

The Gospel of John



An Exposition by John Edmiston

Eternity Daily Bible Study
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John 1:1-3

Jesus The Creative Word

John 1:1-3 MKJV *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being.*

Colossians 2:9 MKJV *For in Him (Jesus Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

We know from Genesis that all things were made through the word of God, what John reveals in this chapter is that Jesus is that Word, He is the very Creative Word of God!

Through Jesus Christ: "All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being."

From pineapples to porcupines they all came into being through Jesus.

John carefully rebuts various Gnostic teachings when he tells us that Jesus the Word did not come into existence after God - He was "in the beginning with God", and that He was "with God" and He "was God". Jesus is not an emanation, or an ascended master or an angel or a "creature" of any kind. Rather He is the very creative word of God in personal and bodily form. (Colossians 2:9)

The scriptures emphasize that Jesus and God are identical in nature:

Hebrews 1:1-3 MKJV *God, who at many times and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, (3) who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, through Himself cleansing of our sins, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high,*

John 14:6-10 MKJV *Jesus said to him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by Me. (7) If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. And from now on you know Him and have seen Him. (8) Philip said to Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. (9) Jesus said to him, have I been with you such a long time and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. And how do you say, Show us the Father? (10) Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The Words that I speak to you I do not speak of Myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works.*

Jesus is God, and all things were made through Him and for Him, and He holds all things together. He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15-20) and he helps us to know what God is like (John 1:14-18). When we see Jesus we see the character of God revealed to us in a way we can understand.

[Now the Trinity is a complex topic and I will not tackle it today but refer you out to an article on my website: <http://aibi.gospelcom.net/articles/trinity.htm>]

A God who is exactly like Jesus Christ rules reality. If you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father. A grumpy old man does not run the world on a cloud (which is the image of God I had as a child). A God full of mercy and compassion and grace and truth runs the world.

Thus when you pray you are praying to a God who is like Jesus, to someone who loves you and accepts you and who wants to work all things together for your good.

This is not a split world, a battle between light and darkness. There is only one Creator and one creative process – and that is through Jesus Christ.

So when we are in Christ, we are in the center of God's creative process. We are in the Person who brings all things into existence.

In the beginning of God's creative process everything was chaos, the Hebrew for 'without form and void' is "tohu w' bohu" which is the exact equivalent of helter-skelter or topsy-turvy or in Filipino "halo-halo". That is a world without structure, chaotic, primeval, and confused.

Into that confused mess came the creative Word and He imposed an order on creation that was "good and very good" (Genesis 1). Similarly Christ can come into the confused life of the sinner and bring grace and salvation. Or He can come into the body of the leper and bring wholeness and cleanness. Or He can speak over the grave of Lazarus and bring life.

As God's creative word Jesus comes into the confusion and brings the Kingdom of God and love and peace and joy and creates a Paradise, a Garden of Eden.

Jesus is not just an ancient prophet wearing a beard and sandals He is the creative Word of God through whom all things were made. If you are a Christian then you are "in Him" and you are loved by Him and His immense power is available to you to bless you.

John 1:4,5 Life Was In Him

John 1:4-5 HCSB *Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. (5) That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it.*

There are 39 references to the word "life" in the gospel of John and most of them refer to Jesus being "life" in some way. Here are just five of them:

JESUS IS LIFE

John 5:21 HCSB And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to anyone He wants to.

John 5:26 HCSB For just as the Father has life in Himself, so also He has granted to the Son to have life in Himself.

John 8:12 HCSB Then Jesus spoke to them again: "I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

John 11:25 HCSB Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live.

John 17:2 HCSB For You gave Him authority over all flesh; so He may give eternal life to all You have given Him.

Thus the Word is a living Word, life is in Him, the Word of God is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12), He is not dead and passive like a concept in Greek philosophy.

Jesus is the life of Creation and He is the light of Creation. All true life proceeds from Him and He has the power to give life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has life in Himself – the same sort of self-existence that the Father has and He can give life to others, and those who follow Him do not walk in darkness but rather are granted the “light of life”.

What is this life? Life is the ability to maintain an integrated complex and functional existence and thus to have a continuity of being. Death is to disintegrate, to decay, to longer function, to not continue in an ordered state of being.

Thus Jesus is the source of life and light and progress and integrated complexity, beauty and order. In Genesis He commanded a formless, void and a chaotic world and brought forth that which is very good.

So Jesus is never on the side of darkness, death and decay. He is always on the side of peace, health, order, beauty, life and wisdom. When Jesus encountered leprosy He did not let the disorder and death win, instead Jesus brought about a clean and beautiful restoration.

Mark 1:40-42 MKJV And a leper came to Him, begging Him and kneeling down to Him, and saying to Him, If You will, You can make me clean. (41) And Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, I will; be clean! (42) And He having spoken, the leprosy instantly departed from him and he was cleansed.

Thus darkness, chaos and decay are enemies of God’s purposes on this planet. Jesus shines into this darkness and the darkness cannot comprehend it / overthrow it / seize / possess / overtake it. (The Greek word is “katelaben” and it has this range of meanings).

Whether it be political darkness, moral darkness, criminal darkness, spiritual darkness, or the darkness of ignorance lies and treachery – the light of Jesus is still more powerful.

The darkest place I have ever been in was a small village, in a very remote part of Papua New Guinea. The village was noted for witchcraft and was filled with disease and insanity. Yet for a few days we preached the gospel there and saw some response. There is no place so dark that the light of Jesus cannot shine there. As Corrie Ten Boom said after suffering through Auschwitz, no matter how deep the circumstances, the love of God is deeper still.

“In Him was life and that life was the light of men.” Jesus is not just a general life principle inherent in Creation, which would be close to pantheism; rather He is also a very special revelation to humanity. Jesus is the light that everyone is searching for.

“That life was the light of men” – the light of humankind is not a tremendously insightful concept it is a LIFE, a single human life, the life of Jesus. Just as a husband may say of his wife “she is the light of my life” so Jesus is the light of the life of all humanity.

Without Jesus our lives are gray and dull and dead and without deep meaning, or as the existentialists say: “life is absurd”.

Life becomes meaningful when a person enters it: a parent, a lover, a friend, a spouse, a mentor, or a teacher. Meaning always comes from relationship and ultimate meaning comes from a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Well what does this mean for us? It means that if we want a life that is full of light and life then we should live it by the commands of Jesus Christ, in close relationship with him. You will not get much meaning from achieving or possessing or having power and prestige. I grew up among that sort of stuff and I saw the outcome and the profound mid-life sadness of the very successful.

Secondly it means you should not let chaos rule in your life. You are born-again to new life, to beauty and order and grace, not to chaos and disorder and turmoil. Put Jesus in charge of your life, your business, your family, your finances and watch Him create peace and order and righteousness and light and life.

John 1:6-8

John The Baptist

John 1:6-8 HCSB *There was a man named John who was sent from God. (7) He came as a witness to testify about the light, so that all might believe through him. (8) He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.*

If you have been watching the news about Iraq recently you may have heard about the persecution of the Mandeans – modern-day followers of John the Baptist. In fact in the first century John the Baptist got such a large following among Jews and other folk in the Middle East that quite a bit of the New Testament is spent explaining the connection between the two cousins – John and Jesus. In Acts 19 Paul has to explain the gospel more fully to a group of John’s disciples in Ephesus as the changeover from following John to following Jesus was not as automatic as we may think.

In Matthew 11:11-13 Jesus says that His cousin John was the culmination of the Law and the Prophets and the “greatest of those born of women”. Yet John, despite his greatness “was not the light”, but rather, like all the prophets of old, John ‘bore witness to the Light”. John “prepared the way of the Lord” by helping Jews take the necessary steps of faith so they could be ready to hear the message of Jesus.

“There was a man named John who was sent from God.” Those “sent by God” are apostles (that is what the word apostle means). Apostles are not sent from a nation as an ambassador, or from a company as a representative but directly from God so as to speak on His behalf.

Those sent from God are sent with a particular message to a particular people – just as Jonah was sent to Nineveh with the commission to warn them of impending judgment. Thus John the Baptist was sent to the desert of Judea with the message “repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand” and a purpose “to be the voice crying in the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

John thus prepared the way for Jesus by calling the Jewish people to repentance, so Jesus could call them to faith in Him. The New Testament makes clear that we cannot have biblical faith apart from moral regeneration. The faith of the positive thinkers is not enough. New Testament faith has a direction and that direction is into God, and into His nature.

We cannot remain in sin and truly believe in Jesus, because if we truly believe what Jesus said we will believe what He said about sin and righteousness and repentance.

Believing in Jesus is not just believing that He exists, or that He is loving and nice, or even that He is God, it is also believing what He said and thus obeying His commandments. If Jesus says “do not lay up treasure on earth’ (Matthew 6:19) and we do so then we are not believing what He said.

Believing in Jesus requires stern moral commitment. It is more than a warmed heart; it is a morally changed life. John came as a preacher of righteousness and moral regeneration so that people could be convicted of their sin and turn to God for mercy and a new life in Christ.

The modern debate on grace is often misconstrued. Grace is not God excusing you from all sorts of abhorrent moral behavior, nor is it a free pass into heaven for the unrepentant. Grace is given to make us holy. Grace calls us from wickedness to repentance, grace reveals the way from repentance to faith in Christ, grace grows us from initial faith to deeper sanctification and grace frees and transforms us along the path from sanctification to ultimate glorification.

Grace gives people the chance to become like Jesus. Grace makes the highway of holiness one that is free from condemnation so that we have the courage to travel along it. Grace is not the same as freedom from condemnation, which is only part of the story. We don’t sit down in the road saying: “Wow, I am free from condemnation.” The idea is to keep moving toward Christ-likeness.

It is much easier to tell a convicted and repentant sinner about Jesus, than a complacent and self-satisfied person who is uncaring of the state of his or her soul. So John came to stir people up so that they would care about their souls and seek God.

John came “so that all might believe through him.” He was a prophet who had as his objective - that others would believe in Jesus. Our ministries should be the same – pointing always to the Savior.

“He was not the light, but he came to testify about the light.” No matter how great our intelligence or insight or calling we are not the Light. Only Jesus is the light. Sometimes we make a preacher or teacher or founder of an organization or denomination another “light”. That is wrong, they may give witness to the light, but they are not the light. You can disagree with me and still be wonderfully saved, but you cannot disagree with Jesus and be saved. Jesus is the Truth and I and all other ministers of the gospel merely point to Him.

The Mandaeans need Jesus. They need the Light. No man born of woman can guide us. Only Jesus is the Light of our lives.

John 1:9-13

Receiving Jesus

John 1:9-13 HCSB *The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world was created through Him, yet the world did not recognize Him. (11) He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. (12) But to all who did receive Him, He gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in His name, (13) who were born, not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.*

The fallen world order does not acknowledge or receive Christ and the New Testament, and particularly Paul gives us a variety of reasons such as: own fleshly inclinations, wrong teaching, our fallen nature, the Devil's blinding of the heart, Jewish legalism, cultural and spiritual strongholds, and human ignorance, pride and folly. I have listed some verses on this topic below:

WHY PEOPLE REFUSE TO RECEIVE CHRIST

Romans 8:7 HCSB For the mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit itself to God's law, for it is unable to do so.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 HCSB (18) For to those who are perishing the message of the cross is foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:14 HCSB (14) But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually.

2 Corinthians 3:14 HCSB (14) But their minds were closed. For to this day, at the reading of the old covenant, the same veil remains; it is not lifted, because it is set-aside only in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 HCSB (3) But if, in fact, our gospel is veiled; it is veiled to those who are perishing. (4) Regarding them: the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 HCSB (4) since the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments (5) and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-3 HCSB And you were dead in your trespasses and sins (2) in which you previously walked according to this worldly age, according to the ruler of the atmospheric domain, the spirit now working in the disobedient. (3) We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and by nature we were children under wrath, as the others were also.

Ephesians 4:17-18 HCSB Therefore, I say this and testify in the Lord: You should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their thoughts. (18) They are darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them and because of the hardness of their hearts.

Colossians 1:21 HCSB And you were once alienated and hostile in mind because of your evil actions.

This is a convincing enough lists of verses – some folks are perishing in stubborn unbelief and spiritual blindness. Such people need a lot of patient prayer and witnessing if they ever are to believe. I was an anti-Christian atheist prior to being saved and many thought I could not be saved – but nevertheless God “got me”.

Yet we need to put an end to Pollyanna views such as: “If we just preach the gospel everyone will believe.” If Jesus Himself could not get everyone to believe, even with all the miracles He performed and His wisdom, love and grace - then we need to accept that this is “something fundamental” in humanity. In fact there are almost two types of people “those who are perishing” and “those who are being saved” and it is seems that it is with difficulty that many of those who are perishing find Christ.

One reason that the world does not acknowledge Christ because the “ruler of this world” is the Devil (1 John 5:18,19) and he has absolutely zero intention of letting this world be released into the freedom of the sons of God. (Romans 8:19-25)

Therefore intercession and spiritual warfare must precede evangelism if the Devil’s grip on fallen humanity is to be broken. Much prevailing prayer has preceded every great revival – (see Dr. Stewart Robinson’s excellent review article *Praying the Price of Revival*) and here is a link on Prayer Evangelism:

The natural human mind is not a level playing field. It does not naturally think the thoughts that accompany salvation. It rushes into folly and gossip and pornography and tabloid rubbish and totally ignores, ridicules and dismisses the deep things of God.

Humanism, which almost deifies the natural human intellect, is without a good explanation for the lust, cruelty, evil, folly, and madness of humanity. Humanism can never properly explain Auschwitz or Rwanda or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The world did not acknowledge Jesus, His own received Him not, yet some did believe and He gave them the power to become sons of God. That is the power to be eternal beings of great glory and authority.

The basis of this sonship is being “born of God”, that is a spiritual birth that comes from God, not a literal or physical birth from mankind or the human will (see John 3:1-18). In the new birth we are born as eternal spiritual beings, who are citizens of Heaven (Ephesians 2:19, Philippians 3:20), and are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6, 1:20).

The world can give us all sorts of other powers – the power to earn money or the power to be famous or the power to rule nations, but only Jesus Christ can give us the eternal and holy power that will last forever, the power to become a son of God.

John 1:14-17

Jesus Reveals Grace And Truth To Us

John 1:14-17 HCSB *The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (15) (John testified concerning Him and exclaimed, "This was the One of whom I said, 'The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me.'") (16) Indeed, we have all received grace after grace from His fullness, (17) for although the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

The eternal and pre-existent Word took on flesh and dwelt among us, and when He did He was revealed to be full of grace and truth.

When God walked among men He did not swagger. Nor did He come like some outer-space alien full of wizardry, fire and strange weaponry. God came among us as one full of grace and truth. The Word did not come to dominate – but to serve.

The Word is not so “gracious” - sentimental and forgiving that it lets go of the truth; nor is the Word so “truthful” and blunt that it is unaccompanied by grace. The Word speaks to both the sinner and the sin.

John the Baptist declared: “The One coming after me has surpassed me, because He existed before me.” – this conundrum is solved by his younger cousin Jesus, who started ministry after John, being the incarnation of the eternal and pre-existent Word of God. When we touch Jesus, we touch eternity.

This eternal, pre-existent and glorious creative Word clothed Himself with lungs and arms and flesh and blood. This body was not some “appearance of flesh” like a mystical hologram, rather it was real flesh that was hungered and thirsted and was scourged and crucified and which bled blood and water when pierced.

Jesus reveals what a man looks like when He is fully the Word and what God looks like when He is fully a man.

In our quest for holiness and sanctification we must return to Jesus and to His character and to being “full of grace and truth”. We can easily equate holiness with things other than Christ, grace and truth; even with things such as knowledge, power, eloquence, a winning personality, or time served. One of the less subtle traps in the Christian life is to equate sanctification with moving up a church or mission hierarchy. Instead Jesus teaches us that servanthood is holiness and the greatest in the Kingdom is the person who is full of grace and truth and is the servant of all.

A focus on grace and truth will cause each of us to ask questions such as: Am I increasing in graciousness, kindness and love? Am I increasing in the Truth? Am I honest and above reproach? Do my words come from the Word?

The Law by contrast is not from grace and truth; it simply brings the knowledge of sin and can do no more. The Law cannot help you. The Law is like a man high on a cliff shouting swimming instructions to drowning men and women. On the other hand Jesus is the lifeguard plunging into the surf and dragging them out. What the Law says is true – but everyone dies. What Jesus does is gracious – and is a far deeper Truth.

Plunging into lost and broken humanity is very frightening. It is easy to be scared by the poor, the homeless, the diseased, the demonized, the wicked, and the violent. It is easy to be repelled by the leper, to flee the prostitute, and to condemn the heretical Samaritan.

Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us, and He did not run away from a single needy sinner. We need to ask for the courage and boldness and grace to engage in incarnational ministry in love.

“We have all received grace after grace from His fullness.” - We do not just receive grace once, leading to conversion, rather we receive grace after grace every step of the way to glory.

Grace is the power behind all spiritual growth, and grace proceeds from God through Jesus Christ and is received by faith. Grace comes to those who want it enough to believe in it.

Grace is both God’s kind and forgiving disposition toward us, and the tangible effects of that disposition – miracles, healing, changed lives, deliverance from demons, breaking of curses, blessings abundant. Grace creates the conditions so that peace can prosper – the very shalom of God.

Grace descends to the needy, the humble, and the contrite. The poor in spirit receive great grace, while the proud in spirit receive nothing.

All spiritual growth depends on our ability to receive grace by faith and to put it to work in our lives through faithful obedience. There is no shortage of grace and truth, that is never the problem, Jesus is inexhaustibly full of grace, it is up to us to humble ourselves, to believe, to receive and to obey.

John 1:18

Jesus Reveals God To Us

John 1:18 MKJV *No one has seen God at any time; the Only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.*

Jesus is a complete declaration of what God is like. He is the “exact representation” of His being (Hebrews 1:1-3) and the “fullness of Deity in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9) so that it could be said that Jesus and the Father were one (John 10:30) and those who have seen Jesus have also seen the Father. (John 14:9)

In practical terms that means that God the Father is like Jesus. He is not the grumpy old man sitting on a cloud throwing thunderbolts at sinners. He loves those sinners, has compassion on them, wishes to show them mercy, sends His rain on the just and the unjust, heals them, loves them and sent His Son to die for them.

If God is like Jesus then God is also kind and gracious and God also heals, and God also resurrects.

Is God really the friends of drunkards and sinners? Would God supply wine at a wedding? Would God touch a leper? Surely in Christ He did so.

Sometimes God and Jesus are almost portrayed as opposites – good cop, bad cop style. That is false. If Jesus is a perfect representation of God then there is no inconsistency between the two. They are never opposites. God is not harsh, while Jesus is merciful. Jesus is not kind while God is cruel. Jesus shows us what God is really like – good, kind, accepting, patient and compassionate.

God came in Christ to achieve reconciliation with His Creation; here it is in two versions:

2 Corinthians 5:19 LITV (19) as, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not charging their deviations to them, and having put the Word of reconciliation in us.

2 Corinthians 5:19 HCSB (19) that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

Colossians sees this as a reconciliation involving the whole cosmos:

Colossians 1:18-20 LITV (18) And He is the Head of the body, the assembly, who is the Beginning, the First-born out of the dead, that He be preeminent in all things; (19) because all the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him, (20) and through Him making peace by the blood of His cross, to reconcile all things to Himself; through Him, whether the things on the earth, or the things in the heavens.

So God took on material form, human form, in Christ and reconciled the entire Universe to Himself. Jesus Christ is God’s perfect statement about Himself and His appeal to His Creation to be reconciled with Him. This is the King’s Son, His only Son, in His exact image, His final appeal that we must not reject. (Luke 20:9-18)

In Jesus Christ God walks among us in a human body and tells us all what He is like. God is love. God is relational above all else. God wants us back with Him; God has come to the lost to bring them home.

Since Jesus is the perfect declaration of what God is like then we must take Jesus with utmost seriousness. He is not just a prophet, or a good teacher or a moral man rather He is God revealed to us and we must study to know Him.

Once we realize that Jesus is God revealed to us then all the “funny notions” of Jesus as a Jewish revolutionary, or Jesus as an Essene, and countless others must be dismissed. Jesus was a person of great personal authority (Matthew 7:29) who people followed and obeyed and who could rightly give new commandments (John 13:34) because Jesus Himself was God.

Jesus is the final word about God. The law and the prophets were partial and fragmentary words, but Jesus is the complete package.

Hebrews 1:1-2 MKJV God, who at many times and in many ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, (2) has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds,

What does Jesus tell us about God? That God is a living, compassionate, truthful and gracious Being who is interested in us and in our problems, who will heal a broken arm, rebuke a demon, provide bread, make wine, still a storm, and answer our honest questions.

God is someone who will go to a party and eat with you. He will even invite you to His wedding feast!

John 1:19-27

John the Baptist's Confession

John 1:19-27 ISV *This was John's testimony when the Jews sent priests and Levites to him from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He spoke openly and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) So they asked him, "Well then, are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." (22) Then they said to him, "Who are you? We must give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He replied, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make the way of the Lord straight,'" as the prophet Isaiah said. (24) Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. (25) They asked him, "Why, then, are you baptizing if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?" (26) John answered them, "I am baptizing with water, but among you stands a man whom you do not know, (27) the one who is coming after me, whose sandal straps I am not worthy to untie."*

The Jews expected three major people – the Messiah, Elijah and the Prophet Jeremiah. The Messiah would bring military victory and liberation, Elijah would return from Heaven where he was translated and bring national revival, and apparently Jeremiah was expected to return with the Ark of the Covenant, the pot of manna, Aaron's Rod that budded and the Ten Commandments that he had hidden so the Babylonians would not get them.

These notions came from a very literal ideal of national restoration – back to the time of David and Solomon. This is why John denied being “Elijah” because he was not the Elijah that they expected.

However John was the “Elijah” of God as the angel said to his father Zechariah:

Luke 1:15-17 ISV For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will never drink wine or any strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. (16) He will bring many of Israel's descendants back to the Lord their God. (17) He is the one who will go before the Lord with the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, and to prepare the people to be ready for the Lord."

And as Jesus said of John later on:

Matthew 11:7-14 ISV As they were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (8) Really, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? See, those who wear fancy clothes live in kings' houses. (9) Really, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and even more than a prophet! (10) This is the man, about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' (11) Truly I tell you; among those born of women no one has appeared who is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (12) "From the days of John the Baptist until the present, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people have been attacking it. (13) For the Law and all the Prophets prophesied up to the time of John, (14) and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

John came "in the spirit and the power of Elijah" and brought national revival, but the revival did not take Israel back to the Golden Age of David and Solomon but forwards into grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, and when they refused it – to the judgment of 70 AD.

God is creative and tends always to move forward. We cannot go back to past Golden Ages – the age of chivalry, the age of missions, the Great Awakening, the Reformation, even the early Church. While each of these made very valuable contributions they are now in the past. However God works in the eternal now and brings us forward to His future.

There is no static state of perfection to which we must aspire. The early Church was riddled with racism and slavery. The Reformation saw a lot of Catholics and Anabaptists being drowned or being burned at the stake. The Age of Chivalry was riddled with disease, injustice and very rigid class distinction and the age of Missions was often far too close to the Empires of the time. Good came, even great good, but they were imperfect ages, and we must move on.

