. Another tradition says that because of this unusual angle of crucifixion, the nails fell out and Peter was offered the chance of release, which he refused, and asked to be crucified with his Lord, still upside down.

If all this is so, he finally learnt the lesson which we likewise struggle for a lifetime to learn: that following Christ means going to His cross with Him, and in the process learning and feeling through and through our unworthiness. And he learnt too that to die with Christ is never forced upon us by the Lord who bought us: in Peter's final, willing choice of death, as with our day by day denials of the flesh for Christ's sake, we make the choices purely from our own volition. We alone decide, in the terror, pain and difficulty of a genuine freewill, that thus it must be for us. And for us, *Quo Vadis?*

21:19 *Now this he spoke, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he said to him: Follow me-* After Peter's 'conversion', the Lord told Peter in more detail how he would die. He would be carried, as the Lord was carried to the cross. But his death would "glorify God" (as the Lord's death also did: Jn. 7:39; 12:28; 13:32; 17:1). Having said this, the Lord invited Peter: "Follow me" (Jn. 21:19). Live the life of cross carrying now, Peter. And they went on walking, with Peter walking behind Jesus. But he couldn't concentrate on the crucifixion life, and got distracted by his issues with John.

Significantly, both Luke and John conclude their Gospels with the risen Lord walking along with the disciples, and them 'following' Him (Jn. 21:20)- just as they had done during His ministry. His invitation to 'Follow me' (Jn. 21:19,22) is the very language He had used whilst He was still mortal (Jn. 1:37,43; 10:27; 12:26; Mk. 1:18; 2:14). The point being, that although He was now different, in another sense, He still related to them as He did when He was mortal, walking the lanes and streets of first century Palestine. Elsewhere I have pointed out that the fishing incident of Jn. 21 is purposefully framed as a repetition of that recorded in Lk. 5- again, to show the continuity between the Jesus of yesterday and the Jesus of today. It's as if in no way does He wish us to feel that His Divine Nature and glorified, exalted position somehow separates us from Him.

21:20 *Peter, turning about, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following- he who had leaned back on his breast at the supper and asked: Lord, who is he that betrays you?-* Like Lot's wife, he turned around, away from the Lord, and saw John also following, the one who had leaned on Jesus' breast at the last supper (is this detail included here to suggest that this was a cause of jealousy for Peter?). And he quizzed the Lord as to His opinion of John. Peter got

distracted from his own following, his own commitment to self-crucifixion, by the powerful fascination human beings have in the status of others and the quality of their following. The Lord replied that even if John lived until His return, without ever having to die and follow Him to the literal death which Peter would have to go through, well, so what: “What is that to you? You- follow me”. This was the same message the Lord had taught Peter through the parable of the 1st hour labourer getting distracted by the reward of the 11th hour one. He had that tendency to look on the faults of others (Mt. 18:21), to compare himself with others (Mt. 19:21 cp. 27; 26:33).

And so, so many tragic times we do the same. We are distracted from the quintessence of our lives, the following, to death, of the Lord, by our jealousy of others and our desire to enter into their spirituality rather than personally following. Remember that it is so often recorded that multitudes followed the Lord wherever He went. But they missed the whole point of following Him- to die the death of the cross, and share His resurrection life. John’s Gospel has a somewhat strange ending, on first sight. The synoptics end as we would almost expect- the Lord ascends, having given His last commission to preach, and the disciples joyfully go forth in the work. But John’s Gospel appears to have been almost truncated. Christ walks away on His own, with Peter following Him, and John walking some way behind Peter. Peter asks what the Lord’s opinion is of John, and is told to ignore that and keeping on following Him. John inserts a warning against possible misunderstanding of this reply- and the Gospel finishes. But when we appreciate that the language of ‘follow me’ is the call to live the life of the cross, to follow the Man from Nazareth to His ultimate end day by day, then this becomes a most impressive closing scene: the Lord Jesus walking away, with His followers following Him, in all their weakness. John’s Gospel was originally the good news preached personally by John, and there is an impressive humility in the way in which he concludes with a scene in which he follows the Lord He has preached, but some way behind Peter. An awareness of our frailty and the regrettable distance with which we personally follow the Lord we preach is something which ought to be stamped on every witness to the Lord. To follow the Lord in cross bearing is indeed the end of the Gospel. And Peter understood this when he wrote that “hereunto were you called [i.e. this is the bottom line of life in Christ]: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Fellowshiping His sufferings and final death is following Him. Little would Peter have realized that when he first heard the call “Follow me”, and responded. And so with us. The meaning of following, the real implication of the cross, is something which can never be apparent at conversion.