In this age we await the completion of the Great Commission, the salvation of the Jews, and the Return of Christ. Yet in some of these things we may be as wrong as the priests were about the Christ, Elijah and the Prophet.

John said "none of the above" – and then described himself as "*the voice of one crying in the wilderness*" a reference to Isaiah 40:3

Isaiah 40:3 MKJV The voice of him who cries in the wilderness, Prepare the way of Jehovah, make straight a highway in the desert for our God.

In other words John was a voice calling for moral change prior to God Himself coming into their midst – in the form of Jesus Christ. John was pointing to one coming after him who was far more worthy than the Baptizer.

Since John was held in very high regard, and all Israel came out to him, then the notion of someone even more worthy was astonishing! It was made even more astonishing by John's statement: John answered them, "*I am baptizing with water, but among you stands a man whom you do not know, (27) the one who is coming after me, whose sandal straps I am not worthy to untie.*"

Duties such as the washing of feet and the untying of sandals were considered so low and demeaning that the religious canons of the day said it could not be performed by a Hebrew slave but only by a foreign born slave:

"If thy brother is become poor, and is sold unto thee, thou shalt not make him do the work of a servant; that is, - any reproachful work; such as to buckle his shoes, or unloose them, or carry his instruments (or necessaries) after him to the bath."

(This says a lot about Jesus – and the foot washing in John 13 as the end of all social distinction).

The Christ was so high and lofty that even a great prophet like John the Baptist “the greatest of those born of women” was unworthy to be even His most lowly servant. Which is why Jesus can say: Luke 17:10 MKJV *So likewise you, when you shall have done all the things commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, for we have done what we ought to do.*

Jesus stood among them but they did not “know” Him. God was unrecognized in the midst of His people.

John 1:28-34

The One Who Baptizes With The Holy Spirit

John 1:28-34 MKJV *These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. (29) The next day John sees Jesus coming to him and says, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is He of whom I said, after me comes a Man who has been before me, for He preceded me. (31) And I did not know Him, but that He be revealed to Israel, therefore I have come baptizing with water. (32) And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and He abode on Him. (33) And I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water, that One said to me, Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon Him, He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. (34) And I saw and bore record that this is the Son of God.*

John speaks of Jesus in the most heavenly of terms:

1. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)
2. The One who has “been before me”. (John 1:30)
3. The One on whom the Spirit rested and abode. (John 1:32,33)
4. The One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. (John 1:33)
5. The Son of God. (John 1:34)

These are not terms that can be applied to any normal person or even to a prophet. The Baptist was a great and mighty prophet, but yet he pointed to Christ as One who was infinitely more worthy than himself. (John 1:27) The prophets could preach repentance from sin – but Jesus would actually take away the sin of the world!

John the evangelist is deliberately making the reader see Christ as both a man and as something far greater than a man. In Hebrew thinking there was a spiritual hierarchy and it probably went thus: Gentiles, Samaritans, women, male Jews, kings, priests, prophets, angels, God. By being greater than the prophets, and obviously not an angel then Jesus is another rank of being – that of the Son of

God. [The article “the” is important as some angels were “sons of God” (see Job 1&2 and Genesis 6) but Jesus is the unique “the” only-begotten Son of God]

The spiritual rank “the Son of God” has the distinction of being one where the Spirit can rest and abide, and which can baptize in the Spirit, whereas the prophet could only baptize in water. The Spirit came upon the prophets and they spoke, but they could not baptize in the Spirit, even Elijah said it was difficult to pass the Spirit to Elisha (2 Kings 2:8-10). On the other hand Jesus could send the Spirit, He could baptize with the Spirit, and make the Spirit come upon others. Thus Jesus is greater than all the prophets and is of entirely another spiritual order.

Jesus was also pre-existent; he “came before” John, in fact even before Abraham! (John 8:56-58). Now Abraham is regarded as the spiritual founder of both Judaism and Islam. But Jesus is the founder of Christianity and existed far before Abraham, as the eternal creative Word of God. It is Christianity that is the truly Ancient Faith!

Christianity is a religion of the Spirit, not the law book. It is faith in one on whom the Spirit abides, faith in One who is familiar with God and is His beloved Son. One who can place the Spirit of God in us and upon us.

For us to be baptized in the Spirit we must first have our sin taken away. Thus Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus removes our sin so He can baptize us with the Holy Spirit so we can dwell in fellowship with God and worship in Spirit and in Truth!

Thus Jesus is both the means of initial saving grace – in that He takes away our sin through His substitutionary atonement; and the means of ongoing salvation and sanctification as He sanctifies us and empowers us through baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Twice John says “I did not know Him”, John did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God except via His relationship with the Holy Spirit: “And I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water, that One said to me, Upon whom you shall see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon Him, He is the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” When God spoke to John the Baptist telling him how to recognize the Messiah – its was by His anointing that He would be known.

In a sense this applies to all ministers of the gospel – it is by our anointing that we are recognized in Heaven – not by our human qualifications. I can imagine the angels saying something like: “He is the one who is compassionate, she is the one who teaches with wisdom, he is the one who heals.”

Christ means anointed one – and “Christian” means “little anointed one”, we are to be Spirit-baptized, anointed, carriers of grace. This can only come about through an intimate relationship with Him who “gives the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34).

John 1:35-37 Directing People To Christ

John 1:35-37 MKJV *Again, the next day afterward, John stood with two of his disciples. (36) And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he says, Behold the Lamb of God! (37) And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

The disciples of John were men who sought religious truth and who wanted to live authentic and penitent lives. John pointed these keen learners to a greater truth, Christ the Lamb of God, so they left

John and followed Jesus. This was the right thing to do. The first duty of the Christian disciple is to learn from God, which is even a higher duty than personal loyalty to a great leader.

Every now and then we find a human leader who inspires us, but we have to remember that such a person is not the end of the story. We may have to move on, to discover new things of our own, to learn things that they cannot teach us or will not teach us. Ultimately we are always following Jesus and learning from God.

My bible college principal Dr. Gibson was such a man, a very wise and great and learned man of God for whom I am forever grateful. He taught me how to mine the Scriptures. Yet he was not the end of my learning curve. The theology I have now is a development, an unfolding, of what was taught back then.

This can be difficult for Christian movements that follow a clear defining leader. Necessary changes can be resisted if they mean going against the historical precedent set by the great one.

But all such leaders, if they are any good, want you to follow Christ and learn from Him. They say, "behold, the Lamb of God" and are happy when you go off to follow Jesus.

You must follow the Truth wherever the Truth leads you.

The earnest disciple hungers for the Kingdom of God far more than for the comfort of tradition or the routines of the organization.

Sometimes the Truth we find can put us at odds with those around us. We move to drink the new wine and they prefer the old. Share your joy tactfully, create a hunger, and feed only the hungry. Do not force-feed the rest.

What about those of us who lead? They need to recognize that all Christian leaders are like John the Baptist, pointing people to Christ. They need to let people move on in their spiritual journey, and follow Christ in the way that He has called them to.

Leaders also need to be hungry disciples and followers of truth themselves. The leader needs to be a learner, and be constantly at the feet of Christ to learn new things about His Kingdom and to receive grace from His throne.

No human leader "owns" his flock, they are on loan from Jesus, and the leader is only an under-shepherd. The sheep are followers of Christ that the leader is caring for; the sheep are not the followers of the leader.

Sheep have feet and will go where they feel they are fed. The two disciples left John for Jesus because they were seeking spiritual food. Therefore a great and high duty of the Christian leader is to provide the food that leads to eternal life.

There comes a time in the life of some pastors when they say "I cannot feed you any more, you need another pastor, I must move on to another church." And there comes a time for the missionary when he says "You are now leaders and you have great men of God among you, it is time I went away. Please go on and learn from God." There comes a time to hand over, to go, to let the sheep be led by someone else.

However such handovers need to be in the Lord's timing. If they are premature the church can collapse, if they are delayed it can be split.

Look at your own life: Are you hungry for the Truth? Are you so ruthless in your search for the kingdom that you would walk away from a great prophet to find someone even greater? Do you have a passionate desire to learn of God?

Look at your own leadership: Are you pointing people to Jesus? Are you feeding the sheep? Are you letting the sheep learn from God?

John 1:38-42

Andrew and Simon Peter Meet Jesus

John 1:38-42 MKJV *Then Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, What do you seek? They said to Him, Rabbi (which is called, being translated, Teacher), where do you live? (39) He says to them, Come and see. They came and saw where He lived, and stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. (40) One of the two who heard John and followed Him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. (41) He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, we have found the Messiah (which is, being translated, the Christ). (42) And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus saw him, He said, you are Simon the son of Jonah; you shall be called Cephas (which translated is, A stone).*

[The readers of John's gospel were obviously Greeks - hence the three "being translated" references in the short passage above.]

Here we see networks of faith in operation. John the Baptist's network starts intersecting with Jesus' network, which in turn grows as people tell each other about the Messiah. One of the keys to successful evangelism is to share the faith with people who are active networkers or who belong to large networks of friends. It is often the "bubbly" attractive student who comes to Christ that leads many fellow students to the Lord! Andrew was such a networker - whenever we see him in action he is introducing people to Jesus.

Another key is the "recommendation". John the Baptist gives the strongest possible recommendation to Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God" and it is on the basis of this recommendation that Andrew and his friend (probably John the apostle) go to meet Jesus. A strong recommendation by a prominent personality can lift a crusade or a church to success.

We also see "hospitality" in action. Jesus accepts two keen young learners into His house, and then meets their friend Simon - who he then names Peter. Jesus eats with people, stays with people and allows them to know Him. He did not just send tracts in the mail; he became personally available as the incarnate Word. The gospel is something more than knowledge; it is a spiritual lifestyle that can be lived out in front of people.

Note that the disciples sought out Jesus, they were keen spiritual learners who had followed John the Baptist out into the wilderness, who had repented of their sins, been baptized and were awaiting the Kingdom of God. These were spiritually prepared for becoming disciples of Jesus and were hungry for the teaching of the Christ.

These were "other-worldly" people, who could go to a friend and say "we have found the Messiah" and not be laughed away. They were not hard-headed pragmatists looking for "the bottom line" or chasing political power, they were heavenly-minded people seeking God - and so they found Jesus.

We need to be a lot more heavenly-minded. We need to be really, really hungry for the things of God and "crazy enough" to go out into the wilderness to hear a prophet - or to go and stay overnight with someone that you think may be the Messiah.

Many want God on an intravenous drip. They want to lie in bed and have spirituality injected into them like Botox. They don't want to bother reading the book, give them the DVD instead!

But God is after seekers, after those who will suffer and pray and groan and travail to know Him. God wants people who will drop their fishing nets, or leave their tax-booths or climb a sycamore tree or yell out embarrassingly in a crowd just to know Him.

There is a terrible, terrible selfishness in much modern spirituality. God is expected to play to market expectations and to "suit" the seeker, to accommodate to their whims and play the music they enjoy and to be convenient about His demands. This is NOT the spirituality of the prophets or of the disciples of Jesus who sold all to pursue the Pearl of Great Price. After all it is us that need to be saved, not God.

Jesus takes one look at Simon and tells him that he will be called Peter - or a "stone". In Matthew he adds "and upon this Rock will I build by Church". Peter was by no means a Rock at this point and until Pentecost Peter would be rash and impulsive, only afterwards finding his strength under the power of the anointing. Jesus sees Peter, as he would be when he was filled with the Holy Spirit, He saw Peter as someone who could be totally filled with God and do amazing miracles and lead His Church.

This is the way God sees people - in terms of their capacity for Himself.

Many pastors can preach a "better sermon" (in technical terms) than Billy Graham but few if any have a greater anointing. It is the anointing that makes the man or woman of God, though the training is also useful and can be taken up by God as part of the person. What matters is our capacity for God and our death to self and our zeal for heavenly things.

Peter made many mistakes, some serious, but he was a "big" person, soft, forgiving and large of heart and knew how to bounce back and restore the relationship. God can do more with a large person who makes a few mistakes than with a small-minded person who never puts a foot wrong.

What is your capacity for God? Are you seriously seeking Him?

John 1:43-51 Nathanael

John 1:43-51 MKJV *The day after, Jesus desired to go forth into Galilee. And He found Philip and said to him, follow Me. (44) Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. (45) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law and the Prophets, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. (46) And Nathanael said to him, Can there be any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip said to him, Come and see. (47) Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him and said of him, Behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile! (48) Nathanael said to Him, From where do You know me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. (49) Nathanael answered and said to Him, Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel! (50) Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these. (51) And He said*

to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Hereafter you shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

What was going on under the fig tree? It seems something was happening in Nathanael's life there that was deep and powerful and spiritual, a private encounter between him and God so that whoever knew about it must be "from above".

Nathanael said to Him, from where do You know me? Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.

One clue is that Nathanael seems to have been a spiritual visionary: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, Hereafter you shall see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."*

So without stretching thing too far Nathanael was perhaps having a vision about the Messiah. In this case Jesus met him "in the spirit" under the fig tree, and later in person after Philip called him.

Visions of Christ are not uncommon; apparently some 40% of conversions of Muslims involve a vision of Jesus. My own conversion involved a vision of God as a gentle light filling the chapel I was in and His voice speaking to me for about twenty minutes.

God reaches out to spiritually sensitive and seeking souls in a huge variety of ways. People have even been converted by a beautiful scent "like roses" suddenly filling the room in a place where there were no flowers.

Spiritual experiences are valuable and are to be treasured but are simply a means of grace, not a sign of spiritual superiority. Some build on their encounter with God, and others do not. King Saul seems to have benefited very little from his prophetic experience. (1 Samuel 10;10,11)

Nathaniel was perhaps a disappointed seeker after the Messiah and cynical about all the false "Messiahs" from Nazareth and Galilee just as many Christians are disillusioned with modern end-time prophets. This is indicated in his statement "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?".

Nathanael was as they say - "from Missouri" – the "show-me state" in the USA so Philip just said "Come and see". Jesus pokes fun at Nathanael's bluntness by saying "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile." In other words, he was truthful and tactless!

So what do we make of Nathanael? He seems to have been an earnest seeker after the Kingdom, a spiritual visionary - but a blunt, tactless and possibly disillusioned one. He is like many today – wanting to believe but tired of the fakes and the nonsense.

When Nathanael does meet the "real thing" and does find the True Messiah his reaction is like that of Thomas after the resurrection: *John 1:49 MKJV* Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!"

This "one huge leap" from deep cynicism to profound faith is precisely what also happened to Thomas. There is a certain type of personality that has either/or faith – either zero or 100% - and for safety sake, to protect their hopes; they tend to choose "zero", right up until the last minute. But when the evidence comes in, they go all the way.

Nathanael is thus the psychological opposite of Peter who seems almost doubt free. Peter jumps out of the boat without a second thought. Nathanael checks the boat for leaks.

The Nathanael's of this world are very useful for tough assignments because once they are convinced they stay convinced. Nathanael stayed the course and was one of the seven who met Jesus on the shore of Galilee after the failed fishing expedition (John 21:2) after the resurrection.

And for those interested in refuting the Da Vinci Code nonsense it was Nathanael who was from Cana and was the most likely bridegroom at the wedding there – not Jesus!

John 2:1-5 Whatever He Says To You...

John 2:1-5 MKJV *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee. And the mother of Jesus was there. (2) And Jesus and His disciples were both invited to the marriage. (3) And when they lacked wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, They have no wine. (4) Jesus said to her, Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come. (5) His mother said to the servants, Whatever He says to you, do it.*

Nathanael, who has just been introduced to Jesus in chapter 1 was from Cana (see John 21:2), so this wedding may have been his – or a friend of his, or even a friend of Mary the mother of Jesus because it is mentioned “the mother of Jesus was there.” Contrary to much modern speculation there is absolutely no evidence that this was the wedding of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. I think the way the narrative moves from introducing someone from Cana, to a wedding at Cana is a big hint that we are dealing with the same person or his family – Nathanael.

Putting such controversies aside, it was a big wedding and all and sundry, Jesus and the disciples were invited, the wine ran out and Mary asks Jesus to do a miracle – much to His exasperation. After Jesus' mild rebuke Mary backs off and leaves it up to Jesus with the immortal words: “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Thus leaving it open for Jesus to do anything at all.

What did Jesus mean by “My time has not yet come” – probably that it was not yet time for His Messiah-ship to be made plain through signs and wonders. Miracles of provision such as that of the five thousand and here with the wine have a huge impact and can attract “rice Christians” that follow for an easy way to have a full stomach. Jesus did not want those sort of followers at this stage, when He was seeking out His core disciples.

Mary's statement is good advice for all Christians: “Whatever Jesus says to you - do it.” Even if that is going to the mission field, or marrying a certain person, or taking a certain job – then do it.

As simple as this sound, doing what Jesus says raises a host of questions such as:

1. How do I know it was Jesus?

The voice is probably that of Jesus if it is loving and holy, if it lines up with Scripture and with your previous experience of the voice of the Holy Spirit. It is sometimes described as being “clean”, pure, light/positive and specific. God's voice is patient and never “hurries” or urges in a “compulsive” fashion though it may indicate to do something straight away. The mind is left open, and clear and in a highly aware state. There is often a “ring of truth” about it.

2. How do I know it was not the Devil or my own flesh or my own mind?

God protects us from spiritual deception (Luke 11:11-13) and we can soon learn to tell when it is the Devil (lust, pride, accusation, snares), or the flesh (sex, money, power, worldly desires) or our own minds (often concerned with our own goals and importance). The Devil's voice is often accusing, vague, confusing, dark, urgent, hasty, impulsive and compulsive and demanding instant irrational action. The mind is disabled and overpowered.

3. Does Jesus still tell people to do things today?

Yes Jesus still speaks to people today via the Holy Spirit who He has given to us as our Comforter and teacher (see John 14:26, 1 John 2:20,27, Acts chapters 8,10,13:1-3 etc).

If in doubt, TAKE TIME, think clearly, check the Scriptures, seek counsel from a wise spiritual leader – or even a few such people. Never hastily rush into something on the basis of an impression.

God's leadings often lead to miracles – like the one in Cana or the Ethiopian eunuch. God's holy nudges can have big consequences such as the time the Lord said to pack a certain black sweater when I went to camp – and it led to the conversion of five young people.

We need to wait in a state of “utter abandonment” on Him saying “Lord have your way, whenever, however.” This is very hard for the natural, logical impatient mind. Yet it is very necessary. We need to let God be God, just as Mary had to let Jesus be Jesus and stop trying to pressure Him. So on “major issues” take the matter to God in prayer then simply carry out your normal daily duties and wait for Jesus to speak.

Write down your thoughts in a journal. Let grace infuse you. Don't harass God and hurry God and get stressed out and impatient, Daniel had to wait 21 days in a fasting mode to get his answer (see Daniel 10). Try and remain in that frame of mind that is obedient and supple and open to grace. Don't try and twist God's arm or force Him into a preconceived notion. Let Him speak – then do exactly what He says.

John 2:6-11 Water Into Wine

John 2:6-11 MKJV *And there were six stone waterpots there, according to the purification of the Jews, each containing two or three measures. (7) Jesus said to them, fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. (8) And He said to them, now draw out and carry it to the master of the feast. And they carried it. (9) When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water which was made wine (and did not know where it was from, but the servants who drew the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. (10) And he said to him, every man at the beginning sets forth good wine, and when men have drunk well, then that which is worse. You have kept the good wine until now. (11) This beginning of miracles Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. And it revealed His glory. And His disciples believed on Him.*

In Australia we have a mournful bush ballad by Slim Dusty called “The Pub With No Beer” - which goes “there is nothing so lonesome and nothing so drear, as to stand at the bar of the pub with no beer” (or something like that). Running out of alcohol is a social disaster – especially on a festive occasion. It is not life threatening but it robs the joy from the occasion. Jesus enters into this wedding crisis simply to bring joy when everything was “lonesome and drear”.

This miracle is celebrated as part of the “Feast of Epiphany” (around January 6th) in the traditional church calendar and was in the news recently when some stone waterpots similar to these were discovered at one of the likely locations of Cana of Galilee.

The stone waterpots did not absorb their contents like clay pots did so there was no chance of contamination or mixing, thus they were ritually clean and used for purification. Their actual volume is uncertain but was between 12-25 gallons each. About the same as a “beer keg” I believe! So we can think of this as 6 beer kegs of wine. That is a LOT by anyone’s counting and to the wine steward it was “good wine”, which should not be surprising for Jesus did ‘all things well

The point of the miracle at Cana is that Jesus began to exercise His powers and did so in beautiful and good ways that caused people to believe. This is Jesus showing His glory! (Verse 11)

Jesus did not show His glory by arriving in a gold carriage with three hundred bodyguards. Rather He showed His glory by providing the drinks at a poor man’s wedding and saving the face and the honor of an average Galilean peasant. Jesus did not come to be admired in pomp and circumstance, or to be served; rather He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:25-28 MKJV But Jesus called them and said, You know that the rulers of the nations exercise dominion over them, and they who are great exercise authority over them. (26) However, it shall not be so among you. But whoever desires to be great among you, let him be your servant. (27) And whoever desires to be chief among you, let him be your servant; (28) even as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

If Jesus is interested in the problems of a humble Galilean peasant wedding then He is interested in our problems as well. If Jesus “bothers” with Samaritans and lepers, then He will “bother” with us as well. If Jesus wants joy at a wedding in Cana then He wants joy everywhere. Jesus is not a party-poopng Pharisee but a giver of the good and abundant life!

The wedding at Cana puts the lie to the central notions of that grim and joyless and serious bondage that is religious conformity. Jesus did not declare His glory at the wedding by reciting the book of Jeremiah from memory or by delivering a sermon. He showed His glory by miraculously providing the drinks!

Christianity that is strained, serious, bug-eyed and joyless is “off”. Something has gone very wrong if joy and fun and peace and kindness and warmth are absent.

We often see Jesus attending parties in the gospel, to the extent that He was even accused of being a glutton and a drunkard.

Matthew 11:18-19 MKJV For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He has a demon. (19) The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man who is a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But her children justified wisdom.

[In this context “eating” = eating meat, and “drinking” = drinking wine, thus Jesus was not a vegetarian or a teetotaler – though John the Baptist was, due to his Nazarite vow (Luke 1:15).]

Jesus miraculously brought joy into humble ordinary circumstances and thus declared His glory. In doing so He also declared the nature of His New Covenant and the end of strenuous, joyless, conformity to religious expectations.

There are many lessons and analogies here as well such as:

- John the Baptist came with the water of repentance, but Jesus comes with New Wine of the Holy Spirit.
- To experience God's grace we need to be obedient and "fill the waterpots" first.
- Jesus provides the best; God's provisions partake of His excellence.
- Jesus is the giver of joy and our social situations are important to Him.
- Jesus does not just do "religious stuff" He can do very ordinary things as well that help people to live well.

John 2:12-17 The Cleansing of the Temple

John 2:12-17 MKJV *After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples. And they did not stay there many days. (13) And the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers sitting. (15) And when He had made a scourge of small cords, He drove them all out of the temple, also the sheep and the oxen. And He poured out the moneychangers' money and overthrew the tables. (16) And He said to those who sold doves, Take these things away from here. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise. (17) And His disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of Your house has eaten Me up."*

"Take these things away from here. Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise." The New Testament makes clear that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Matt 6:24) and godliness is not a matter of "much gain" in the financial sense (1 Timothy 6:5-10).

The commands of Jesus are very anti-materialistic *"Do not worry about what you shall eat or drink."* *"Do not store up treasure on earth"* *"You cannot serve both God and Mammon"* *"Beware of all kinds of greed"* and so on. No materialistic person can fully enjoy the Kingdom of God. In fact materialism is flat-out disobedience.

The traders in the Temple were opportunists, using the fact that people from out of town could not readily bring a bull or a sheep with them to worship, so they sold often diseased animals (see Malachi 1) at outrageous prices for sacrifices. The corruption it introduced defiled the priesthood and especially the High Priests whose greed was so rampant that they would send out armed gangs to collect tithes by force – especially from the Greek-speaking Jews.

The Temple had become the most greedy, dishonest and corrupt place in all of Israel – and Jesus had to cleanse it, but He did so gently but firmly, with a whip of small cords that did nothing more than sting. It was probably His moral force that really carried the day.

Christians are to be zealous for the things of God and should protect them from defilement and commercialization. And they are to act with scrupulous honesty when dealing with finances in the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately embezzlement by church officials is very common and according to one source exceeds \$16 billion – (yes billion with a "b") per year.

Not only does such embezzlement of church funds hinder the work of God, it also defiles those involved in it and brings disrepute on the name of the Lord. God's view of Christian financial dishonesty and lying can be seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira who were struck dead (Acts 5:1-11). Christians involved in such financial dishonesty should repent, confess and restore the funds.

On a deeper level the Temple can be taken as a symbol of the Inner Temple of the Christian – the spirit. Because God the Holy Spirit dwells in us and is one with the Christians spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17) we are not to defile our spirit through greed, which is idolatry (Ephesians 5:3-5) or through immorality (1 Corinthians 6:19).

God wants us to be a “house of prayer” inwardly and to honor God in our deepest thoughts. However materialism sets up a rival temple to Mammon and is idolatrous and Jesus will scourge and discipline you until you repent of it (Hebrews 12).

Materialism in the heart often appears as envy or as a questioning of the justice of God, which we expect to be delivered in material form e.g. “why is that pastor driving a brand new car while I drive an old bomb when my theology is better”. As the parable of the laborers makes clear we are not to envy another person because God has been generous to them. (Matthew 20:1-16)

Our spirit is not to be a “house of merchandise”, an inner world of wheeling and dealing and trading and unethical opportunism, rather it should be a holy place of love and purity where the things of God receive priority.

The key to this is the same as it was for Jesus “zeal for My Father's house”. If we are passionate about God and His honor then we will readily remove these spiritual obstacles. Zeal is spiritual energy for spiritual things. It is not just for missionaries and new Christians but is to be a characteristic of all Christians (Galatians 4:18, Titus 2:14, 1 Corinthians 12:31, Revelation 3:19) In the Revelation reference zeal is the correct antidote to the Laodecian's lukewarm and materialistic faith.

Progress in life is not measured in cars and houses and lands and titles or by dollars in the bank. Progress in life is simply progress in Christ.

For many of us there is a need to repent, and to be holy and cleanse ourselves from all materialistic greed, covetousness and envy and to develop a true zeal for the things of God in that holy place, which is our spirit.

John 2:18-22

The True Sanctuary

John 2:18-22 MKJV *Then the Jews answered and said to Him, What sign do you show us, since you do these things? (19) Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. (20) Then the Jews said, this temple was forty-six years building, and will you rear it up in three days? (21) But He spoke of the temple of His body. (22) Therefore when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

I have a sneaking suspicion that when the Temple is rebuilt – it will be done in three days! That aside, the clear reference of this passage is to the resurrection and to the divinity of Christ and to His relationship to his body.

Jesus' body was very important to God. God made sure that Christ was conceived of a virgin, and that no bone of His body was broken, and God raised Christ's body from the dead and also made Jesus ascend physically to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God.

Jesus body is also important to our salvation - His blood was poured out for our sins and His rent flesh opened the way to Heaven.

This tremendous importance of the physical human flesh of Jesus is truly startling. It says the body is redeemable, and resurrect-able and confirms what Genesis implies – that our flesh was always made to be dwelling place of God. It is a huge slap in the face to Gnosticism and to the idea of human flesh as evil and to the notion that all true spirituality is wholly mental and ethereal.

Hebrews gives us a big clue when it equates the flesh of Christ with the curtain of the Temple:
Hebrews 10:20 HCSB *By the new and living way that He has inaugurated for us, through the curtain (that is, His flesh);*

Hebrews also tells us three more important things about the flesh of Christ:

The incarnation was necessary to defeat Satan:

Hebrews 2:14-15 HCSB *Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, He also shared in these, so that through His death He might destroy the one holding the power of death--that is, the Devil-- (15) and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.*

The body of Jesus was carefully prepared by God to do His will:

Hebrews 10:5-7 HCSB *Therefore, as He was coming into the world, He said: You did not want sacrifice and offering, but You prepared a body for Me. (6) You did not delight in whole burnt offerings and sin offerings. (7) Then I said, "See, I have come--it is written about Me in the volume of the scroll-- to do Your will, O God!"*

Christ's offering on the cross sanctifies believers once for all time (and does not need to be repeated):
Hebrews 10:10 HCSB *By this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.*

Thus the body of Christ is the summation and perfection of the Temple ceremonies, his flesh is the veil into the Holy of Holies and His body and blood satisfy for the atonement of sins and provide a way to God and entrance into newness of life and victorious Christian living.

The blood of Jesus Christ is also a cleaning agent for the human spirit and conscience:

Hebrews 9:13-14 HCSB *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who are defiled, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, (14) how much more will the blood of the Messiah, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?*

1 John 1:7 HCSB *But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

Christ's body was the True Temple and the Temple is where God dwells.

Colossians 2:9 HCSB *For in Him the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily,*

2 Corinthians 5:19 MKJV *(19) Whereas God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and putting the word of reconciliation in us.*

Thus God, in His great holiness, does not refuse to dwell in human flesh. Therefore your body, cleansed by the blood of Jesus is acceptable as a dwelling place of God. Your body is also a temple, a sacred site that must be treated reverently:

1 Corinthians 6:17-20 MKJV (17) But he being joined to the Lord is one spirit. (18) Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit in you, whom you have of God? And you are not your own, (20) for you are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

So lets sum this up:

1. Christ's body was a temple – a place where God dwelt. In fact it was the True Temple.
2. Christ's flesh was equivalent to the Temple veil and when His body was pierced the Temple veil was torn in two from top to bottom.
3. God dwelt in Christ's physical body, raised it from the dead and He physically ascended into Heaven and the Son of God still dwells physically in a resurrected body as the fullness of Godhead in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).
4. Thus the human body is not intrinsically evil but can be redeemed, resurrected, transformed and brought to heaven. In fact the human body is supposed to be the dwelling place of God.
5. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, a sacred site, to be treated with reverence and not to be defiled through sexual immorality.

John 2:23-25 The Aloofness of Jesus

John 2:23-25 MKJV *And as He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, at the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the miracles which He did. (24) But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all (25) and did not need that anyone should testify of man. For He knew what was in man.*

Jesus is aloof from the mass of the people at the Passover, they believed in Jesus but Jesus did not believe in them – because He knew they would crucify Him in the end. Thus Jesus tells us not to trust in unregenerate human nature, it will always let us down.

Jesus knew what was in fallen humanity so fully and so completely that He did not need anyone to tell Him about human nature - because He "knew all". And what did He say is inside us prior to Christ? It is not a pretty picture:

Mark 7:20-23 MKJV And He said, That which comes out of the man is what defiles the man. (21) For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, (22) thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: (23) All these evil things pass out from inside and defile the man.

Jeremiah 17:9 MKJV The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

Ecclesiastes 9:3 HCSB This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: there is one fate for everyone. In addition, the hearts of people are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live--after that they go to the dead.

The average “Joe Smith” is thoroughly self-centered and runs their life inwardly writing a story with themselves as the center of all things – with the selfish trinity of “I myself and me” starring as mini-gods and super-heroes.

Now, even in the Old Testament there is also an opposing picture – that of the renewed heart, the faithful heart, the heart after God and so on, but it is a much rarer picture.

Non-Christians may do many good things and even approve of spiritual things, however it is woven into their self-congratulating story. Repentance is giving up one’s self-deceit and sin and madness and folly and becoming God-congratulating instead.

What goes on in our heads is not harmless. The fantasies of money, sex or power, the plots of revenge, the desire to kill, the envy of the rich and famous, and the scheming to attain that which is not rightfully ours, the love of comfort and luxury and the careless disregard of others, elitism, pride, superiority, covetousness, these all are things far from the truth of the gospel.

Our inner world is not serene and consistent – in fact it is a right bird’s nest of beliefs we have picked up over the years, of desires and plans and vows and opinions that the Bible calls “the thoughts and intents of the heart”. Along with our good intentions are some bad intentions and angry intentions and so forth. Most people can happily have one belief system on Sunday and another at work on Monday morning.

The ability to operate in two contradictory belief systems is what James calls “double-mindedness”. (James 1:5-8) This double-mindedness is always rebuked by the prophets from Joshua’s “choose which day who you will serve” (Joshua 24:15) to Elijah’s “how long will you falter between two opinions” (1Kings 18:21) to Jesus and “you cannot serve God and Mammon” (Matthew 6:21-24) to James and his exhortations against double-mindedness and worldliness. (James 1:5-8; 4:1-7).

Jesus knew all this and still loved us! Jesus knew about our most disgusting, vile, mean and covetous and treacherous thoughts and still died for us! Jesus did not say because you deserve I would be kind to you! No, he said because I know your need of a Savior I will die for you!

Jesus knows all your stuff! He knows the websites you visit, the foolishness you think, the fantasies you have, and the dreams that fill your mind. He still loves you just as you are but He sure wants to clean up the junk that is in your head and in your heart. The article I out at the start of today’s devotional can really help you with that as can the entire Biblical EQ ebook you can download at (it is free).

The Holy Spirit wants to get into the closet and throw out the non-God belief system/s that are there. He will throw out materialism, he will jettison all pornography, and He will rewire your ambitions and rework your ideas of success and of leadership to more biblical models.

If you want God to trust you then you have to allow Him to clean up your inner world. Jesus stood aloof from the unregenerate human heart but He is close to those whose hearts are purified by the blood of Christ – for the pure in heart shall see and behold God. (Matthew 5:8)

John 3:1-8

Born-Again Of The Spirit

John 3:1-8 HCSB *There was a man from the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (2) This man came to Him at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher, for no one could perform these signs You do unless God were with him." (3) Jesus replied, "I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (4) "But how can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked Him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (5) Jesus answered, "I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (6) Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. (8) The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."*

Nicodemus, the “teacher of all Israel” realized that he did not have what Jesus had and that the spirituality of Jesus was of a kind totally other to all Nicodemus’ devotion, to all his book learning, and to all his discipline and rigor. The miracles were astonishing and the teaching was deep. This was clearly “something else” and it was good. Nicodemus was a human being but Jesus was a human being who was also a spiritual being.

Nicodemus wants some deep personal teaching from Jesus. He comes humbly, though secretly, and admits that He sees Jesus as being from God. Nicodemus is clearly there to learn and not to argue. So Jesus immediately goes for a mind-stretching concept for his talented but very literal (Pharisee) pupil – the idea of being “born-again”.

Nicodemus protests at the concept and the Master-Pupil Socratic dialogue begins. Jesus makes it very clear that flesh and spirit are entirely different levels of being: “Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

The Kingdom of God is spiritual so to dwell in it Nicodemus needs to be born into the spiritual level of existence: *"I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

He even repeats it turning it around and adding extra meaning: "I assure you: Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." The ‘water and Spirit addition indicating that is not only water baptism as a ritual that saves, but it must be accompanied by real spiritual transformation that comes from true repentance and grace received through faith.

So we are not Christians by joining a club or listening to Christian music or wearing a Christian T-Shirt. You cannot join Christianity the same way you can join a golf club! You have to actually experience a deep transformational inner moral and spiritual change that makes you an eternal creature made in the image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The caterpillar must become a butterfly before it can join the flying school!

Now being “born-again” has, in some circles been equated with “had a warm fuzzy spiritual experience”. This notion does not square with Scripture. Being born-again is a moral and spiritual experience, which may or may not be emotional. There is no mention of Nicodemus doing handstands!

However we can expect born-again folk to be quite puzzling and a bit different: “The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

Spiritual people operate on another plane of existence. The apostles are good examples of this – traveling the Roman world and following God’s leadings, but always profitably and not haphazardly.

The apostle may seem quite bizarre when compared to the trader or the politician but they are working God’s plan with a keen vision for God’s glory. Sometimes spiritual folk ignore what seems like a “big opportunity” to focus on a single person such as the Ethiopian eunuch, or they stay with an outcast on the edge of town like Simon the Tanner. Or like Jesus they seem to wait until its too late and Lazarus has passed away – only to bring him up from the grave.

Born-again folk may be misunderstood, or even be accused of fanaticism; however being born-again is the only way into the Kingdom of God. To be born-again you must be willing to let go of living merely on the earthly human plane of your own will and ideas and notions and desire a moral and spiritual existence as a God-indwelt human. You must realize that no matter how smart and moral and spiritual you are - you “just don’t have it” in yourself, that you are missing something important and that you need whatever it is that Jesus has got. That is the point that Nicodemus came to – and that is the point you need to come to as well.

John 3:9-18 Everlasting Life

John 3:9-18 MKJV *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, How can these things be? (10) Jesus answered and said to him, Are you the teacher of Israel and do not know these things? (11) Truly, truly, I say to you, We speak what we know and testify what we have seen. And you do not receive our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (13) And no one has ascended up to Heaven except He who came down from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven. (14) But even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (16) For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him. (18) He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.*

Nicodemus is perplexed by the new birth. So Jesus explains that Heaven and Earth are only connected via the “*Son of Man who is in Heaven*” (verse 13). Jesus is the connection because He can descend from Heaven, and He can ascend into Heaven, and He is in fact always “in Heaven” and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand wherever Jesus is. So Jesus is the God-Man, who is at home both on earth and in heaven.

Jesus alone of all human beings possessed this dual quality so Jesus alone is able to speak with authority about spiritual things and answer the question of Nicodemus. Jesus is able to testify about Heavenly things because He has been there and seen them: *Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak what we know and testify what we have seen. And you do not receive our witness. (12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how shall you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*

Jesus is unique - there are no other “avatars” or “gurus” who have the same God-Man quality: “*And no one has ascended up to Heaven except He who came down from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven.*”

Because Jesus is unique in this way He is the sole source of salvation. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and no one can come to the Father except via Him (John 14:6) and there is no other name under Heaven by which men must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

Since He is the only God-Man, the only “begotten Son” of God, the only bridge between earth and heaven then it is Jesus who must do the work of salvation: *“But even as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

On the cross Jesus was literally *“lifted up between Heaven and earth”* to be an intermediary, and to atone for sin. Jesus did this to open a way for believers to possess eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world to help it to connect to Heaven, and to bring believers into the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is only mediator between God and Man – Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5) and He gives us eternal life through faith in His Name.

The following verses are among the best known in Scripture: *(16) For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.*

That they may not perish - those outside of Heaven perish, because only Heaven is truly eternal. Outside of Heaven everything simply decays and perishes forever.

If you think about it there are only two alternatives to eternal life. They are: a) something that is eternal – but which is not “life”, that is eternal death or b) to be life but not be eternal, that is to have a temporary life in some way. So the three options are eternal life, eternal death, or temporary life. Both the latter options can be classified as “perishing”. They are truly dreadful alternatives.

God displays His love in sending His only-begotten Son to die on the cross so that we might be spared from these truly dreadful alternatives and be saved. God wants us with Him, in Heaven, sharing His eternal life.

Because humanity is naturally disconnected from Heaven it is “condemned already” – that is humanity is naturally outside the realm where grace operates in eternal and beautiful ways. If you are outside of grace - then you are in judgment; and given that we are all sinners that means humanity is condemned already. Jesus put it this way: He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

Believing removes us from condemnation, connects us to Heaven and we receive grace and enter into eternal life. In fact we immediately become citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:20) and are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. *Ephesians 2:6 HCSB He also raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavens, in Christ Jesus,*

“He who believes on Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already,” There is no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1) so God is always benevolent and good toward you though He may chastise you from time to time (Hebrews 12:5-13). But for those who choose not to believe, the future is bleak.

John 3:19-21

Reactions To The Light

John 3:19-21 HCSB *"This, then, is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. (20) For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed. (21) But anyone who lives by the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be shown to be accomplished by God."*

The light has two possible reactions: fear and scurrying away like cockroaches, or attraction to the light - like moths.

Evil people run from the light of God, they dwell in moral darkness, extinguishing even the light of conscience, and sometimes they even dwell in physical darkness as well, in graveyards and dim back alleys. "For everyone who practices wicked things hates the light and avoids it, so that his deeds may not be exposed."

Evil reacts against exposure because exposure could bring judgment. Exposure could face them up to themselves, to their shame and to their punishment and to what they have done – which they hide even from themselves.

But quite ordinary people also avoid God's light as well because they do not want to change. They do not want to be probed by God. They do not want certain matters brought up or certain attitudes changed, and they fear pastors and counsellors and all those who ask awkward questions about the state of their souls.

Living by the truth is very hard. It takes real courage to come into the light and talk face-to-face with the God who does not condemn us. There are two bible verses that are very important in this regard:

Romans 8:1-2 HCSB *Therefore, no condemnation now exists for those in Christ Jesus, (2) because the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.*

1 John 4:16-18 HCSB *And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. (17) In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; for we are as He is in this world. (18) There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love.*

Romans 8:1,2 tells us that we are without condemnation if we are in Christ and 1 John 4:16-18 tells us that God is fundamentally love and that we do not need to be terrified that He will punish us on the day of judgment.

So when we face a miniature "Day of Judgment" and look into our life and actions we can do so honestly, without fear of condemnation or punishment. We can look at our mess dispassionately as a surgeon looks at an open wound. We can let God deal with it, without feeling condemned, any more that we would by dealing with a medical problem.

The ability to confidently come into God's light and let Him deal with our sin, and folly and pride and waywardness is at the very heart of sanctification:

1 John 1:4-10 HCSB *We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (5) Now this is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. (6) If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and walk in darkness, we are lying*

and are not practicing the truth. (7) But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say, "We have no sin," we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say, "We have not sinned," we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Denial “*makes God a liar*”, so covering up sin is a serious sin itself. We have to be open with God; we cannot have fellowship with Him, and run away from being open and honest with Him about our faults. We need to be honest with Him just as we would be honest with a good psychiatrist who was trying to cure us. If we ‘fess up – that is confess our sins, in an open and light-filled relationship with God, we do not condemned as we feared, instead we get the forgiveness and cleansing we truly need.

As we do this it becomes obvious that God is changing us. Our deeds are no longer our deeds - but become the deeds of God working in us. Our ministry becomes “wrought by God”. We stop battling to hold on to a crucified and dying old nature, instead we eagerly embrace the new nature, and the indwelling Christ.

In the light we are eager to say “these are not my works – they are the works of Jesus in me” and “these are not my fruits, they are the fruits of the Holy Spirit in my life”. We become connected to the vine and we abide in it and we bear much fruit. Honesty before God keeps us in the light and connected to the vine so do not fear little flock for God is gentle with the contrite in heart!

Psalms 34:18 MKJV Jehovah is near to the broken-hearted; and saves those who are of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17 MKJV The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Isaiah 57:15-18 MKJV For so says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity; whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, even with the contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (16) For I will not contend forever, nor will I be always angry; for the spirit should fail before Me, and the souls I have made. (17) For the iniquity of his covetousness I was angry and struck him; I hid Myself, and was angry, and he went on turning away in the way of his heart. (18) I have seen his ways, and will heal him. I will also lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners.

Isaiah 66:2 MKJV For all those My hand has made, and all those exist, says Jehovah. But to this one I will look, to the afflicted and contrite spirit, and the one who trembles at My Word.

John 3:22-30

He Must Increase, But I Must Decrease

John 3:22-30 MKJV *After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea. And He stayed there with them and baptized. (23) And John was also baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. And they came and were baptized. (24) For John had not yet been cast into prison. (25) Then a question from John's disciples arose with the Jews about purification. (26) And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, He who was with you beyond Jordan, to whom you bore witness, behold, He baptizes, and all come to Him! (27) And John answered and said, A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from Heaven. (28) You yourselves bear witness to me*

that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before Him. (29) He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Then my joy is fulfilled. (30) He must increase, but I must decrease.

Ministry transition is tough. When missionaries hand over to the new national church, or a pastor retires and hands over to a successor or when the ministry moves to a new CEO – it is tough. It is easy enough to say that Jesus must increase and I must decrease – lets hope that resolution came at conversion or soon after! But its tough to say Jim or Jane or Frederick must increase and I must decrease. It is difficult to let your success and your disciples go to another. But it is a sign of great maturity when it is done properly.

John the Baptist read the anointing on Jesus and knew that Jesus was the greater man. In fact that he was unworthy to untie the latch of Jesus' sandal. He knew that the sheep would follow the leader that most met their needs and Jesus could meet them in a far deeper way than he could.

John the Baptist mentally positioned himself correctly as "the friend of the bridegroom" – this eased the transition, retained some significance and dignity, and allowed him to let Jesus take His proper starring role as the Messiah.

John stands in complete contrast to all-too-common ecclesiastical envy and jealousy. He does not call Jesus a "sheep-stealer" but rejoices in His success. John actually had his joy "fulfilled" by seeing Jesus' success. John was more concerned about being a good player on God's Team than with his individual success.

Key to this is a phrase tucked away in the middle of today's passage: "A man can receive nothing unless it is given to him from Heaven." This is a common gospel thought and Jesus even says something like it to Pontius Pilate: *John 19:11 MKJV Jesus answered, You could have no authority against Me unless it were given to you from above. Therefore he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.*

In other words Heaven determines the course of our lives and our ministries, our level of success and our level of authority. Paul even says that of the human authorities in Rome: *Romans 13:1 MKJV Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities. For there is no authority but of God; the authorities that exist are ordained by God.*

The pastor down the road gets his ministry and power and authority and larger congregation – from God. Therefore envy, jealousy and backbiting are utterly fleshly and inappropriate.

Galatians 5:15 MKJV But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

Our own sense of fairness tells us that it is wrong for so-and-so to be better off than I am. But underneath this sense of fairness lurk other things such as bitterness, envy and jealousy – sins that held Simon magus had when he tried to buy the anointing of the apostles (Acts 8).

Freedom from envy is a sign of spiritual greatness. In early 1997 my website Eternity Online Magazine was doing well and I began to see 1 million readers a week – online and offline, through article reprints in print publications and on radio etc. When I (perhaps foolishly) shared this only one other pastor congratulated me on this – the rest looked askance. That man who rejoiced and said "that is the best thing I have heard in a long while" was a true Christian gentleman.

Let us be team players on God's team, let's work together and rejoice in one another's success as coming from God. Let's not envy what God in His goodness gives to another.