21:21 *Peter therefore seeing him, said to Jesus: Lord, and what shall this man do?*- There is a fatal fascination with the question of why some weren’t called. But who are we as the clay to argue with the potter’s grace? John’s Gospel closes by addressing this question. Peter was following Jesus, walking behind Him, in response to Jesus’ command to follow Him. But John was also following Jesus, and Peter turned around, turned back from following Jesus [just as he lost his focus on Jesus when he was walking on the water towards Jesus]... to notice John was also following. The fate of others, the nature of their following or not of Jesus, is not [in this sense] directly our concern; our focus must be upon single-mindedly following Jesus as we by grace have been called to do.

21:22 *Jesus said to him: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow me*- If Peter had to die the death of the cross, he wondered what John would have to suffer. The Lord’s reply is that if John were not called to be a martyr, but lived without tasting death until the Lord’s return- what was that to Peter? He ought to still “Follow me”. The Lord may



be speaking literally, or using hyperbole in order to make Peter realize that absolutely nothing in the path or destiny of another man should distract him from *his* path. And we can well take that lesson; for so many stumble in their following of the Lord, or staying on the path intended, because of obsessions with others.

21:23 *This saying therefore went forth among the brothers, that that disciple should not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he should not die, but: If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you?*- We have a window here onto how easily there could arise misunderstandings in an illiterate community, going only on the reported speech of the Lord, passed around by memory and repetition. Hence the need for the Spirit to inspire definitive Gospel records as we have them, correcting such errors which would inevitably arise. We also note John's title for the believers as "the brothers". A new family relationship had been born due to the Lord's resurrection and continued spiritual life amongst them.

21:24 *This is the disciple that testifies of these things and wrote these things; and we know that his witness is true*- The Gospel of John is the eyewitness account of John- he says that he testifies to all he has written. The "we" presumably refer to the elders of the Johannine community, the converts he had made, who as it were published his Gospel. If so, they would only have know that his witness was true because of the work of the Comforter, the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in their hearts enabling them to discern truth about Him. Alternatively, the "we" would refer to the other disciples, who alone had been with the Lord and John from the beginning of His ministry, and who could testify that John's account was true.

21:25 *And there are many other things which Jesus did, which if each one of them should be written down, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written*- The books written parallel the personal witness made of :24. The Lord had done so much in so many lives, that if each person were to write down their account, then "I suppose" the world could not contain the records. "I suppose" reads strangely as it stands; John is hardly one for using throw away terms such as "I guess...". The Greek literally means 'to make as oneself'. The idea may be that each one in whom the Lord Jesus had done things could write a witness as John had done in his Gospel record; and the world could not contain so many books of witness. But "the world" in John is nearly always the Jewish world; and so often, he alludes back to the prologue. His conclusion of the Gospel is surely a place where he would allude to the prologue. There we read that the Jewish world did not "receive" the testimony or *logos* of the Lord; and "contain" here can also mean "receive" [s.w. "All men cannot receive this saying", Mt. 19:11]. So the idea may be that the Jewish world would in no way receive all the testimonies made. This however would be a rather negative way to end. We have detected allusions to the great commission so often in John. Perhaps the idea is that the world, both the Jewish world and the *kosmos*, could and should be flooded with books of witness from those in whose lives the Lord had done things. For He "did" [s.w. "made"] disciples of men (4:1 s.w.), doing or making people whole (5:15 s.w.). Their 'books' would be like John's book of witness in his Gospel record; but all slightly different. This, then, would be the taking of the Lord Jesus into all the world, by personal witness of what He had done in human lives.