Ministry can seem insignificant. So we cling to status symbols – titles, church attendance numbers, offerings, TV appearances, books, disciples and diplomas to boost our feelings. When these are threatened what little fragile status we have in this world seems to be taken away and carnal reactions may result.

The thing is – if we survive the test, we may well be rewarded as a good and faithful servant. Remember God wants to bless you!

John 3:31-36

He Who Comes From Above Is Above All

John 3:31-36 MKJV *He who comes from above is above all; he who is from the earth is earthly and speaks from the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all, (32) and what He has seen and heard, that He testifies, and no one receives His testimony. (33) He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true. (34) For He whom God has sent speaks the Words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. (35) The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand. (36) He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him.*

The testimony of Jesus is the testimony of Heaven and when someone believes it they are thereby testifying that God is true. We have to believe in the God that is revealed in Christ.

One of the greatest of all questions is – do you really believe what God says? Do you really believe who God is? Do you trust God? Do you grasp the goodness of God and really believe that He is working all things together for your good? Do you really trust God, not just a god of your imagination but the God that is revealed in Christ?

Yesterday I was writing an article on faith and I ended up defining it thus: *True saving faith involves entering into a trusting dialogue with the Creator God as revealed in the person, life and ministry of Jesus Christ so that the character and power and promises of God enter our daily lives and transform them in specific loving, good and hopeful ways including but not limited to, our eternal salvation.*

By this I mean that we need to trust Jesus for our salvation and also for our daily bread, for spiritual growth, and also for help in time of trouble. The people who Jesus commended for their faith often believed for something tangible and practical such as a healed son (the centurion) or a delivered daughter (the Syrophenician woman). We have to grab hold of the testimony of Jesus and really believe it in both its temporal and eternal meanings.

John says that this kind of faith, the faith that really receives and believes the heavenly testimony of Jesus, is quite rare: *“and what He has seen and heard, that He testifies, and no one receives His testimony.”* Out of the whole Jewish nation of around 3 million plus (perhaps as many as eight million if the Diaspora is included) only 120 were gathered in the Upper Room at Pentecost and perhaps 20,000 were involved at the height of the Jerusalem revival. That is still much less than one percent of the nation.

Jesus did not speak His own “human” words, rather He spoke “the words of God” given by the Holy Spirit. “For He whom God has sent speaks the Words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.”

This phrase “for God does not give the Spirit by measure” is quite important. Pagans see the Spirit as a sort of spiritual fluid they can have “more of” or “less of” whereas Scripture tells us that He is a Divine Person who we relate to. Thus any word from the Holy Spirit is a word from God.

Those who see Jesus, as simply a prophet must have great difficulty with the next verse: “*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.*” No prophet is ever portrayed in the same terms or class as the beloved Son of God who has all Creation committed to His trust ad care. If all things are given into the hands of Jesus then that certainly includes the Church and all believers (Colossians 1:15-20) and so the primary agency taking care of your life is not yourself, your family or even the government or the angels – but Jesus Christ is your Saviour.

Since God has committed all things to Christ then for those things, their relationship with Christ is the most important thing possible. What we believe about Jesus is critical in the deepest most profound sense imaginable. Our attitude to Jesus – who is responsible for us, determines the attitude of God and His Universe to us. “He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him.”

Everything comes back to faith, to what we believe. If what we believe is right we live, if what we believe is wrong we die. If I believe I can fly and so jump off the Empire State Building my wrong belief will have drastic consequences. If I believe that I should drive on the left hand side of the road in the USA because that is the side we drive on in Australia, then my wrong belief may have lethal consequences. Even if I am just ignorant or mistaken in my wrong belief about which side of the road to drive on, it doesn’t matter, my wrong belief could still be deadly.

Everything depends on what we believe. If we believe the truth we live and if we believe lies we die – and even ignorant, mistaken or well-intentioned spiritual beliefs that are incorrect can be deadly.

The thing we must get right is to trust the God that is revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and believing rightly about Him and His goodness, love and power. If we believe on the Son – we have life and life abundantly. Thus our right belief leads to a right state of being and to right action and to good consequences. But if we not believe the Son, then we do not see life and the wrath of God abides on us. We cannot afford to be ignorant or mistaken about God and about eternal things because the stakes are so incredibly high.

John 4:1-6 A Weary Saviour

John 4:1-6 MKJV *Therefore when the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John (2) (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), (3) He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. (4) And it was necessary for Him to go through Samaria, (5) Then He came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. (6) And Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus upon the well. It was about the sixth hour.*

Jesus reacts to his popularity (making and baptizing more disciples than John) and to his fame with society in general (the Pharisees now knew this) by moving away from the action in Judea and going back up into Galilee. Jesus thus avoids a full-fledged confrontation with the religious powers of the day. He has more ministries to do and more things to teach in the peace and quiet of Galilee and he did not want a storm of controversy distracting from His central message of righteousness through

repentance and faith being expressed in love in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus moves away from conflict with the Pharisees to a surprising acceptance by the Samaritans – even though He was a Jew, He was now an outcast Jew, one who was also at war with the Jerusalem religious establishment as the Samaritans had been for centuries.

Jesus had to travel north to Galilee and could have gone the ‘long way around’ as most Jews did but instead chose to go directly through the Samaritan towns and villages that had once been so inhospitable. (Luke 9:52-56)

Luke 9:52-56 MKJV And He sent messengers before His face. And they went and entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for Him. (53) And they did not receive Him, because His face was going toward Jerusalem. (54) And seeing, His disciples James and John said, Lord, do You desire that we command fire to come down from Heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did? (55) But He turned and rebuked them and said, You do not know of what spirit you are. (56) For the Son of Man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save. And they went to another village. (However on this occasion Jesus was traveling away from Jerusalem and so got a much better reception.)

Jesus arrives at a historically significant site that connects with the patriarchs Jacob and Joseph and He is weary. Jesus, though God, was human. In fact He often seems to be tired or to have the disciples taking care of Him. We find Jesus asleep in the boat as the disciples row hard during the storm for instance. We variously find Jesus being hungry, thirsty and weary during His ministry. Jesus was human, fully human.

The disciples served Jesus while Jesus served the world. They were his “minders” going ahead to get food, untie donkeys, arrange logistics and as advance parties into the Jewish and Samaritan towns and villages. Thus Jesus relied on others and made Himself vulnerable to their organizing ability. This is hard for some people to do who wish to micro-manage every detail themselves. Yet most successful people become successful because other people want them to be successful. A team of friend and supporters who will care for you, pray for you and arrange things for you is an enormous asset in any ministry.

It is lunchtime (the sixth hour) and they have probably been walking since early morning, when it is coolest. It is now time to stop, eat and have a siesta and then start walking again the late afternoon. As the old song goes “Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun...” Yet Jesus still works – even though tired He shares His faith with the Samaritan woman.

It is these ordinary weary traveling moments when we are at our most human, and often that is when we connect best with the world around us. Jesus was just a tired man exhausted by the well, rejected by the Jews, on His way back to Galilee, thirsty, human, easy for a sinner to relate to. As Paul said, “to the weak I became weak...”

1 Corinthians 9:20-23 MKJV (20) And to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain the Jews. To those who are under the Law, I became as under the Law, so that I might gain those who are under the Law. (21) To those who are outside Law, I became as outside Law (not being outside law to God, but under the Law to Christ), so that I might gain those who are outside Law. (22) To the weak I became as the weak, so that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men, so that I might by all means save some. (23) And this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I might be partaker of it with you.

When we pretend to be made of “stainless steel” and hide our vulnerability and discount our humanity and weakness we lose our connection to a hurting world. Jesus never pretended to be aloof from humankind, He was real - a hungry, thirsty, tired and utterly transparent Saviour.

John 4:7-15 Living Water

John 4:7-15 MKJV *A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, Give me to drink. (8) (For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) (9) Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, How do you, being a Jew, ask a drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews do not associate with Samaritans. (10) Jesus answered and said to her, If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that says to you, Give Me to drink, you would have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water. (11) The woman said to Him, Sir, you have no vessel, and the well is deep. From where then do you have that living water? (12) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his children and his cattle? (13) Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, (14) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. (15) The woman said to Him, Sir, give me this water, so that I may not thirst nor come here to draw.*

The woman of Samaria strikes me as being “sassy” – strong-headed, and probably attractive, the sort that could have five husbands that wanted her to start with - and still be so fiery that they could not put up with her in the end. She does not meekly give Jesus a drink but answers Him back saying in a backhanded way “you Jews only talk to us when you want something”. Yet Jesus, this Jew who talks to her in puzzling ways, soon intrigues her.

First of all Jesus calls Himself “the gift of God”. What a term for mortal man to use – but in this case it was true! Jesus is the gift of God to the world, His gift of Himself, the fullness of deity in bodily form (Colossians 2:9) and the Son given to Israel with the government on His shoulder (Isaiah 9:6). The gift of God asks for a gift of water. Does He ever get it? There is no sign of it! The woman leaves her waterpot (verse 28) and goes into the city to tell others with no indication that she ever filled it and gave the Saviour a drink!

Jesus is the gift of God and from Him we get the gift of living water – the gift of the Holy Spirit. Mythological speaking Jesus is the true Aquarius – the one who carries the waterpot and pours out the Spirit on mankind. In John 13 Jesus pours water into a basin to wash the disciples feet, and in Luke sign of the Passover feast is to follow a man carrying a pitcher of water – the symbol of Aquarius. Now I am not advocating Greek mythology but rather saying that Jesus fulfilled a common cultural motif of His day by being the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The gospel fulfills many aspects of culture and God seems to create in every culture “redemptive analogies” that link to the gospel as Don Richardson shows in his well-known missions book “Peace Child”.

From Greek culture Jesus moves to Hebrew culture (the Samaritans were a mixture of both with temples to both Zeus and Yahweh) and proves that He is greater than the patriarch Jacob after whom Israel was named:

John 4:12-14 MKJV *Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself, and his children and his cattle? (13) Jesus answered and said to her, Whoever drinks of this*

water shall thirst again, (14) but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Thus Jesus is the fulfillment of both the Gentile religion and the Jewish religion. He is the solution to having a true and deep spirituality that is both Living water” alive and blessed, and everlasting and eternal. Man ancient stories tell of the tensions between being eternal and being fully alive and the quest not just for eternal life but eternal youth. Jesus is BOTH eternal life and living water. Jesus pours out the Spirit and inaugurates an internal, self-renewing and abundant spiritual life.

The woman says impatiently “give me this water.” taking the whole thing very literally. But we should say the same thing to Jesus “give me this water” in other words “be filled with the Holy Spirit” and with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5; 18-20)! We need to daily ask the Lord to fill us with His living water and to bless us with the Holy Spirit in wisdom, love and power.

It is easy to muddle along – or rather “puddle along” in the same small pool of spiritual experience. But we need the overflowing, the streams of living water, the grace of God and the abundant filling of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus is willing to give this living water to the disreputable and sassy Samaritan woman then He may also be willing to give it to you! You see such grace is never earned by personal piety (of which she had little) but rather is poured out on the receptive, the seeking, those who knock and ask and receive by faith! The Samaritan woman was a seeker, full of desire, desire that had taken her into many wrong places but had finally found the right Man and the right desire – living water. This would change her and her whole community,

God wants true worshippers, who are full of desire, yet an ardent desire that is rightly directed towards Him and to spiritual things.

John 4:16-24 In Spirit And In Truth

John 4:16-24 MKJV *Jesus said to her, Go, call your husband and come here. (17) The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus said to her, You have well said, I have no husband (18) for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband. In that you spoke truly. (19) The woman said to Him, Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. (20) Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. (21) Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither worship the Father in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem. (22) You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. (23) But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. (24) God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.*

John’s gospel was written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD hence Jesus saying: “believe Me, the hour is coming when you shall neither worship the Father in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem” was fulfilled because worship at Jerusalem was now impossible. Christianity is unlike any other religion in that there is no special “sacred location” for worship. Christians can worship anywhere, as Abraham did, as long as they worship “in spirit and in truth”. The Samaritan vs. Jewish question -about which mountain to worship on, is thus rendered null and void by the cross.

But what does it mean to worship “in spirit and in truth” and why does God seek these kinds of people to worship Him?

Jesus explains the first part by saying “God is Spirit”, the Greek is quite ambiguous at this point and is literally “Spirit the God” (pneuma o Theos) which can be translated as “Spirit is God” or “God is Spirit”, “God is a spirit” is a poor but common translation. The construction is the same as that used in the sayings God is light, and God is love. (1 John 1:5 and 1 John 4:8). In other words, God’s essence is that of a spiritual being and so worship must be “in the Spirit”.

Firstly, the spirit is the core part of our humanity that connects with eternity. To worship in the Spirit is to worship with the core part of our being, not just with our mind, our body or our emotions those these may be also included. It is also to worship in the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Spirit who is given to us in Christ Jesus. Paul goes so far as to say that Christians are “one spirit” with God. (1 Corinthians 6:17) This is not necessarily an extreme experience or an ecstatic experience but it is a deep and true experience. True worship has spiritual depth to it.

Secondly, true worshippers worship in truth. This means that there is content, truth content, and theological content, to their worship. All the main NT prayers, and especially from Pentecost onwards, are profoundly theological. There is an adoration of God as Father; there is a sense of the coming Kingdom and deep and profound motifs about the nature of the church, the Holy Spirit and believers. Here is one of the earliest NT prayers:

Acts 4:24-31 MKJV And having heard, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord and said, Lord, You are the God who made the heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that is in them; (25) who by the mouth of Your servant David has said, "Why did the nations rage and the people imagine vain things? (26) The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." (27) For truly, against Your holy child Jesus, whom You have anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nations, and the people of Israel, were gathered together (28) in order to do whatever Your hand and Your counsel determined before to be done. (29) And now, Lord, behold their threatening, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word, (30) by stretching forth of Your hand for healing, and miracles, and wonders may be done by the name of Your holy child Jesus. (31) And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness.

Note the God-centered use of Scripture and the concern for the Kingdom and the lack of concern for themselves despite persecution. In fact despite the fiery trials of the early church there are a complete lack of prayers for deliverance from these trials. The prayers of the NT are God-ward and for His glory and their perfection in Christ.

Thus true worship is neither glib, nor self-centered but is profound, deep, spiritual and God-centered. The center of worship is God, not man, which is why seeker-sensitive worship is a contradiction in terms. Yes we should have some seeker-sensitive church activities - but worship is sensitivity to God, not to man.

Worship is not about the music, or about us having a good time or having our needs met for entertainment. Worship is about giving great glory to God, about entering into the Spirit and connecting with the profound eternal realities and expressing them in deep truthful prayers and acts of worship. At Pentecost the Spirit fell and people heard the 120 “speaking the great things of God” – that is giving voice to great and worthy statements about God.

While God still accepts the naïve worship of new Christians we should rapidly progress beyond this to praying the deep and great things of God and to giving glory to God in the Spirit. God is seeking

people who know and glorify Him, not self-centered and immature believers who simply want to enjoy themselves on Sunday mornings! Try this test – ask the average Christian to describe God and see how long or how deep the answer is. Few Christians possess much in the way of eternal truth that they can speak about, or glorify God for.

Most of today's worship is thoroughly carnal and man-centered. Much thought is given to what people want and very little thought is given to what God wants. Deep teaching or profound prayers are eschewed, and in some cases even banned, in case such "heavy material" turns some off. Yet look at the worship as recorded in the NT and it is all "heavy" particularly Paul's prayers. There are no "Prayers of Jabez" in the NT! The prayers are for the glory of God and the maturation of believers in Christ. "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, they will be done..". God is the chief concern of prayer, not man. Even prayers for the Church often end with a doxology e.g. Ephesians 3:14-21.

Truth has vanished from many pulpits and been replaced by man pleasing. In most Christian bookstores it is even hard to find half a dozen books with an emphasis on requiring Christians to obey the commands of Christ. The emphasis has gone from producing saints to producing happy and satisfied church attendees who tithe regularly. We are close to a great apostasy - and may be even in the midst of one.

God is Spirit and we must come to the Rock of Ages in spirit and in truth, and we must deal with eternal, abiding, truth-filled spiritual things. We must worship with our gaze upon the Throne. We must glory in the great things of God. Does this mean that we should go back to the Anglican Prayer Book of 1611 or to the more theological traditions? Not really, but we can learn much from them. It is not the place (here or Jerusalem) or the form, but the truth-content and the presence of the Holy Spirit moving deeply amongst us. We do not need to be stuffy, but we do need to have both depth and truth in our worship.

John 4:25-26

Jesus The Messiah

John 4:25-26 MKJV *The woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming, who is called Christ. When He has come, He will tell us all things. (26) Jesus said to her, I AM, the One speaking to you.*

John 4:25-26 ISV *The woman said to him, "I know that the Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will tell us everything." (26) Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

Here Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Saviour of Israel and the Son of God. Jesus normally was reticent to do so, but with this woman He opens up and plainly says that He was the Messiah. God frequently grants His most powerful revelations to the "most unlikely" people.

But what did this Messiah do? Did He make the woman's' life instantly prosperous? Did He wave a magic wand and take away her shameful domestic situation? In fact the Messiah came and went and nothing much changed on an external level.

Jesus the Messiah does not do the things we want a Messiah to do – that is fix all our problems.

In one sense Jesus is a very disappointing Messiah and we are often left with messy lives even after we are converted and even after we serve Him faithfully.

I would very much like a Messiah who would burst into my life and set it straight and make it very prosperous. I would like to own my own house and have a car and some nice furniture and be well paid for my ministry, however that has not happened at any time in my 25 years of living by faith. Jesus has chosen to not be that sort of a Messiah for me.

Jesus however has been a Messiah of grace and wisdom and spiritual growth and emotional and at times physical healing. Jesus has done a deep interior work in my life and re-constructed things of eternal value.

We tend to see our problems as being in this world and we want a political and material Messiah. For a person without a heavenly perspective “money is the answer to everything” as it says in Ecclesiastes 10:19 (which is deliberately written ironically, from a perspective that is “under the Sun”, that is without God factored in.) So we want a financial Messiah and a prosperity gospel because money seems the answer to all earthly problems.

Unfortunately Jesus never gave away bars of gold nor did He turn the water wells into oil wells.

So what sort of a Messiah should we expect? We should expect a Messiah that gives the Living Water of eternal life; a Messiah that lets us be at odds with this world while He prepares us for a better world in eternity.

This world cannot satisfy an eternal being because it is passing away, and we are eternal beings if we have accepted Christ. A true Messiah will not try to satisfy eternal beings with temporary trinkets. As much as I think I would be satisfied with a house and a car and a good salary I must acknowledge that is simply not the case.

A true Messiah will solve the true problems – problems such as death, resurrection, eternal meaning, calling, eternal reward and personal significance. He will solve the problem of being loved and accepted for who we are – and he certainly did that for the woman at the well.

Preeminently Jesus solves the problem of true knowledge. “When He has come, He will tell us all things.” Jesus tells us all things because He tells us everything about what God is like. Once we know that, then all other knowledge, both spiritual and temporal falls into place.

Jesus is more than a rescuer; rather He indicates that we have been rescued by the Father’s love. “We love because He first loved us”. There is only a Messiah because the Father willed it so. Therefore God wants us rescued, and is not willing that any should perish.

Neither is the Messiah a spirit, or a concept or an ideology. Jesus tells the woman that the Messiah had flesh and blood when He said, “ I who speak to you am He.” There He was, sitting by the well, unassuming, unpretentious, yet obviously someone different, someone who was able to change her life.

When Jesus turns up He generally does so in these quiet ways, as an eternal presence in the midst of the daily routine of drawing water. The woman did nothing extraordinary to meet the Messiah. He just arrived and met her as she was, as a sinner in need of a Saviour.

John 4:27-34

True Food

John 4:27-34 MKJV *And upon this His disciples came and marveled that He talked with the woman. However, no one said, What do You seek, or why do You talk with her? (28) The woman then left her waterpot and went into the city and said to the men, (29) Come see a man who told me all things that I ever did. Is this One not the Christ? (30) And they went out of the city and came to Him. (31) In the meantime His disciples were asking Him, saying, Master, eat. (32) But He said to them, I have food to eat which you do not know. (33) Therefore the disciples said to one another, No one brought Him anything to eat? (34) Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.*

The disciples see everything with human eyes – a disreputable woman, a questionable situation, and a lack of food. But Jesus sees with divine eyes – a new believer, a spiritual harvest and the food of doing God’s will.

Spiritual opportunities can sometimes look like social catastrophes. Sharing the gospel with a drunk or with a conspicuous sinner can seem inappropriate, yet it can lead to many others following suit. The Samaritan woman became the evangelist for her whole village.

There are two parts to Jesus’ final comment here (a) to do the will of Him who sent Me and (b) to finish His work. This sustained Jesus because he lived for the Father’s approval. It is easy to rush out to ‘do God’s will’ but much harder to “finish” it. It is easy to go for a few weeks to the mission field but much harder to do twenty or more years there. But if we really want to please God then we have to finish the job that He has given us to do.

Ephesians 2:10 MKJV *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.*

God has “before ordained” certain good works that we are to walk in as new creations in Christ Jesus and when we do these good works we will know the true satisfaction that is “true food” for the soul.

Often these works appear to be “just common sense” like being honest, or putting up with relatives or loving one’s husband or caring for one’s wife. Good works are often the least spectacular things – like Dorcas who made garments for the widows (Acts 9:36-41). Good works are seldom “on stage” things, done down the front of a large auditorium (though they can be) more commonly they are humble works of grace.

Whatever good works God has assigned to us we should complete them and not leave them half done. Children should be fully and properly raised in the fear of the Lord, people should be “prayed through”, even the church lawn should be mown in a holy and fitting manner.

Some of us get tasks of great sacrifice and tedium – missionary work in hard places, looking after aged relatives, bearing with an impatient husband, or caring for a sick child. All these good works have to be completed and done “as unto the Lord” despite many discouragements.

Now indeed there may come a time to “dust off one’s feet” and move on from the unresponsive area, or to give up a job that is trying and find another, but only if it is accompanied by the peace of God and not as a result of defeatism and discouragement.

Jesus looked past how own social needs (respectability) and physical needs (tiredness, thirst and hunger) to do the Father’s will and to reap a spiritual harvest. We need to be hungry to do God’s will even if it seems in appropriate and inconvenient. The greater desire should be to see spiritual results for God, so when the phone rings late at night with an “inconvenient person” in dire distress we need

to give that our full attention (but not if it is just an attention-seeking neurotic who can wait till morning).

Our needs can wait when an urgent Kingdom opportunity presents itself. However we cannot sacrifice others in the same way. We need to be careful if we disappoint children in order to meet an urgent Kingdom opportunity. I once turned down a very prestigious conference in order not to disappoint my wife, who I had been away from for some time and needed me at home. We have to strike a balance.

The Samaritans were ready to believe, the fields were “white unto harvest” and Jesus made the most of it. We need to have a sense that tells us “this is a divine appointment, pay attention, drop everything, God is at work here and is inviting you to join in.”

Your true food, your true-life satisfaction will come when you do God’s will and complete the good works He has fore ordained for you to do.

John 4:35-38

The Harvest

John 4:35-38 MKJV *Do you not say, It is yet four months, and the harvest comes? Behold, I say to you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white to harvest already. (36) And he who reaps receives wages and gathers fruit to life eternal, so that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. (37) And in this is the saying true, One sows and another reaps. (38) I sent you to reap that on which you bestowed no labor. Other men labored, and you have entered into their labor.*

The Samaritans are flocking out to see Jesus, an “easy” revival as the woman’s testimony crystallizes a growing realization that the time for their Messiah had come. Two illustrations from my studies in Chemistry may help here. The first is a super-saturated solution in which a single speck of the crystal can precipitate a shower of crystals. The second is an acid-base titration (where you add acid to a beaker containing alkali and litmus indicator) when after many drops a point of sudden change is reached and a single drop turns the solution from basic to acidic, and the litmus from blue to red. That single bit of crystal added that causes the crystals to form is just a speck of dust and the single drop of acid that causes the change is just another drop of acid. Even though they “cause” great changes they are quite insignificant in themselves. They are no different to the previous crystals or the previous drops of acid that went in from the burette.

So it is with evangelism, many laborers add their “drop of acid” to the solution and bit-by-bit they accumulate and change things until one last “drop” of prayer or witness is added and the revival comes. In such cases *“One sows and another reaps”*.

We labor in fields where many have labored before. Beside me I have Leon Morris’s excellent commentary on John, and a Greek New Testament and Reinecke’s Linguistic Key to the Greek NT and other such books. People much smarter than I have done the hard work and I just turn the pages and read the footnotes. I am a midget standing on the shoulders of giants.

We should not neglect the great work of the Reformers or the Church Fathers or the great theologians who have mined God’s Word as best they could and presented us with much truth for us to then build on.

Jesus built on Moses and the prophets, Peter built on Christ, as did Paul, Augustine built on Paul, Luther and Calvin built on Augustine; Wesley built on the Reformers and so on until today. So when you pick up a work such as Millard Erickson's Christian theology is a compilation and condensation of tens of thousands of great minds prayerfully thinking about God for over two thousand years. But the foundation for all is Christ.

Thus, with the exception of pioneer missionaries, it is almost impossible for anyone to point and say "these are my fruit alone, the result of my labors". For instance I cannot say that your spiritual growth is solely the result of reading Eternity-DBS, you have pastors and friends and disciplers and prayer partners and family members who may have all had a very significant impact on you. If a particular devotional ministers to you powerfully it is just "another drop of grace" that fell at the right time.

We are all co-laborers for your growth – me, your pastor, your prayer partners and so forth, we all serve you and want to see you become like Christ, we are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's. One plants, another waters, and yet another gets the harvest. Together we all contribute to the glory of God and we can all rejoice together in your edification.

Thus there should be no rivalry in the Kingdom for we are all contributors to the one great process. One convicts of sin, the other leads to Christ, yet another follows up yet all should rejoice in the salvation of the sinner. Paul said, "I did not come to baptize" – yet many think that baptism is where the most glory is. Paul preached the gospel but let others do the baptizing. He knew his place in the process of the Harvest.

We are all part of the grand process of Christ being revealed in His Church to the glory of God. If God has you pastoring a small church in a remote area, you are still as much a part of the glorious process as an evangelist such as Billy Graham. Simply be faithful to your calling, which is all the Lord asks.

There are some places on earth that are truly white unto harvest – such as Mozambique, and others that are stony ground – such as Georgia. We should deploy the most laborers where the harvest is greatest. Too many laborers are working in the diminished harvest of Europe and North America and few in the great harvest fields of Asia and Africa.

It is always good to keep the process of the Harvest in mind, it keeps us humble and it helps us to persist when the going is tough, knowing that we shall reap if we do not grow weary.

John 4:39-42

The Christ, the Saviour Of The World

John 4:39-42 MKJV *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed upon Him because of the saying of the woman, who testified, He told me all that I ever did. (40) Then as the Samaritans had come to Him, they begged Him that He would stay with them. And He stayed there two days. (41) And many more believed because of His own word. (42) And they said to the woman, Now we believe, not because of your saying, for we have heard Him ourselves and know that this is truly the Christ, the Savior of the world.*

The Samaritans, in just a few days came to the amazing conclusion that Jesus was the Christ, the savior of the world, and they seem to have arrived at this conclusion as an entire community.

[Now Jesus could have stayed there and set up home, for this was the first community to truly believe in Him, but instead, as we shall see, He went to where He was not honored (in Galilee, see the next few verses).]

Now in order to understand what the Samaritans meant, and what John recorded we need to look at the terms “Christ”, “Saviour” and “World” and we will start with this last term first..

According to Leon Morris the term kosmos or world originally meant “decoration” or “bauble” from which we still get the term “cosmetic”. Thus the universe came to be seen as the ultimate decoration, a ordered system of beauty.

The term is mainly used by Paul and John and has a few different shades of meaning.

The first is the realm under the control of Satan and the astrological powers of the Greco-Roman world, which was governed by elaborate religious taboos called “stoichea” or the “elemental principles of the world”. It was the realm that served “luck” and had sacrifices and libations and worried about curses and propitious times. It was entirely hostile to Christ (John 7:7, 15;18). Thus friendship with the world was enmity towards God (James 4) and one could not enter into this system without arousing the jealousy of the Holy Spirit. A modern equivalent would be trying to be a Mason and a Christian, or believing in Lady Luck and going to casinos and being Christ’s. It was a vast realm entirely in bondage to superstition, human philosophy and religion and the worship of angels and demons. In this sense Satan is the prince of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11, 1 John 5:18,19) and the world does not know Jesus or the Father (John 1:10, 17:25) nor can it receive or know the Spirit (John 14:17). Paul makes it clear that Christians must exit this system being crucified to it (Galatians 6:14,15) and thus needing to be separated from it (Colossians 2:8-23, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). The world (kosmos) is never the place of blessing in Scripture; we must leave it in order to be blessed.

The second main meaning is fallen; tragic humanity enslaved to the above system which God loves and rescues e.g., John 3:16 and 4:42. Christ speaks to the world the things He has heard from God (John 8:26), takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), is the Saviour of the world (John 4:42) and gives it life (John 6:33) even giving his flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51) because He came to save it and not to judge it (John 3:17, 12:47) and overthrow Satan its prince (John 12:31, 14:30, 15:11) and thus victory over the world system remains with Christ (John 16:33). To fallen humanity Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). When John says that Christ is sent “into the world” (John 3:17, 11:27 etc) he may mean sent into the Universe as a whole or more specifically into the hostile world of cosmic powers governed by Satan in order to overthrow it.

The third main meaning, used less often is simply ‘everyone, or everything’ and is used as loosely and generically as we use the term “the world” today e.g. when the Pharisees say of Christ ‘the whole world has gone after Him’ or “the world was made through Him” (John 12:19, John 1:3, Hebrews 1:1-3)

Thus as the Christ the Savior of the world Jesus is the Christ that is the Chosen One, the Messiah with the Holy Spirit anointing, that breaks all the bondages of the evil spiritual realm led by the prince of darkness. Jesus as the anointed Christ, rescues humanity from the oppression and possession of spiritual powers and from enslavement to rituals, superstitions and the fear and dread of ghosts and taboos. Jesus rescues us also from what they do to our bodies, minds, emotions and spirits and takes us out from their destructive power to a place of abundant life.

John only used the term savior twice – here and in 1 John 4:14 and in both cases he uses it in the phrase “the Saviour of the World”. *1 John 4:14 MKJV “And we have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”* In other words, John sees Jesus as being sent by God to

save us from the powers and principalities that dominated life in the Graeco-Roman world and which still dominate our various cultures, both Western and non-Western today.

Jesus is not just the Saviour of individual people who walk the sawdust trail at a revival meeting, rather He is the Saviour of all those fallen human beings, trapped by Satan and caught up in darkness, and in the throes of evil and addiction, if they repent and believe in Him. Thus Jesus is the way out from all our bondages.

John 4:43-45 A Prophet Without Honour

John 4:43-45 MKJV *And after two days He departed from there and went into Galilee. (44) For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own native-place. (45) Then when He had come into Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast; for they also went to the feast.*

Jesus was originally unrecognized by how own family and His won hometown, in fact Matthew tells us that the people of Nazareth initially refused to believe:

Matthew 13:54-58 MKJV *And when He had come into His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so much so that they were astonished and said, From where does this man have this wisdom and these mighty works? (55) Is not this, the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers, James and Joses and Simon and Judas, (56) and his sisters, are they not all with us? Then from where does this man have all these things? (57) And they were offended in Him. But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and in his own house. (58) And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

John picks up on this using his literary technique of “juxtaposition” – that is putting two highly contrasting things next to each other to bring out the contrast and the meaning of each. So the Samaritan harvest and belief in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world is quickly contrasted with the unbelief of the Galileans. It is as if John is saying “the heretical Samaritans believed in Him after a few days but Jesus’ own family and friends did not believe, even for a very long while”.

In fact this unbelief was so strong that Jesus passed judgment upon the cities of Galilee: *Matthew 11:20-22 MKJV* *Then He began to upbraid the cities in which most of His mighty works were done, because they did not repent. (21) Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the powerful acts, which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes! (22) But I say to you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you.*

Thus it is often most difficult to convert our own families and own neighborhood, while we get to speak to large crowds elsewhere. In fact it is often only after we have received acclaim away from home that they even start to believe in us. This certainly was the case with Jesus – it was only after they saw Jesus doing miracles at the feast in the “big city” of Jerusalem that they started to believe in Him at Galilee. “Then when He had come into Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast; for they also went to the feast.”

Any paradigm-changing ministry will meet much resistance and “unbelief” at first and most ministries take about twenty years or more to become “mainstream” – e.g., youth ministry, the charismatic movement, media ministry and short-term missions each of which faced considerable opposition at

first (and still some opposition today). My own area of ministry – Internet evangelism and Cybermissions, is beginning to take off – after fourteen years of personal involvement and being thought of as quite strange. This is to be expected, it happened to Jesus and will happen to us also.

Generally speaking there are a small percentage of “visionaries” (less than 5%) followed by 10-15% of “early adopters”, then about 40% are “late adopters” and the rest are apathetic to the new movement or even hostile. Pareto’s principle of the 20% who do 80% of the work and 80% who do 20% of the work applies here as well.

In our work for the Lord we can become very hurt if we expect everyone to be as enthusiastic as we are, or if we demand that they to go along with the vision that God has given us. If Jesus could not get all His friends and family and nation to follow Him, even with his love, wisdom and miracle working powers, then we cannot expect to do any better.

Jesus simply led those who chose to follow Him. He moved with the movers, and taught the teachable and disciplined the believers. This is a valuable principle. In every group there will be those that “get it” – work first with those, patiently explain yourself to the rest and let those who vehemently disagree go elsewhere – with your blessing. Someone said that: “Even the simplest thing needs to be explained at least six times before it registers with a group of people.” and I have found this to be very true in ministry. Complex truths – such as justification by faith take much more explaining than that!

Here is some good advice Paul gave to Timothy about pastoring under adverse conditions:
2 Timothy 2:23-26 But avoid foolish discussions with ignorant men, knowing--as you do--that these lead to quarrels; (24) and a bondservant of the Lord must not quarrel, but must be inoffensive towards all men, a skilful teacher, and patient under wrongs. (25) He must speak in a gentle tone when correcting the errors of opponents, in the hope that God will at last give them repentance, for them to come to a full knowledge of the truth (26) and recover sober-mindedness and freedom from the Devil's snare, though they are now entrapped by him to do his will.

John 4:46-54 The Nobleman’s Son

John 4:46-54 MKJV *Then Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee, where He made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. (47) When He heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and begged Him that He would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. (48) Then Jesus said to him, Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. (49) The nobleman said to Him, Sir, come down before my child dies. (50) Jesus said to him, Go, your son lives. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken to him, and he went away. (51) And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, Your son lives. (52) Then he asked of them the hour when he began to get better. And they said to him, yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. (53) So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, Your son lives. And he himself believed, and his whole house. (54) This is the second miracle Jesus did, when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*

Tackling last things first – this is not the second miracle of Jesus but the second major Galilean ministry, which occurred after coming a trip from Jerusalem (the first being the wedding at Cana) as John mentions the many miracles done at the feasts in Jerusalem. This miracle is a “sign” in that it points to God and to the nature of Jesus and elicits faith from many people involved.

Miracles are not just God's power at work for our convenience. They are always for the glory of God and are meant to increase faith –which is why the sometimes seem to happen most often to new Christians and to non-believers just before they are converted. Many of the Muslims who believe in Jesus come to faith as the result of a decisive miracle such as a healing in the family. Thus before we ask for a miracle we need to also ask – who will believe, and what glory shall the Lord get from all of this?

Jesus says, and it seems with a sign of some sort, that “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” This was His reaction to the crowds – and He performed the miracle so they might believe. They should have been like the Samaritan woman – open, curious about God and able to sense the truth in their spirit, from a brief conversation, and believe. The Holy Spirit anointing on Jesus should have been enough to convince them that here was a holy man of God, a Messiah. But they were “stiff-necked and stubborn” or as they say in the Philippines “hard-headed”. The “fragrance of grace upon the soul” did not move them – rather they wanted tangible visible proof.

Jesus initial reply to the nobleman (Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe) seems harsh but Jesus often tested people to see how real their desire was, and how truly desperate they were for God to act. The Syrophenician woman, the father of the epileptic and the case of some blind beggars are cases when people had to publicly demonstrate their sincere desire for God to act. Jesus tests us, how much do we really want his grace? Will we suffer an apparent rebuke, or being ignored? Will we wait? Will we persist and press in? God most often answers the persistent and the desperate.

The nobleman (probably an official in Herod's court) accepts the rebuke and simply asks for his son to be healed, and for Jesus to travel the twenty miles from Cana down to the lakeside at Capernaum. Jesus refuses to do this and simply says “your son lives”. If Jesus had gone then it would have looked like Jesus was at the beck and call of high officials. He could not go such a distance with a royal official without compromising His gospel of social equality (see James 2). So Jesus simply issues the word – and the nobleman believes and goes his way to find his servants coming to him with news of the son's healing.

Something about the way Jesus said “*Your son lives*” brought the nobleman's faith to maturity and he did believe – and later his whole household. This sort of faith in the “rhema word of God” (the word God speaks into life's situations) is the faith of the saints and the prophets. God said it, I believe it.

What does this sign tell us about Jesus? Firstly that He is a compassionate healer whose word is authoritative and can heal at a distance. Secondly that He is the victor over death and disease and the giver of life. The phrase “*your son lives*” is repeated three times in this short paragraph. This was the healing phrase – the word from God in the situation and it is spoken about and celebrated. The word for lives is from the “zoe” Greek word family and while it has normal uses it is often also used of eternal life, resurrection life or powerful life, life that is life back from the dead (Galatians 2:20, Revelation 1:18, 4:9-10) and especially so in John (John 4:10-11, 5:25, 6:51, 57,69, 11:26 as well as here)

In this chapter Jesus has proclaimed that he gives living water, and now that He gives life. Since life comes first of all from the Creator that is tantamount to saying that he is linked to the Creator God and shares many of his powers. While medicine may heal it cannot give life, only God can do that, and if Jesus Christ can also do that, then He is God. And Jesus does not just give normal life, he gives resurrection life, eternal life, the life that cannot die and which is living water in our innermost beings.

John 5:1-6

The Man With An Infirmary

John 5:1-6 MKJV *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (2) Now there is a pool at the Sheep Gate at Jerusalem, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. (3) In these lay a great multitude of those who were sick, of blind, lame, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. (4) For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and troubled the water. Then whoever first stepped in after the troubling of the water was made whole of whatever disease he had. (5) And a certain man was there, who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him lying, and knowing that he had spent much time, He said to him, Do you desire to be made whole?*

There is an old joke that goes: “How many social workers does it take to change a light-bulb?”

The answer is: “One, but the light bulb has to want to change!”

On the whole people do not change unless they are first open to the idea of change. Even positive change, such as success, can threaten people who are used to “comfortable failure”. Some people become dependent and indigent, they identify so totally with their affliction that to remove the affliction (the drug dependency, the back pain, the emotional disability) is almost to remove their entire identity. They are frequently the people who describe their condition with the permanent identifier- “I am a...” rather than with the less permanent “I have a.”

When Jesus walks among this mass of afflicted humanity He goes to the “hardest case”, the one who had been there a “long time”, the “lifer”, with a thirty-eight year disability. Jesus asks him just one question “Do you desire to be made whole?” This question has application at every level of humanity:

Does the sinner want the wholeness of salvation?

Does the sick person want the responsibility of full health?

Does the lifelong failure want the lifestyle changes that come with success?

Does the emotionally damaged person want wholeness enough to forgive the person that hurt them?
Does the confused person really want the wholeness that mental clarity (perhaps with medication) will bring?

Does the heretic really want the Truth?

Does a corrupt government really want a properly functioning nation?

Does a small local church really want to be alive and growing and full of new converts?

God tends to give us the desire of our hearts and if the desire of our heart is to remain just as we are, in our affliction, unhealed and unchanged, He will even grant us that.

As a bible college lecturer I am continually amazed at how lengthy and arduous and full of stops and starts the process of disciple making is. It probably took Jesus the Son of God just 3 seconds to raise Lazarus - but it took Him 3 years to make a small group of effective disciples! That is because personal change is slow and takes place at the pace of the will of the learner. Which is why love is so important in teaching. People learn much more willingly when they are loved.

Learned helplessness takes a huge toll – and this man was full of it, and also full of excuses about being unable to get into the water. Opportunity always passed him by. Well now Opportunity was standing right there talking to him!

Satan spends much of his evil energy discouraging us and binding us up with an oppressive feeling of helplessness in vital areas of life and ministry. Helplessness and hopelessness are never from God, they are truly demonic fortresses of the soul. They must be resisted and cast down. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) The frequent teaching of Scripture is that God is a God of empowerment, not discouragement and that nothing is impossible to them that believe.

God is a God of empowerment and He wants you healed and whole and powerful and able. God's destiny for you is as eternally alive son/daughter of God, glowing in spiritual power, ruling this world on his behalf. Therefore He wants you to be a loving, holy, wise, capable, and competent and powerful ruler in His kingdom and is always building you up with that destiny in mind.

Do you desire to be made whole? Are you prepared to let go of your excuses and your blaming of others and your desire to remain as you are, and take on the responsibility and the joy of a new life as a whole person?

If this is the case, then come before God and ask Jesus to make you whole for His glory and for His Name's sake.

John 5:7-15 Take Up Your Bed And Walk

John 5:7-15 MKJV *The infirm man answered Him, Sir, when the water is troubled, I have no one to put me into the pool. But while I am coming, another steps down before me. (8) Jesus says to him, Rise, take up your bed and walk. (9) And immediately the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. And it was a Sabbath on that day. (10) Therefore the Jews said to him who had been healed, It is the Sabbath. It is not lawful for you to take up the bed. (11) He answered them, He who made me whole said to me, Take up your bed and walk. (12) Then they asked him, Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk? (13) And he did not know Him who had cured him, for Jesus had moved away, a crowd being in the place. (14) Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, Behold, you are made whole. Sin no more lest a worse thing come to you. (15) The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him whole.*

There are three main characters here: Jesus who makes the man whole, the Pharisees who see the "sin" (carrying his bed) and miss the miracle (that he was able to carry his bed), and the man who was once infirm who now ends up telling on Jesus.

The crucial information is in verses 8 and 9 above: "*Jesus says to him, Rise, take up your bed and walk. (9) And immediately the man was made whole and took up his bed and walked. And it was a Sabbath on that day.*" Jesus speaks into the man's life and makes him whole and able to pick up his bed (probably a straw mat of some sort) and walk, throughout the passage this is referred to as "being made whole".

This is true holistic ministry, Jesus addresses the man's physical need first (verses 8 and 9) and his moral need second (verse 14) – saving grace always precedes moral reformation. God often does His greatest miracles 'while we were yet sinners' (Romans 5:8).

Those observing it, miss the miracle and just see a man carrying his bed on the Sabbath in clear violation of the religious codes of the day. The answer the man gave is a classic: "*He who made me*

whole said to me, Take up your bed and walk.” Clearly pointing out that Jesus (grace) could do what the Pharisees (Law) could not – that is making a man whole. But again the Pharisees miss the miracle and in their reply instead of *saying, “Who made you whole?”* indicating an interest in grace, they merely say *“Who is the man who said to you, Take up your bed and walk?”* Thus ignoring God’s great saving work in favor of locating a supposed “criminal”.

Jesus moves away and disappears into the crowd, doing another anonymous miracle. So much of God’s work is like that – anonymous. So often God heals, provides and saves and then leaves the scene with just a fragrance of grace lingering in the air.

Jesus did not just leave the man physically healed; He also sought to care for his soul. “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, Behold, you are made whole. Sin no more lest a worse thing come to you.” Jesus knew that this man had been morally compromised by his 38 years of dependency, desperation and alienation. Such long-term poverty often reduces people to a survival mentality in which higher values like loyalty and morality are discarded in favor of the prospect of immediate monetary gain. Jesus was trying to lift him up a notch to a higher spiritual and moral level.

However, Jesus’ exhortation seems to have offended the man, who immediately left to tell the Jews about Jesus, knowing full well that this would get Jesus into trouble. In direct contrast to the blind man in John 9 this fellow is an ungrateful wretch.

His reaction is the short-term survival mentality at work: The man had got what he wanted from Jesus – healing, now he might get some money from the Jews by telling on Him. This is the ultimate extension of the “hand-out mentality”.

So we have two sets of people who missed the point of the miracle entirely. The first is the man who received the miracle who saw it as “just another handout”, this time from God and who at no point “praises God” – in complete contrast to the lame man at the Gate Beautiful who went “walking and leaping and praising God”. The miracle was simply another thing that happened to him in life and seems to have wrought no perceptible moral or spiritual change. This is what is known as a defiled conscience, one that has been degraded by life until only immediate self-interest is left as a personal value.

The second are the Pharisees who see the miracle as an illegal act. Their spiritual senses are overwhelmed by a desire to control people and to wield power over others via the enforcing of various rules. The Jews, as John calls them, are blind to grace because they only see Law. This is like many cults and schismatic churches today. This is known as an overly scrupulous conscience, one that is overly concerned with religious laws and fine-points and strangely seared towards human compassion and quite unable to apprehend grace. The diametric opposite of the defiled conscience it is like an over-dose of conscience. But it is just as blind to God.

Those who worship in Spirit and in truth, on the other hand, would see a miracle, a mighty miracle, and smell the fragrance of grace and have an intact sense of wonder and a conscience alive to basic spiritual realities. Let us pray that God will enable us to have such a sense of spiritual wonder that we always behold His works.

John 5:16-18

Equal With God

John 5:16-18 MKJV *And therefore the Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath day. (17) But Jesus answered them, My Father works until now, and I work. (18) Then, because of this, the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but also said that God was His father, making Himself equal with God.*

Jesus is “breaking out of the box” of Jewish religious tradition. He does good works on the Sabbath (a healing miracle), and He called God His Father “*thus making Himself equal with God*”.

The Jewish spiritual world was stratified and the basic levels were: the Pit (where demons were confined), the lower and upper realms of Sheol (where the human dead dwelt), Earth, first heaven (where birds fly), second heaven (angelic realm) third heaven (throne) and above the heavens (God).

In this structure mankind was clearly divided into two, Jews who were under the Law which was administered by the good angels (Acts 7:25, Hebrews 2:2) and the Gentiles who worshipped fallen angels that is – demons (1 Corinthians 10:20).

Thus all men were less than the angelic realm and far, far less than God. Humanity was so far below God that any sort of ‘family relationship’ was thought to be utterly impossible. No mere human could call God his Father. God was said to be ‘the father of Israel’ as a nation but that implied nothing more than tender care and provision.

Jesus thus astonished everyone by calling God His Father. Fatherhood implies “having the same nature as”. Dogs only father dogs, cats only father cats, donkeys only father donkeys. If the father is a monkey, then we know that any child logically must also be a monkey. So if I say, “My father is God” then I am logically saying, “I have a divine nature”.

Thus by the Jewish logic of levels and natures anyone saying “My father is God” is saying “I am on the same general spiritual level as God and my make-up and nature is of the same kind as His.”

Now the OT says clearly that there is only one God, and now this person (Jesus) claims to be of the same spiritual level and make-up and nature as the one and only God, therefore they are claiming to be that God, or at least equal to Him.

Furthermore Jesus demonstrates powers that no normal human had at that time by giving prophecies about the end of the world and performing healings, exorcisms and mighty miracles. He was also going around seemingly “changing the rules” about things like the Sabbath and divorce. And only God can change the very rules that God had made.

So Jesus is clearly making Himself equal with God, and when the Jews accuse Him of this (saying He was equal with God) He does not flat-out deny it, even though such a denial would have got Him out of trouble – in that they wished to kill Him.

The epistles make very clear that Jesus was indeed God in human form:

Colossians 2:9 MKJV For in Him (Jesus Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Philippians 2:5-7 MKJV For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, (6) who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, (7) but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

John 1:1-3, 14 MKJV In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. ... (14) And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us. And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth.

Jesus was able to call God Father, because He was the Word, the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the fullness of deity in bodily form.

We can call God Father, because we are in Christ, are made citizens of Heaven, and are born of God with an eternal nature. Because of the work of Christ we will rule and reign with Him and He is not ashamed to call us “brothers” (Hebrews 2:11). He is the Son of God, the Elder Brother, and we are the “sons of God”, His brethren.

Let me be clear, we are not God, or even gods with a small g. We are sons of God, and we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ (Ephesians 2:6,7) promoted into glorious realms by the ascension of Jesus.

Jesus had God as His Father from all eternity; He is the only-begotten Son, while we are adopted children of God. Thus we can call God our Father without making ourselves equal with God. Yet we are to call Him “Abba”, Daddy in the spirit of our adoption as sons (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6).

Jesus shook the Jewish world by calling the Creator God “Father” – something that is so common today because of the Lord’s Prayer. It still makes Muslims furious when Christians dare to call God “Father”. It is an awesome privilege that has been bestowed upon us because we are new creations in Christ Jesus.

John 5:19-23

The Father And The Son

John 5:19-23 MKJV *Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He sees the Father do. For whatever things He does, these also the Son does likewise. (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows Him all the things that He Himself does. And He will show Him greater works than these, so that you may marvel. (21) For as the Father raises the dead and makes alive, even so the Son of Man makes alive whomever He wills. (22) For the Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son, (23) so that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*

Jesus says four astonishing things about Himself (remember yesterday He said he was God’s Son, “thus making Himself equal with God”):

1. For whatever things He (God the Father) does, the also the Son (Jesus) does likewise. That is Jesus is claiming to do the same activities as God.
2. The Son of Man (Jesus) makes alive whomever He wills. In other words Jesus is claiming that He has the god-like power to impart life, even eternal life.
3. The Father judges no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son (Jesus). In other words Jesus is claiming to be the judge of the souls of all men and women on planet earth.
4. “That all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father” and that not honoring the Son is to dishonor the Father. In other words Jesus is claiming that people should honor Him, even as they also honor God and that to not honor Him is to also not honor God.

These are astonishing claims! If they are true then Jesus does the works of God, can give life to the dead, judges the souls of all men, and is to be honored by all people everywhere. In other words if these claims are true, then Jesus is the Son of God and is also God. If these claims are true then Jesus is Lord and we must honor and worship Him.

On the other hand they could be false. If they are false then we have two alternatives. Either Jesus knew they were false and was a liar and was crucified for His deception. Or Jesus did not know these outrageous claims were false and thus was a raving lunatic in the same category as someone who maintains that they are a boiled egg! Jesus cannot be “just a good man” and claim to be the judge of all human souls. Such a claim is so grand that either He is what He says He is, or He is a demonic religious charlatan, or He is a deluded lunatic. He is either a liar, a lunatic or He is Lord. There are just no other alternatives.

But the transparent, sacrificial, honest quality of His life and teaching and the good that has flowed from them and the coherence and beauty of His thought tell us that He is not a liar and certainly no raving lunatic. So we are left with the third alternative – Jesus is who He says He is, the Son of God.

Jesus sees and does the works of God. So if I want God to work in my life, then I should ask Jesus to do that work. Christ in me is God at work within me. God heals through the name of Jesus, God does mighty miracles through the name of Jesus, and God even sends His Holy Spirit – through and in the name of Jesus. Faith in Jesus leads us into the realm of the might, miracle-working power of God.

Jesus has the power to give life to the dead. He makes alive whomever He wills. A dead person cannot will anything much, and we are dead in our sins until Christ makes us alive with the life that is from God. Beyond that we can come to Christ for a deeper experience of His eternal life within us. Christ makes us alive – in the midst of disappointment, disillusionment, despair and hopelessness God’s hope and life can break through and bring defeated souls into life and faith and hope and love.

All judgment has been committed to the Son. He is the Judge we will face on Judgment Day. Those who do not believe are condemned already but those who believe have passed out of death into life (see John 5:24,25, the next two verses after today’s passage). Jesus is not just a sentimental figure in a robe and with a beard and sandals; He is the living resurrected one, the Judge of all our souls. So it is very important that we obey His commandments.

So all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. Jesus is worthy of worship and honor as the Son of God. He is not just a worthy example, a good man, or a prophet; He is the One through whom all things were made and for whom all things were made (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-20, Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus is the Lamb of God, seated upon the throne (Revelation 5) before whom we all should bow and worship and sing praises.

Thus the Christian life is not just about life principles, morality or spiritual keys to success. The Christian life is about giving appropriate honor and glory to the Son of God, believing in Him, worshipping Him, and obeying His commandments.

The focus of our life has to be on God. Our personal success is a secondary by-product, and one that is negotiable. The non-negotiable aspect is faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God. Now this faith is not a momentary thing “I once prayed a prayer..” but an abiding life-directing and controlling reality. Peter did not become a great apostle by bowing his head by the lake of Galilee and uttering a one-minute prayer then going back to fishing as before. When Peter believed it was for good, and it took over and directed his whole life. That is the sort of faith we must have in Jesus the Son of God.

John 5:24-29

The Resurrection Of The Dead

John 5:24-29 MKJV *Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life. (25) Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live. (26) For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life within Himself, (27) and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. (28) Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear His voice, (29) and shall come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil to the resurrection of condemnation.*

This passage is both inspiring, and difficult. It seems, at first glance, to be contradictory on the question of salvation by faith & salvation by works. Verse 24 is a classic salvation by faith statement – “He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life.” While verse 29 seems to speak of salvation by works: “ and shall come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil to the resurrection of condemnation.”

There are two possible explanations. Firstly that faith must issue in works or it is dead, the works are merely evidence of the faith, which is to say that no one will be resurrected unless their faith was real and operative in their life. The other explanation is that Christians are saved by faith, but “those who have not heard” receive the judgment of the Gentiles (by works, justifying the good man, but apart from the Law) alluded to in Romans 2:5-12.

Whatever your take on this, the Christian life involves both living faith and good deeds. We are not just to be a people full of theological notions; instead we are to maintain strong righteous beliefs in God that guide all aspects of our life and action. With the exception of deathbed conversions, the rest of us must demonstrate our faith - in good works that God has planned for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10 MKJV *For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. Thus while we are saved by faith we should walk “worthy of the resurrection”:*

Luke 20:35-36 MKJV *But they who shall be counted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage. (36) Nor can they die any more, for they are equal to the angels, and are the sons of God, being the sons of the resurrection.*

Philippians 3:10-11 MKJV *(10) that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death; (11) if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead.*

So a Christian should aim to live a worthy and holy and godly life - which is what all the apostles' record, and which Jesus commands. This is accompanied by the strong belief that this life of holiness would be amply rewarded in the resurrection.

All life comes from God, including the power to live a holy life. Indeed the life we live in the resurrection will not be our own life, in our own strength, rather it will be a life given to us by Christ and it is clear that we enter into this gift of life by faith:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My Word and believes on Him who sent Me has everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life. (25) Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live. (26) For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life within Himself.”

Upon conversion we are moved from death to life and taken out of condemnation, so there is now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1,2).

This gift of life from Christ will even apply to the dead, in the graves, who shall hear his voice and live at the resurrection. (John 5:28) It also applies to the spiritually dead, who, when they “hear” by faith (spiritually, in themselves) the word of Christ are born-again (Romans 10:9-17).

So the Father has given to Jesus the power of eternal life as the Son of God (John 5:25), and the authority to judge the dead - as the Son of Man (John 5:27).

When we truly believe in Christ Jesus we relate to Him as the Son of God (John 1:12) and become His brethren (Hebrews 2:11), and as His brethren we should do what He did – good works and live as He lived – a holy and worthy life.

John 1:12-13 MKJV But as many as received Him, He gave to them authority to become the children of God, to those who believe on His name, (13) who were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but were born of God.

John 5:30-37

The Father Witnesses To The Son

John 5:30-37 MKJV *I can do nothing of My own self. As I hear, I judge, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me. (31) If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true. (32) There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. (33) You sent to John, and he bore witness to the truth. (34) But I do not receive testimony from man, but these things I say so that you might be saved. (35) He was a burning and shining light, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light. (36) But I have greater witness than that of John, for the works which the Father has given Me that I should finish them, the works which I do themselves witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me. (37) And He sending Me, the Father Himself, has borne witness of Me. Neither have you heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape.*

Jesus says that three things bore clear witness to Him – John the Baptist (John 5:33-35), His miracles (John 5:36) and the Father (John 5:37) so there was no need for Jesus to bear witness to Himself, which would have seemed to be invalid (John 5:30-32). Yet even with a great prophet testifying to Jesus, and great miracles showing plainly that He was different, and the Father’s testimony at His baptism (as well as in nature and the Scriptures) they did not believe.

Jesus also says some fascinating things about His relationship with the Father:

1. That He can do nothing by Himself. (v. 30)
2. That He does not seek His own will but the will of the Father. (v. 30)
3. That the Father has given works to Jesus to perform and He wishes to finish them. (v. 36)
4. That the Father sent Jesus. (v. 36,37)
5. That the Father has borne witness of Jesus. (v. 37)

These five things apply to all of us in ministry. We can do nothing without Christ but must abide in Him (John 15), we are not to seek our own will and interests but the interests of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:21), we have good works given us to do (Ephesians 2:10) and we should finish them (2 Corinthians 8:11, 2 Timothy 4:7, James 2:22) and we are sent by God into the harvest (Matthew 9:37,38) and so He will validate us and our ministry (Matthew 10:19,20; Luke 21:12-15; Isaiah 54:17).

Each of these five points has profound consequences for the Christian life. In total they mean that as we subsume our will to the will of the Father, then we do the works He wants us to do, and which He sent us to do, and then He bears witness to us and through us.

Thus we must start by “doing nothing” – except that which we see in Christ. Christ is the template and we are to follow the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2) and by abiding in Him bear much fruit (John 15).

It is the surrender of our will to God’s will that bears much fruit. That is not to say that we become passive, the apostles were active, vigorous strong and definite. But it was an activity that flowed from abiding in Christ.

We are not on Earth to become great, climb the social ladder or even change the world. Rather we are here to do the works that God has given us to do – which may well be looking after a disabled child. God sets the agenda; in fact, God has already set the agenda.

Ephesians 2:10 MKJV For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Therefore submitting to God’s will, means taking on God’s agenda and doing those good works that He has drawn up for us to do.

John the Baptist fulfilled the good works that God had planned for him, as a burning and shining light, and a national revival of joy ensued (John 5:35) but still the religious establishment did not believe his witness, and so with Christ. We are to do our works, even if they do not get the anticipated result. If we preach the truth and others do not listen, it is not our fault.

In the case of the Pharisees the fault lay in the heart of the hearers, which was dull and unable to perceive God (John 5:37).

God was giving clear testimony to Jesus – through John the Baptist, through the powerful works, and directly from Himself. Any person with even basic spiritual perception would have picked up that Jesus was the Messiah. But they were niggling about legalities and “witnesses” and ecclesiastical recognition. Jesus was not recognized by them and their system of giving honor to man (John 5:44) therefore, they thought He was not “valid”.

But it is not man that ultimately validates a ministry but God and God was doing so with signs and wonders and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the lame man, healed by the pool, was evidence of that (see the beginning of John 5).

John 5:38-47

The Unbelief Of The Jews

John 5:38-47 MKJV *And you do not have His Word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He has sent. (39) You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life. And they are the ones witnessing of Me, (40) and you will not come to Me that you might have life. (41) I do not receive honor from men. (42) But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. (43) I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me. If another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. (44) How can you believe, you who receive honor from one another and do not seek the honor that comes from God only? (45) Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you, Moses, in whom you trust. (46) For if you had believed Moses, you would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me. (47) But if you do not believe his writings, how shall you believe My Words?*

There are two causes listed here for their unbelief:

- a) Not listening to the Scriptures (v. 39,40, 45-47)
- b) Receiving honor from one another. (v. 41, 43,44)

These results in two spiritual conditions:

- 1) You do not have His Word abiding in you. (v. 38)
- 2) You do not have the love of God in you. (v. 42)

How to make you church go dead: Firstly, stop teaching the Bible, or teach only the bits you like. Secondly, create human honor systems of self-promotion and glorying in man. Have a Christianity-Life, not-too-heavy-on-the-bible, 3-ring circus of stages, entertainment, celebrities and honoring one another.

What is so wrong with honor systems? Honor systems create competition among believers, and result in politics, envy, strife and selfish ambition. As James says: *James 3:16 MKJV For where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every foul deed.*

Honor systems also tend to reward only either the dull orthodoxy of the establishment, the so-called innovative theology of heresy, or the powerful personalities of religious hucksters. Few faith-filled missionaries or humble servants of God get much in the way of human applause.

Jesus actually goes as far as to say: *Luke 6:26 MKJV Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you! For so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

And in today's passage: *"I do not receive honor from men."* (v. 41)

Ministering to people in order to receive human approval is one of the oldest traps in the ministry. Little by little they are told "don't preach on money" or "we like the Psalms" and the pastor complies for fear of losing his or her position. Whole books of the Bible are ignored, and difficult passages skipped over, and less than the full counsel of God is taught. Yet I think Martin Luther once said: He who preaches the gospel in all points except where it applies to the present age, has not preached the gospel at all."

So receiving honor and neglecting the message of the Scriptures are intertwined evils that lead surely to unbelief. The Jews refused to believe Moses' testimony concerning Christ and the testimony of

other Scriptures such as Isaiah 9 that were clearly being fulfilled in Jesus. They read the Scriptures according to human convention rather than according to the Spirit and they read them that way because that led to human honor from their peers. The erroneous conventional interpretation had become socially reinforced.

Today we are in a similar position on doctrines such as inerrancy, homosexuality, hell and the uniqueness of Jesus for salvation - all of which are now very unpopular. Non-one receives honor for saying homosexuality is wrong and the passages on it are neglected in many pulpits.

As Jesus said earlier in John - John 4:24 MKJV *God is a spirit, and they who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.* Truth is a basic requirement for true fellowship with God and love of God.

Thus, the neglect of inner spiritual message of the Bible and the raising up of human systems of honor may lead to a shriveling of fellowship with God. The Word is not in them, and the love of God is not in them. And in the end they refuse to believe in the Messiah and thus fail to enter into salvation.

They did "search the Scriptures" thinking that salvation was in a book, rather than in God. We should study the Bible but we must do so looking to God for approval and listening to the Holy Spirit as its interpreter. For the letter on its own kills, but the Spirit gives life. *2 Corinthians 3:6 MKJV Who also has made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive.*

Ultimately, our doctrine must emerge from the sensitive conscience, informed by the Word, and quickened by the Spirit - and not from any human system of approval.

John 6:1-14

The Feeding Of The Five Thousand

John 6:1-14 MKJV *After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias. (2) And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles, which He did on the sick ones. (3) And Jesus went up into a mountain and sat there with His disciples. (4) And the Passover was near, a feast of the Jews. (5) Then Jesus lifted up His eyes and saw a great crowd come to Him. He said to Philip, Where shall we buy loaves so that these may eat? (6) And He said this to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do. (7) Philip answered Him, Loaves for two hundred denarii are not enough for them, that every one may take a little. (8) One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, (9) There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fish, but what are these among so many? (10) And Jesus said, Make the men recline. And there was much grass in the place. So the men reclined, about five thousand in number. (11) And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to those who had reclined; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. (12) And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing is lost. (13) Therefore they gathered and filled twelve hand baskets with fragments of the five barley loaves that were left over to those who had eaten. (14) Then seeing the miracle that Jesus did, those men said, this is truly the Prophet, the One coming into the world.*

This miracle is in all four gospels in almost identical form, except Luke adds the seating arrangements - by fifties (Luke 9:14). It marks a turning point in the ministry of Jesus after which He seems to become much more Messianic and a political threat. It is after this that the Galileans want to take Him and make Him King by force (incidentally reinforcing the fact He was of the royal bloodline.)

A similar thing happens to priests and missionaries who move from a preaching ministry to also meeting human needs in a holistic fashion, suddenly life becomes political.

Let's look at the miracle in some depth. It is a miracle that meets the obvious physical needs of his hearers, the popular peasants of Galilee, with their staple food – bread and fish. It is an economic miracle of supply.

I once had a similar miracle with a large yam I was given when I was a missionary in Papua New Guinea. I had been moved to a very expensive urban area and my support was insufficient so a church elder gave me a large purple-black yam which I put on the kitchen bench and cut off a chunk each, day, boiled it and ate. It was delicious. After a while I noticed the yam was not getting any smaller, until the last week I was in PNG when it seemed to shrink and vanish. The yam lasted about four months.

My wife tells similar stories about cooking for large Christian university student functions in Manila, and how no matter how little they started with, there was always more than enough by the end.

God's blessing enables a small amount to go a long way and I am continually surprised at how much can be done with little or no cash, but just with the blessing of God (e.g. parting the Red Sea, healing lepers etc.) Many a large church has started in a garage with little funds. If you start with just what you have, then somehow it ends up being enough.

Money is still needed, wages and the electricity bill still have to be paid, but money is not the overriding factor – the blessing of God is. Some of my most effective Internet ministry was done in 1996-1998, out of a dusty 8ft by 6ft breezeblock office in the Australian tropics with an old computer and a 33K modem. Eternity Online magazine peaked with one million readers plus per month. These days' administration and paperwork and writing grant applications seem to take up way too much time.

Jesus has a creative powerful solution to even very large-scale problems – like 5000 hungry people. The scale is not a problem to Him. God made everything we know out of a “handful of nothing”; He can also make bread for five thousand out of a few barley loaves.

I tend to stress out over large-scale problems instead of handing my five loaves and two small fish to Jesus. We need to stop, and “be still” and ask Jesus for the creative solution that He has in mind.

Just a note, the miracle did not happen because of the disciple's faith, but because of their obedience. The power was with Jesus, not with man. They just got to see that power at work in a spectacular way because they obeyed.

John 6:15-21

Jesus Walks On The Water

John 6:15-21 YLT *Jesus, therefore, having known that they are about to come, and to take him by force that they may make him king, retired again to the mountain himself alone. (16) And when evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, (17) and having entered into the boat, they were going over the sea to Capernaum, and darkness had already come, and Jesus had not come unto them, (18) the sea also--a great wind blowing--was being raised, (19) having pushed onwards, therefore, about twenty-five or thirty furlongs, they behold Jesus walking on the sea, and coming nigh to the boat, and they were afraid; (20) and he saith to them, 'I am he, be not afraid;' (21) they were willing then to receive him into the boat, and immediately the boat came unto the land to which they were going.*

Jesus runs away from earthly glory. Just a few verses before (John 5:41) He had said that He refused to receive glory from men, now He demonstrates what He meant by heading away from the crowd that wanted Him to be King and entering into solitude and prayer – he “retired again to the mountain himself alone.”

Jesus was battling for His soul. This study is late because this evening I went and saw the movie Kingdom of Heaven, which is about a Crusade and also about keeping our souls in the midst of severe temptations and struggles. In it the hero has to choose again and again to be honorable. There is a great line in it “Allah says submit, but Jesus says choose”. (BTW it is much better than the critics have said).

And here Jesus Himself had to choose. He knew he could have claimed the Kingship, which was rightfully His, bypassed the cross and used twelve legions of angels to overthrow Rome. He was seeing great miracles, healing the sick, feeding the five thousand and walking on water - His powers must have been intoxicating. He was popular and He was anointed. He could easily have been King.

But instead He goes to prayer and then heads into a storm. This is a picture of much Christian ministry. We strain and struggle and nearly sink and row “twenty-five to thirty furlongs” (3 to 4 miles) through big waves until our muscles ache, and then just at the point of weariness and panic Jesus turns up and we are at land. That happened to me last week with a project that has been going in circles for a year, seemingly going nowhere and which had worn me to a frantic frazzle. Now suddenly it looks like actually happening. What happened? Jesus got in the boat!

Now it is up to Jesus to decide when He will turn up – and meanwhile we have no choice but to row hard! It is not a lack of faith to do the hard work, but it is sheer grace and blessing and relief when the Lord turns up!

“And darkness had already come, and Jesus had not come unto them,” Darkness in John’s gospel always has a spiritual meaning “and Judas went out – and it was night” being the most famous. The darkness is the evil that opposes the good and struggles against the light but cannot overthrow it (John 1:5).

The darkness had come and was all around the disciples - they were in the midst of a storm and were wet and cold and weary and frustrated and in the midst of their abandonment and anxiety they began to see a terrible apparition, someone walking on the water towards them, perhaps a ghost come to take their souls! They were doomed - and where was Jesus! Right in the midst of their fears!

Jesus often seems to turn up at the worst of moments when my mind is thinking weird frightened thoughts. And He often steps out of the blackest night with a cheery: ‘I am he, be not afraid;’ and when He arrives His presence changes everything.

Why does God put us through such things? Why are we left to row our boat in the storm? To test us, grow us, and teach us. If everything was miraculously “snap-of-the-fingers” convenient we would still be infants in our faith.

At the end of the Kingdom of Heaven one of the Saracens (Muslims) says to the spiritually perplexed hero: “God must love you or you could not have done such things”. When we look back and see our almost sinking boat touching dry land, in an instant, then we know that God is with us. Suddenly the impossible becomes possible and when that happens, after we have done all we can and got nowhere, then we know it is God’s love.

Jesus never deserts His friends but neither does He pander to them like little children. He always treated the disciples as very capable grown men. We need the dignity of the human struggle in the darkness and the storm, and we also need the miracle.

Jesus walked on the water. Just like that, as if the elements were His to command – and they were. The chaos that disturbs rocks and us and our boat is under the feet of Jesus.

Romans 16:20 MKJV And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Ephesians 1:22 MKJV And He has put all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

All our problems are under the feet of Jesus! Praise the Lord!

John 6:22-27

Seeking Jesus Aright

John 6:22-27 MKJV *The following day, the crowd standing on the other side of the sea had seen that there was no other little boat there except that one into which His disciples had entered, and when they saw that Jesus did not go with His disciples into the little boat, but that His disciples had gone away alone, (23) (however, other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the loaves, the Lord having given thanks), (24) therefore, when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor His disciples, they themselves also entered into the boats and came to Capernaum seeking Jesus. (25) And when they had found Him on the other side of the sea, they said to Him, Rabbi, when did you come here? (26) Jesus answered them and said, Truly, truly, I say to you, You seek Me not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. (27) Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you. For God the Father sealed Him.*

The crowd is now seeking Jesus – for all the wrong reasons and so Jesus is playing the spiritual equivalent of hide and seek. In fact in the remainder of John 6 He says such hard things that almost all (except the disciples) turn away and stop following Him.

Jesus wanted true believers not adoring followers. Jesus did not receive glory from men, or seek their praise or want them to follow Him in order to make Him feel important or successful.

In fact Jesus was not very 'seeker sensitive'. He made people go out into the wilderness to find Him, he told incomprehensible parables and made it clear that it was tough to be a true believer e.g. "take up your cross and follow me".

Jesus intrigues the crowd when He got to the other side of the lake so they ask: "Rabbi, when did you come here?" To which Jesus does not give an answer. Instead He tells them they were seeking Him for all the wrong reasons: Truly, truly, I say to you, You seek Me not because you saw the miracles, but because you ate the loaves and were filled.

He then corrects their priorities in the next verse: "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you. For God the Father sealed Him."

These verses alone should be enough to sink the so-called prosperity gospel. Personal satisfaction, especially material satisfaction, is not the aim of life nor is it the purpose of Christ's mission here on earth.

We are not to put our life's energy into materialism but into the pursuit of eternal reward.

Matthew 6:19-21 MKJV Do not lay up treasures on earth for yourselves, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. (20) But lay up treasures in Heaven for yourselves, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:22-23 MKJV And He said to His disciples, Therefore I say to you, Be not anxious as to your life, what you shall eat; nor for the body, what you shall put on. (23) Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.

Indeed the bread of life is Christ Himself and the doing of His will. John 4:34 MKJV Jesus said to them, My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. Later in this chapter Jesus will graphically describe such spiritual food as "eating His flesh and drinking His blood".

We often get God wrong, we want Him to be our "Heavenly Jeeves", a convenient butler who thinks of our every comfort and who is brought into service with just a simple prayer. But God is no man's servant!

God is not convenient. He wants true sincere spiritual worshippers who worship Him in spirit and in truth and who seek eternal life – not just bread and fish. As we shall see later Peter left all and followed Jesus for His words – which were words of eternal life. In the end that is all we get – words. But what words! Words that impart eternal life!

Many of us in ministry take stock in mid-life and see our contemporaries zooming ahead of us in financial and social position while we struggle on. Then we wonder: "if it was worth it all". We look at our bookshelves and our Greek lectionaries and wonder if our pursuit of truth has got us anywhere. But we have Christ and we have the words of eternal life. And we will have no idea how much that will be worth until we get to Heaven.

In the end the whole Christian life is a wager – that pursuing eternal life and the "food that does not perish" is worth it.

One thing is sure – that if you just pursue material things you end with nothing at the end of the game. Naked you come into the world and naked you leave it (1 Timothy 6:7). All that work is for stuff that perishes, which means it is for nothing in the long haul.

What we gamble on is that we can take our wisdom and faith and sanctification and grace and holiness and love with us beyond the grave. These things, our souls tell us, will last. So they are the things that we should work for.

John 6:27

For God The Father Sealed Him...

John 6:27 *Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you. For God the Father sealed Him.*

We will focus for today on the final phrase in John 6:27 “For God the Father sealed Him”. Anything that happens to Christ is of great importance to those who are in Christ so we need to enquire into what is meant by the sealing of Jesus.

John only uses the word “seal” on one other occasion in his gospel: *John 3:31-33 MKJV He who comes from above is above all; he who is from the earth is earthly and speaks from the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all, (32) and what He has seen and heard, that He testifies, and no one receives His testimony. (33) He who has received His testimony has set his seal to this, that God is true.*

There the “seal” could be to do with verifying that the witness of Jesus is true and that God is true. So here “seal” may have to do with ‘authenticating’ the testimony of Jesus – firstly, at His baptism “this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” and then through the testimony of John the Baptist, and through the miracles and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. In this case we could also read, “For God the Father has authenticated Him” – indeed God the Father is always authenticating His Son – most notably through the resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4)

Secondly, there is a spiritual sense to the “seal”. The seal says that we belong to God as one of His servants: *Revelation 7:2-3 MKJV And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, (3) saying, Do not hurt the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*

The seal of the Living God marks those who are spiritually alive – the true servants of God in Christ. Thus Jesus had the “stamp of God” upon His life. He was a marked man, marked out as belonging to the Father and set aside for His work.

This sealing is an inner work of God through the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:22 MKJV (22) And He has sealed us and having given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Ephesians 1:13-14 MKJV in whom also you, hearing the Word of Truth, the gospel of our salvation, in whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, (14) who is the earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 4:30 MKJV And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you are sealed until the day of redemption.

The way that God knows those who are truly His, and discerns the true believers from the “fakes” is by checking the “seal” – the imprint of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Those with the Holy Spirit are His, and those who merely imitate the faith without this interior reality are not.

When we get to Heaven we will probably not be given a test on our theology or correct denominational affiliation, rather God will check for faith in Christ and for the presence of His seal – the Holy Spirit.

THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT

Romans 2:29 MKJV but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart; in spirit and not in letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God.

Romans 8:9 MKJV But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

Romans 8:14 MKJV For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

1 John 3:24 MKJV And he who keeps His commandment dwells in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit, which He gave to us.

1 John 4:13 MKJV By this we know that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

Romans 8:29 (above) tells us that we are not validated as true Christians by:

- a) an outward mark or ceremony such as circumcision.
- b) By “letter”, that is by observing spiritual rules or laws.
- c) By human approval and recognition that is “the praise of men”.

Romans 8:9 tells us that without the Spirit dwelling in us we are “none of His”.

Romans 8:14 tells us that the essential characteristic of the sons of God is that they are led by the Spirit of God.

1 John 3;24 tells us that we know that God dwells in us by the Spirit which He gave us.

1 John 4:13 says that we know we dwell in God – is because He has given us of His Spirit.

Thus, true Christianity is a God-wrought interior work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Church membership rolls may have their uses but they are no register of the saved. The saved are registered by being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

Thus, Christ was sealed with the Holy Spirit as a servant of God and this then brought about His authentication as a Servant of God and the consequent miracles that authenticated Him. It was His anointing, not any human diploma or ordination that marked and sealed the ministry of Jesus Christ.

John 6:28-35

The Bread Of Life

John 6:28-35 MKJV *Then they said to Him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God? (29) Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent. (30) Therefore they said to Him, What sign do you show then, so that we may see and believe you? What do you work? (31) Our fathers ate the manna in the desert, as it is written, "He gave them bread from Heaven to eat." (32) Then Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses did not give you that bread from Heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from Heaven. (33) For the bread of God is He who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world. (34) Then they said to him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. (35) And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes on Me shall never thirst.*

The crowd are always trying to turn the conversation back to "give us bread" (v.31 & v.34) they are focused on having God meet their physical needs. But Jesus is trying to point them to the meeting of their spiritual needs.

The crowd starts off with a polite question to the Rabbi "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" I think this was meant to impress Jesus with their piety, flatter Him a little, and put Him in a good mood so they would get what they wanted – which was bread. As a missionary I have sometimes been asked to preach in a church and later found out this was just "buttering me up" in the (vain) hope that they would get funding from Australia or America. This question to Jesus is quite similar.

Jesus replies with the quite curt: "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." Faith in Jesus as the Son of God enables us to "work the works of God", indeed without such faith we "can do nothing" (John 15:5). The true work of God is faith, and all other works flow from that one main work of trust in God.

For instance as a missionary I must first trust the Lord and step out in faith, as I step out in faith and trust God, then from the work of faith flow the other works of teaching, mercy and compassion. The work of faith begins and under girds the whole enterprise- and if that faith should flag, then I end up with a bureaucracy not a ministry.

The next two verses boil down to them trying to strike a bargain with Jesus around the proposition: "Give us bread and we will believe in You".

(30) Therefore they said to Him, What sign do you show then, so that we may see and believe you? What do you work? (31) Our fathers ate the manna in the desert, as it is written, "He gave them bread from Heaven to eat."

Jesus then decides to use this as a jumping off point to preach the gospel:

(32) Then Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Moses did not give you that bread from Heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from Heaven. (33) For the bread of God is He who comes down from Heaven and gives life to the world.

This is very similar to the same "hook" Jesus used with the woman at the well except that "living water" is replaced with "bread from Heaven" and later "bread of life". Jesus of course is referring to Himself as the true Bread from Heaven (thus making this a good passage for Communion.) Jesus is the One who came down from heaven to give spiritual life and nourishment to all who believe.

The “manna in the wilderness” was simply a type of the true Bread from Heaven, which is Christ. Thus is the Old is fulfilled in the New.

“and gives life to the world” – Christ gives life to the world, to all who will receive it in this world, and without Christ the world is life-less. Without Him we are utterly dead in our trespasses and sins - but by grace He has given us new life and raised us with Him to sit in heavenly realms (Ephesians 4:1-7).

1 John 5:11-12 MKJV And this is the record, that God has given to us everlasting life, and this life is in His Son. (12) He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Totally missing the point the crowd asks: “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” And Jesus responds: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes on Me shall never thirst.”

The spiritual hunger of mankind is met in Christ and finds more than enough to satisfy even the most ravenous spiritual appetites. There is so much to Christ that we can never devour it all.

There is a dearth of preaching about Jesus, His attributes and character and miracles and nature – and the people are hungry and thirsty while some pastors share ideas and stories and notions and talk about good things but not God things. Paul preached nothing but “Christ and Him crucified” and I try to make sure every sermon of mine has Christ at the center.

Jesus is the food and drink of the Christian soul and if we are to feed our sheep we must feed them Jesus. Let’s focus our sermons and bible studies on Jesus Christ and His salvation and we shall see true church growth in both grace and number.

John 6:35-40

The One Who Comes To Me...

John 6:35-40 MKJV *And Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes on Me shall never thirst. (36) But I said to you that you also have seen Me and do not believe. (37) All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will in no way cast out. (38) For I came down from Heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. (39) And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up again at the last day. (40) And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes on Him should have everlasting life. And I will raise him up at the last day.*

Today we will pick up the last verse from yesterday (v.35) and go on to look at some of the Bible’s most interesting verses about our common salvation.

Eternal life requires an infinite resource to sustain it and faith in Christ will give us the spiritual resources (bread of life) that will sustain us for eternity. All other sources of power will fade away or be limited in some way. All complexity requires maintenance, or it falls into decay – and life is complex! So God sustains the believer through Christ who works in us for our good.

In verse 36, Jesus then accuses the crowd of unbelief, of being cynical spectators in the salvation story wanting “one more sign” before they will believe – and thus never believing! They actually saw Jesus do the miracles – and yet still did not believe!

Verse 37 says: “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will in no way cast out.” Salvation is like a train to Heaven. Anyone who wants to can get on the train, and no one who gets on the Salvation Train will ever be thrown off. And everyone who the Father wants on the Salvation Train will be aboard. The Salvation Train is Christ and all who are “in Him” (through grace, by faith) are on the path to salvation – and will arrive, for the train is safe.

Verse 38 tells us that Jesus came not to do His own will – which is also in line with the prayer in Gethsemane: *Matthew 26:39 MKJV And He went a little further and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.*

Some create great problems for the doctrine of the Trinity in this supposed conflict between the will of Jesus Christ and the will of the Father. They ask: “How can one God have three separate wills, that is a will for each of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?” An analogy might be a perfect marriage, which does not stifle individuality, but still makes the two people into one. It is in the nature of personality to want to unite with another, and it is also the nature of personality to exercise free will. Jesus Christ would not be a full person if He did not possess a free will – and neither would the Father! But the will of Jesus Christ is a freely surrendered will. God is complicated and in His complexity He is a Trinity of three eternal persons in one essential and unified Being. Each person has utterly and totally free will, but that free will is exercised in harmony and grace and perfect unity.

The last two verses tell us about the sureness of our resurrection glorification: *(39) And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up again at the last day. (40) And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes on Him should have everlasting life. And I will raise him up at the last day.*

Not all who thought they followed Jesus were those “which He has given Me I should lose nothing.” Those who followed for bread, or to make Jesus a political Messiah or for personal profit like Judas – these fell away. They were followers but not true believers. What then are the characteristics of true believers who will be raised on the last day? “That everyone who sees the Son and believes on Him should have everlasting life.” They see (Literally behold, gaze continually at) Christ and believe in Him. Jesus’ words are taken with utmost seriousness by true believers - they obey His commandments and love His righteousness.

False followers have a strong personal agenda that is primary and which God must fit into – bread, political power, money, and various personal desires. When God offends their personal agenda, and asks for Isaac to be put on the altar, they turn back from the faith. On the other hand true believers can sing “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give” and truly mean it.

We need to spend much time beholding Jesus and believing Him. The verbs are present participles “who is seeing the Son and who is believing on Him” – and this implies continuous action, it is not a one off spiritual experience but a daily habit of faith in Jesus the Son of God.

In the end it must be God’s will, not our will and God’s ambitions and interests, not our ambitions and interests, and to such folk, the true believers salvation is safe and sure and guaranteed.

Jesus Christ the Son of God will come in glory and power and will raise true believers on the Last Day. We will have both eternal life and a glorious, eternal and immortal resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:35-58) and become like the angels in Heaven. *Luke 20:35-36 CEV But in the future*

world no one who is worthy to rise from death will either marry or die. They will be like the angels and will be God's children, because they have been raised to life.

That is worth sacrificing our personal desires for!

John 6:41-47 Unless The Father

John 6:41-47 MKJV *Then the Jews murmured about Him, because He said, I am the bread which came down from Heaven. (42) And they said, Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How now does this One say, I have come down from Heaven? (43) Jesus therefore answered and said to them, Do not murmur with one another. (44) No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Me. (46) Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God, He has seen the Father. (47) Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me has everlasting life.*

The Jews did not believe but made comments about His earthly origins. Instead of addressing their question Jesus goes to the root source of their unbelief – not being taught of God.

Some people have zero spiritual intuition. Literal to the last they “just don’t get” even the most obvious of the parables and entirely miss the signs of times. Other people are spiritually sensitive and attuned and pick things up very quickly; they have a life-long curiosity about meaning, spirituality and deeper religious matters. These are learners in spiritual things are “being taught by God”.

That is why Jesus says things such as:

Matthew 11:15 MKJV He who has ears to hear, let him hear and

Matthew 13:12 MKJV For whoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance. But whoever does not have, from him shall be taken away even that which he has.

There are those who are being drawn by God to Christ, and those who are oblivious to spiritual matters. From an early age I was interested in Greek and Roman myths and spirituality in general, then in existentialism, then in astrology, the New Age, Zen and finally Christianity. I was always very sensitive as a young person and spiritually curious. This I believe was God at work in me slowly drawing me to Himself.

Each of us, who are in Christ – and reading this, are being taught by God (v. 45 above) and this devotional is just one small part of His instructing you. As I used to say to my bible college students in Australia – unless God teaches you, you will learn nothing.

I noticed that about one-third of bible college students really “get it” and grow while two-thirds are hardly changed at all by two years in the Scriptures. This is largely independent of the lecturer’s style. Those who are spiritually hungry will learn even from a poor lecturer. But those who are self-satisfied would hardly learn even from John Stott himself. (That is not to say we should lecture badly).

All spiritual growth is a divine miracle. It took Jesus 3 seconds to raise Lazarus but three YEARS to get His disciples to learn the truth and to truly believe in Him!

Coming to Christ is God’s work in us: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me

draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Me."

God communicates with our spirit to teach us the things of Christ:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 MKJV (But as it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard," nor has it entered into the heart of man, "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God.

God reveals to us, the deep things of God, things that eye has not seen, nor ear heard! He does this through the Holy Spirit so that we might know the things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16)

"Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Me." (As I did!) Though we may wander down many wrong tracks if we truly follow the voice of conscience and truth and spiritual sensitivity we will always end up face to face with Jesus Christ at the end of the day.

On our own we cannot get there, we will be as argumentative and blind as the Jews in John's gospel. Everything works against us finding God on our own - our mind is fallen, our light is dim, our efforts are insufficient, our flesh is strong, and the world is full of spiritual deception that lures us away from the truth.

The only way that the sinner can find grace is if the Father draws him. This is known as preeminent grace (pre-before, veno – to go) that is the grace that goes before conversion to draw us to God. None of us can say "I have such a high IQ that I managed to find faith in God through my own cogitations." We can only say "I believe because the Father taught me, and showed me Christ."

Yet we have to be willing to be taught and we have to choose to believe. Which is why Jesus ends up today's passage with: Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me has everlasting life.

John 6:48-58

Whoever Partakes Of My Flesh

John 6:48-59 MKJV *I am the Bread of life. (49) Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and died. (50) This is the Bread, which comes down from Heaven, so that a man may eat of it and not die. (51) I am the Living Bread, which came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he shall live forever. And truly the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (52) Then the Jews argued with one another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? (53) Then Jesus says to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves. (54) Whoever partakes of My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (55) For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. (56) He who partakes of My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me, and I in him. (57) As the living Father has sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he who partakes of Me, even he shall live by Me. (58) This is the Bread, which came down from Heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna, and died; he who partakes of this Bread shall live forever. (59) He said these things in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.*

The miracle of the manna was great but ultimately ineffective for (a) it did not cause those who ate it to live forever – they all died, (b) it did not cause them to believe in God – because they died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. So the miracle of Moses' manna gave neither physical nor eternal life. By contrast Jesus gives eternal life now and will raise us up bodily on the last day.

In his commentary on John, Leon Morris argues strenuously from verb tenses and other data that this passage does not refer to Communion but to the Cross-. I would say that its primary meaning is the Cross, of which Communion is a reminder. We “eat and drink” of Christ when we believe in His atoning work on our behalf. That is the spiritual side of Communion, the external symbol being the bread and wine. Communion is not essential for salvation but faith in the atonement is, and Communion is that ceremony we normally use to express our faith in the atonement.

When Jesus says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves.” He does not mean that we have to go to a church building and receive communion from a priest or pastor to be saved. Salvation is by living internal faith not by an externally applied sacrament.

Jesus means that we are to “feast” on what He has done for us in the cross – and that may be in a daily quiet time, or a bible study, or at church or in a large variety of settings. However we tend to do that most often when we contemplate His sacrifice for us during communion.

So the saving act is the Cross – not the sacrament. The sacrament is simply a reminder of the Cross.

By using the graphic representation “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood” Jesus is emphasizing His actual physical, biological self. Flesh (sarx) is a sweaty, physical word (in contrast to soma / body). He uses it to say at least four different things:

- a) He is saying Christianity is more than just believing a disembodied Greek philosophy; it is a participation in a very physical sacrifice. The flesh and blood of Christ is important – indeed vital, not just the teachings and ideas.
- b) He is saying He is physical that is that He is a fully incarnated God. He is not just an angel or a demiurge – He has flesh and blood.
- c) It is a call to total intimacy – to eat His flesh, drink His very blood, and to dwell in him and have him dwell in us. There can be no holding back at a distance. We must be partakers’ not just observers. “He who partakes of My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me, and I in him.”
- d) It is a call to a source of real life. Jesus says “you do not have life in yourselves” and indeed that is so for all die, just as those who ate the manna eventually perished. Jesus also says: “which I will give for the life of the world.” In other words His flesh is a gift that brings life to humanity and solves the problem of our mortality.

Jesus explains the mechanism of His imparting life to humanity: “As the living Father has sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he who partakes of Me, even he shall live by Me.” The eternal life of the Father is the life that is in the Son, and by partaking of Christ we partake of that eternal life.

To use a very simple analogy - Jesus is like an ATM machine, connected to the Bank of Heaven, from which we can receive eternal life. The ATM machine can only dispense those things that are in the Bank of Heaven – eternal things. Jesus Christ is the point that we can connect to God’s eternal kingdom and all its benefits. The Father’s life dwells in the Son, and it is from Jesus that we can receive God’s eternal life. *Colossians 2:9 MKJV For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

John finishes this passage with a brief statement: “He said these things in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.” These were actual words, spoken to real people, who found them hard to understand. It was not a fictional Socratic dialogue made up to illustrate a point. So Jesus Christ is not just a symbol, a philosopher, or an ideal, He is a person with flesh and blood who taught in a synagogue in an actual place called Capernaum. This helped to refute Gnosticism and its unreal and disembodied view of Jesus.

John 6:60-63

Spirit & Life

John 6:60-63 MKJV *Then when they had heard, many of His disciples said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? (61) But knowing in Himself that His disciples murmured about it, Jesus said to them, Does this offend you? (62) Then what if you should see the Son of Man going up where He was before? (63) It is the Spirit that makes alive, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life.*

God is life and life is of God. That is why the Bible calls God “the Living God” and why Jesus, in verse 57 (yesterdays passage), calls God “the Living Father”. John 6:57 MKJV As the living Father has sent Me, and I live through the Father, so he who partakes of Me, even he shall live by Me.

The material flesh, without the life principle, rapidly decays and rots. The collocation of proteins and lipids has no energy of its own. According to one website () the chemicals in our body are worth about \$4.50! Indeed the flesh profits nothing!

The life principle is called spirit – that is what animates us and gives us great value as persons. As Jesus says in verse 63 “It is the Spirit that makes alive.” We commonly use the word in this sense when we say that someone who is animated and alive is ‘spirited” while a person who is lackluster and apathetic is called “dispirited”.

The God principle and the Life principle are very closely connected through the fact that God is the Creator who gives life to all things, and who has life in Himself. God places His life in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9) who then makes it available to us through faith - and who dwells us as we dwell in Him (John 6:57).

The key to receiving the eternal life of God in our souls is in believing the words of Jesus. “The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life.” (John 6:63) Faith in the words of Jesus enables us to connect to God, and to receive the life of God.

When this life manifests in us it does so as spiritual fruit – the love, joy, peace, patience and kindness of Galatians 5:22-23. Such life is more than mere energy; it is personal and divine life and has a quality of love and peace to it. It is highly organized and harmonious energy, more like a symphony of the soul than the “frantic, clamorous noise” of the flesh.

God’s life is more than mere existence. Eternal life is much more and much higher than eternal existence. Even Satan has eternal existence! But the Devil does not possess eternal life.

Eternal life is the harmony of Heaven and the peace of God dwelling in the soul of the believer - to enrich it, develop it and sanctify it to completeness and perfection. This is a spiritual work that is brought about by spiritual means, through a living faith connection with God, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

The flesh is useless in this. No amount of non-spiritual work can bring about the life of God in our souls. We can climb stairs on our knees, be circumcised, and whip ourselves until we bleed and try all sorts of external religious practices – but they are of absolutely no use apart from Christ. Two New Testament passages make this absolutely plain:

Colossians 2:20-23 MKJV (20) If then you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to its ordinances: (21) touch not, taste not, handle not; (22) which things are all for corruption in the using, according to the commands and doctrines of men? (23) These things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and humility, and unsparing severity of the body, but are not of any value for the satisfying of the flesh.

Galatians 3:1-5 MKJV O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you not to obey the truth, to whom before your eyes Jesus Christ was written among you crucified? (2) This only I would learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing of faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, do you now perfect yourself in the flesh? (4) Did you suffer so many things in vain, if indeed it is even in vain? (5) Then He supplying the Spirit to you and working powerful works in you, is it by works of the law, or by hearing of faith?

True Christian spirituality is not found in the “works of the law” nor is it in “the commands and doctrines of men” rather it is in laying hold of the life of God which is in Christ, by faith and then living out this life in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, long-suffering and self-control.

As with any tree, the fruit flow from the life, not the other way around. We cannot get God’s life by forcing ourselves to have self-control and patience – we will just end up as rigid legalists doing that! The life flows from the Spirit in us, which comes, as we truly believe the words of Jesus.

When Jesus says: “Then what if you should see the Son of Man going up where He was before?” (v. 62) He is referring to His ascension and His visible return to the Heaven from which He came - as the bringer of Eternal Life who was validated by His resurrection from the dead. Jesus is a clear demonstration of what God’s life looks like in human form, and its grace and power. Only He can thus say: The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life. (v. 63)

John 6:64-71

The Things Behind

John 6:64-71 MKJV *But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who is the one betraying Him. (65) And He said, Because of this I said to you that no one can come to Me unless it was given to him from My Father. (66) From this time many of His disciples went back into the things behind, and walked no more with Him. (67) Then Jesus said to the Twelve, Do you also wish to go away? (68) Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life. (69) And we have believed and have known that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. (70) Jesus answered them, Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? And one of you is a devil? (71) But he spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon; for it was he who was about to betray Him, being one of the Twelve.*

This is the point when many walk away from Jesus and go back to their former lives: “From this time many of His disciples went back into the things behind, and walked no more with Him.” (Interestingly this is John 6:66!)

There seem to be two kinds of unbelievers here a) the unbelievers b) the betrayer – Judas. The unbelievers were numerous. The betrayer was one evil man – Judas Iscariot (v.70).

Jesus explains the unbelievers thus: "Because of this I said to you that no one can come to Me unless it was given to him from My Father." Faith is a gift that God gives under many and varied circumstances. Without this gift of faith no one can come to Christ. Why do some not receive it? That is a mystery but some do not even desire to receive it! If we go through the rest of John 6 we find that those that walked away seem to be those centered on this life - and wanted a political Messiah who they could make King and who would give them bread. Such folk want tangible and immediate solutions and have little place for faith.

But the Betrayer was not just ignorant, or faith-less – but rather was evil and Satanic so full of greed and treachery that Jesus could call Judas 'a devil' (v.70).

Peter, by contrast, clung to Christ: Then Jesus said to the Twelve, Do you also wish to go away? (68) Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life. (69) And we have believed and have known that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Peter was not anchored in the miracles nor in free bread nor in political activism but in the truth of what Christ taught: "You have the Words of eternal life." Truth is the safest place of all; because political programs may fail, miracles may cease and the bread may run out - but God is always the same.

Why didn't Jesus explain Himself more carefully to the unbelievers? Surely they could have been persuaded to believe with a little more effort? Why did He seem to deliberately offend them and drive them away? Matthew Henry writing on this passage says: "The corrupt and wicked heart of man often makes that an occasion of offence which is indeed matter of the greatest comfort."

People are continually offended at God and seem to believe that they can say to God: "You are fired."

Certain doctrines and bible passages offend some, others are offended at the Trinity or at laws governing sexual immorality, or by the need to repent and believe. People even dismiss God over trifles such as a preacher using old-fashioned language and clothing. Such people are not seeking God in the first place. They are in fact seeking a world ordered to their own satisfaction and interests. When God fails to satisfy, they fail to follow.

Jesus did not change His doctrine or His message in order to get people to follow Him (or turn up in Church). Instead He stated hard puzzling truths that only persistent determined seekers of God would stick with.

God does not need us to follow Him. God is in fact without any needs (as we would understand them) being completely self-sufficient and needing nothing from His worshippers: *Acts 17:24-25 MKJV The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, (25) nor is served with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives life and breath and all things to all.*

The local church may feel it needs us, and the pastor may say he needs us, but God has absolutely no need of us. So if we want to go back to the former things, the inadequate things, the things that are behind, then it does no damage to God, only to ourselves. It is a clear case of "cutting off our nose to spite our face." Apostasy is thus a completely self-centered and futile act of revenge against God.

If I quit my ministry today then God would raise up another missionary to take my place. God needs no followers and no servants. The service we give to God is our privilege and calling – not something God requires because He is incomplete or needy in some way. As John Milton wrote when he became blind:

“God doth not need either man’s work or his own gifts. Who best bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best, His State is Kingly. Thousands at His bidding speed and post o’er land and ocean without rest: They also serve who only stand and wait.”

John 7:1

Jesus Walks In Galilee

John 7:1 MKJV *After these things Jesus walked in Galilee, for He did not desire to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him.*

Jesus goes where He is welcome. When the Judean Israelites (the Jews) sought to kill Him he did not say, “this people are so far from God and so much need salvation that I will stay here and take the risk.” Instead Jesus went where He was welcome – to Galilee.

Just this week two friends of mine in Manila have received specific and highly credible personal death threats from Muslims. In other parts of the letters they were sent, all workers among Muslims in the Philippines were threatened with holy war and terms like “blood will flow” were used repeatedly. I am included in this second group of threatened people though my personal assassination is very unlikely as I now live in Los Angeles.

What do I do? Does my organization soldier on? Do we withdraw? How much risk can I ask my co-workers to take? Do we “move to Galilee”?

Underneath all this is the question: “Is the salvation of murderous Muslims really that important?”

Jesus instructs His disciples thus: *Luke 10:10-12 MKJV* *And into whatever city you enter, and they do not receive you, going out into the streets say, (11) Even the dust of your city which clings to us, we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this that the kingdom of God has come near you. (12) But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city.*

In other words we are to give all people a reasonable chance to hear the gospel, but if they do not wish to hear the gospel that is their problem – and a mighty big one!

The Christian worker is not a kamikaze pilot. As noble as suicidal courage may seem Jesus did not indulge in it – until He knew he had to, in order to complete His work. Martyrdom is never a prominent theme in the New Testament and is never specifically encouraged. In fact the general injunction is “flee”!

Matthew 10:23 MKJV *But when they persecute you in this city, flee into another; for truly I say to you, In no way shall you have finished the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.*

Matthew 24:16 MKJV *Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains.*

Matthew 2:13 MKJV *And when they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise and take the young child and His mother and flee into Egypt. And be there until I bring you word, for Herod is about to seek the child to destroy Him.*

Christian faith is primarily a way of peace that avoids conflict and steers away from combative personal stances. The only deliberate human sacrifice called for in Scripture is Jesus Christ, and while

most of the apostles laid down their lives for the gospel, they did not rush into such a fate like a Palestinian suicide bomber.

We may need to die in the service of Christ, but generally we should avoid it. Mostly we should do the sensible thing, the thing that Jesus did, and go and safely “walk in Galilee” for a while. God does not lay the salvation of the world on our shoulders. The Great Commission is merely to preach the gospel - saving the world is God’s job, not ours.

If God goes where He is welcomed then perhaps that is a good ministry strategy for us as well. Instead of struggling for years in a prickly and hostile church trying to make changes that are always resisted, a pastor should “go where he/she is welcome” even if that means working in secular life for a while. God has not obligated us to dwell in the midst of personal hostility – instead we are “called to peace” (Colossians 3:15, 1 Corinthians 7:15). God even hides His servants away from the fury of man - like Elijah by the brook Cherith.

For many years I have (wrongly) felt it to be cowardly, sinful and self-indulgent to seek peaceful circumstances or to desire “a quiet life in all godliness” (1 Timothy 2:2). This, I mistakenly thought, was “wimping out”! Yet peace is simply the set of circumstances that allows me to function as God made me to function. A bird is at peace in the air, and our cat is at peace sleeping on the top of my laser printer! Peace is dwelling in the state that God knows is best for us! (Which even may be very busy – but not hostile and destructive!)

Except in rare and exceptional circumstances we should not seek conflict and we should generally avoid hostile and personally destructive environments. This may mean dropping a sarcastic and abusive boyfriend or finding a better job. If living with a drug addict, an alcoholic or an abusive relative is personally destructive and overwhelming we can take some time out and “walk in Galilee”. Remember we are not required to redeem all mankind, or to “save” them no matter how obdurate and impossible and dysfunctional they choose to be!

John 7:2-10

Jesus’ Unbelieving Brothers

John 7:2-10 MKJV *And the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near. (3) Therefore His brothers said to Him, Move away from here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see the works that You do. (4) For no one does anything in secret, while he himself seeks to be in public. If you do these things, reveal yourself to the world. (5) For His brothers did not believe in Him. (6) Then Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. (7) The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its works are evil. (8) You go up to this feast; I am not yet going up to this feast; for My time is not yet fulfilled. (9) And having said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. (10) But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as in secret.*

The Feast of Tabernacles or “Feast of Booths was the “Jewish camping feast” (Goodenough) at the end of the harvest season and went for seven and after the exile for eight days, with people living in tents and in booths made of wicker branches. It was of such social significance that it was simply often called “The Feast”. Sociologically it was not unlike the Christmas-New Year celebrations in many nations, though it had a very different religious significance – of gratitude to God for His blessings and a remembrance of their dwelling in the wilderness. The dwelling in tents broke down social barriers and contributed to the general attitude of merriment. By the time of Jesus an eight day

had been added and a water-pouring ceremony where every morning of the celebration a priest went down to the Siloam Fountain, whence he brought in a golden ewer water which was poured on the altar of burnt-offerings, amidst the singing of the Hallel (Pss, cxii-cxvii) and the joyful sound of musical instruments. This becomes the setting for “living water” comments Jesus makes later in this chapter.

The brothers of Jesus seem to be ironic in their comments; John makes clear they did not yet believe on Him and perhaps, like many siblings simply thought that Jesus was being self-promoting. “Go and make a star of yourself you big show –off” seems to be the line of their thoughts. There may have been an additional “and get yourself killed doing it” at the back of their thoughts as well. There is possibly some resentment at His popularity.

The brothers ask Jesus to: “reveal yourself to the world.” But Jesus in contrast makes clear that His job is to reveal the world to itself and to expose their deeds as evil. “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its works are evil.” Jesus is no Pollyanna optimist, He sees very clearly the evil in the hearts of men - from which they need to be redeemed. In Luke says we are still “evil” even in our best moments:

Luke 11:11-13 MKJV For what father of you, if the son asks for bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake for a fish? (12) Or if he shall ask for an egg, will he give him a scorpion? (13) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

“Then Jesus said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.” The unbelieving brothers are simply drifting with the tide of the times, going along with the “world” and its obligations. They exist outside of the times of the Spirit, but in contrast Jesus has “times” ordained by God.

John uses the Greek word “kairos” to denote time here. Kairos is the event-time word (in contrast to clock-time). Event time is “you can watch TV after you have washed up” in contrast to “you can watch TV at 7:30”. One event (washing-up) determines the next (watching TV) - or in Scripture “first the gospel must be preached as a witness to all nations (first event) then the end shall come (second event)”. Thus “kairos” is used in Scripture to denote God’s special timing of divine events. Jesus must wait for God’s timing before He can go up to the Feast.

“And having said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as in secret.” Jesus did not go up with the family caravan (see Luke 2) and did not announce Himself but simply mingled in, and went up in secret without any fanfare.

Jesus was aware of the populism of His cause, of thousands coming to hear Him and of some wanting to make Him their King. This could have derailed His agenda and seriously marred His training of His disciples. It was also at a point when reaction was building and people were seeking to kill Him. Thus wisdom dictated that He keep a low profile.

Jesus knew that “the world” without a faith connection to God, is evil, and to be King of that disconnected world is no honor in eternity. Jesus was not trying to play “I am the King of the castle” or to be among the famous A-List Jewish celebrities. Instead He was trying to produce repentant, contrite, prayerful believing saints fit for Heaven. Jesus was interested in changing the spirit of a man for eternity, and not in exterior honors. So Jesus did not do the “normal” things that political aspirants did back then: “For no one does anything in secret, while he himself seeks to be in public. If you do these things, reveal yourself to the world; His agenda was on a far higher plane.

John 7:11-15

The Untaught Teacher

John 7:11-15 MKJV *Then the Jews sought Him at the feast and said, Where is He? (12) And there was much murmuring among the crowd concerning Him, for some said, He is a good man; others said, No, but he deceives the crowd. (13) However, no one spoke openly of Him, because of the fear of the Jews. (14) Now about the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and taught. (15) And the Jews marveled, saying, how does this man know letters, not being taught?*

Jesus moves into an atmosphere of such hostility that He is literally “unmentionable” - However, no one spoke openly of Him, because of the fear of the Jews. Now obviously everyone at the feast was an Israelite – so the group they were afraid of was not their own Jewish race but rather the elite Judean hierarchy – who John calls “the Jews”.

“Now about the middle of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple and taught. (15) And the Jews marveled, saying, How does this man know letters, not being taught?” About the middle of the feast – that is on the third or fourth day, Jesus goes up into the temple and starts teaching. He was not a learned professor – just a carpenter from Galilee, who knew His stuff” and startled the crowds so that they said, “How does this man know letters, not being taught?”

Jesus was certainly literate, could quote Deuteronomy and other Scriptures from the Greek Septuagint, and writes in the sand in John 8 - but He was not formally “lettered” or qualified in an academic sense. “The marvel was that Jesus showed Himself familiar with the literary methods of the time, which were supposed to be confined to the scholars of the popular teachers” (Westcott).

Wisdom and education do not necessarily oppose one another, but are actually independent of one another. This was brought home to me when I went to Papua New Guinea and found some very wise and godly church elders in tribal areas, with minimal education and little “formal theology” but a wonderful grasp of Christ and well-worn Bibles. Revelations through dreams and visions were so common as to be considered quite normative. They were quite literally “taught of God”. It is not a mastery of Greek verbs that makes a saint, but the ability to hear from God in the spirit.

Many an erudite person seems to have a poor marriage or goes off on foolish tangents – because their human spirit is unbalanced and they simply do not hear aright from God!

I am all in favor of a good education – and so is the Bible, but unless the spirit is right, all the education in the world will not form Christ in a human being. When the spirit is wounded or inflated, or dull or puffed up and proud, or obstinate and unbelieving no amount of education can help. Many skeptical liberal scholars, with brilliant minds, are unable to hear God correctly, because they are spiritually out-of-tune.

Jesus however was perfectly in tune with God and saw life with utter clarity and transparency. John often emphasizes this direct reception of knowledge from God via the Holy Spirit:

John 6:45 MKJV *It is written in the Prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to Me.*

1 John 2:27 MKJV *But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and no lie, and as He has taught you, abide in Him.*

(See also John 14:26, 1 John 2:20, 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, Hebrews 8:10,11, Isaiah 28:23-29 etc.)

Jesus was not taught by man - but by God, who instructs us in the inner man, via our conscience and forms beliefs that are true within us. After Adam fell the human mind became darkened and it is only God who can bring the light that helps us to see things properly. Fallen minds reason in their fleshly self-interest and thus often oppose God and are hostile to Him. The fallen mind rationalizes far more than it reasons - and finds countless excuses for sin, greed, enmity and immorality.

People who pursue peace find the biggest obstacle to peace is in their own minds – their own fears, prejudices, excuses, wrong beliefs and insecurities. It is only as we follow Christ and listen to God that we begin to see through ourselves and our peer-group programming that is deep within us. As we are taught of God we are released from racial hatreds, envy, strife, contention and the love of money. God teaches us to have different attitudes – beatitudes! Only Christ can teach a Jew to love an Arab, or an Irish Protestant to love a Catholic.

Light is the test of true learning - and love is the test of how much light we have!

1 John 2:9-10 MKJV He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now. (10) He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no offense in him.

Those taught of God have a different attitude – an attitude of love that is without hatred, rancor and strife - while those merely taught by man are frequently argumentative and full of strife. A preacher can have a D. Min. and write academic papers but if that preacher is full of ethnic hatred, or bitter resentment, then he or she is still in darkness! Which is why Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 8:1-3 MKJV (1) But concerning the sacrifices to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. (2) And if any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. (3) But if any one loves God, he has been known of him.

To sum up: We need both human knowledge (of cars and computers) and also the divine attitudes and wisdom that comes from being taught by God. Knowledge without love and light can be hateful and deadly. The world needs people who are taught by God – and they will be our real teachers. The sign that someone has been taught by God is an unusual level of wisdom, love and spiritual light. Hatred is a sure sign that someone has not been taught by God - and that person is still in darkness. Thus the hostile, hateful Jewish experts of the Law were in darkness while the “unlettered” carpenter from Nazareth, who was full of love and wisdom, was the One taught by God.

John 7:16-18

True Doctrine

John 7:16-18 MKJV *Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. (17) If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or I speak*

from Myself. (18) He who speaks of himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

Each of the three verses we are considering today contains a world of truth! These three verses are of great utility when it comes to assessing the various truth claims of various Christian spiritual teachers.

v. 16 - Jesus answered them and said, My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

Jesus had great reverence for Truth that lay beyond Himself, beyond His own thoughts, and beyond His human cognitive processes. He did not “make things up” for the sake of novelty, or to impress people but rather received and spoke eternal truth to which He also submitted.

Having a holy reverence for established truth and a humble regard for one’s own intellectual powers is the mark of a true teacher. A certain televangelist a few years ago said the ‘anointing’ told him there were nine gods, a trinity of the Father, a trinity of the Son and a trinity of the Holy Spirit! Fortunately he was promptly rebuked by many and made to submit to doctrinal correction. We cannot play fast-and-loose with the Scriptures and with the fundamentals of the faith.

Those who seek to establish “new” approaches to Christian truth mainly end up in the wilderness or in heresy. You simply CANNOT redefine morality to make it more acceptable to some elements of the media. We are not allowed to have personal doctrines of our own idiosyncratic construction – though we may indeed explore the Word, but should we find something we think is new, we should cautiously bring it to light before others and see how it fits with other Scriptures and the main doctrines of the faith.

The apostle Peter puts it this way: *2 Peter 1:20-21 ASV knowing this first, that no prophesy of scripture is of private interpretation. (21) For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*

In other words we cannot just cook up our own private doctrines must wait on God, who generally will also reveal the same truth to others also. If Jesus did not make up His own theology – but instead listened to the voice of the Spirit, then surely we should also! Humility before God, and listening reverently to and for eternal truth, rather than always trying to invent new things, is the mark of the true Christian teacher.

v. 17 - *If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or I speak from Myself.*

This verse tells us that the first step in finding out the Truth is being willing to obey it and live it! God does not give Truth to us for us to write a thesis about, or to admire, or for the sake of intellectual curiosity. Truth is to be lived.

If we really want to follow God, and do His will, then we will be properly aligned with God the Holy Spirit, who will empower us and give us wisdom and discernment so that we will be able to know “of the doctrine, whether it is of God”. By contrast, disobedient people will go astray, because if they do hear the truth, they will just disregard it.

v. 18 - *He who speaks of himself seeks his own glory, but he who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.*

People who are always cooking up new teachings are basically vain – and seeking their own glory and their own theological significance. The urge to “say something new so I can get my book/paper published” is very strong in academic circles. Some of these theological innovations are simply

horrendous attempts at self-glory with little regards for the facts or the consequences – the Da Vinci Code being a case in point. I have just finished reading a book that claims to totally reinvent religion and philosophy – of course it just falls into more than a dozen old errors!

But someone who is carefully seeking the “true Truth’ and the glory of God, and diligently seeking to find out ‘what is really so” rather than chasing the latest ideas of men, is truly a good person. As Jesus said such a person: are true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.

Arriving at Truth is always a slow, humble process involving great reverence and caution. Scientists take a dozen years to find out one small set of facts about a drug combination or the ecology of a certain species. Theological truth is certainly no easier to come by. The mark of a good teacher of the Word is a deep and prayerful reverence for the text and a love of the facts – even if those facts are difficult, socially unacceptable or “traditional and boring”.

Just as a physicist does not make up the laws of physics that he or she personally prefers – but simply discovers those that are actually in existence, so we cannot make up spiritual laws just because we like them, but must humbly and obediently seek to find out those spiritual laws that are real and are true.

John 7:19-24

Righteous Judgment

John 7:19-24 MKJV *Did not Moses give you the Law? And yet not one of you keeps the Law! Why do you seek to kill Me? (20) The crowd answered and said, You have a demon! Who seeks to kill you? (21) Jesus answered and said to them, I have done one work, and you all marvel. (22) Because of this Moses gave you circumcision (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers,) and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath day. (23) If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath day so that the Law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry at Me because I have made a man entirely sound on the Sabbath day? (24) Do not judge according to sight, but judge righteous judgment.*

The Jews were proud of receiving the Law, and doubly proud of their mark of circumcision on the eighth day. In these verses Jesus plays one off the other to help deepen the Jews understanding of their faith.

Circumcision came from the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and was incorporated into the Law of Moses as a sign of the covenant. It was supposed to be performed on the eighth day – and the Jews observed this strictly – even if the eighth day fell on a Sabbath. So the Sabbath prohibition against work did not apply in the case of circumcision. Jesus makes the point that if a ceremonial requirement such as circumcision over-rode the Sabbath, then surely making someone “entirely sound” (KJV: “every whit whole”) did also.

In Mark Jesus makes clear that God is not demanding as much as He is blessing, God is more interested in making us whole - than in having us fulfill a set of formal legalisms.

Mark 2:27-28 **And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: (28) so that the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**

And in Matthew there is a wonderful section on the true meaning of the Sabbath:

Matthew 12:1-14 MKJV At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath day. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat. (2) But when the Pharisees saw, they said to Him, Behold, your disciples do that which it is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day. (3) But He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him, (4) how he entered into the house of God and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? (5) Or have you not read in the Law that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? (6) But I say to you that One greater than the temple is in this place. (7) But if you had known what this is, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned those who are not guilty. (8) For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. (9) And when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. (10) And behold, a man having a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbaths? This so that they might accuse Him. (11) And He said to them, What man among you will be, who will have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbaths, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? (12) How much better is a man then than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. (13) Then He said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out, and it was restored whole like the other. (14) Then the Pharisees went out and held council against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

This attitude to the Sabbath debunks the whole religious establishment by making it the servant and not the master. Instead of controlling people and condemning minor infractions of Sabbath observance the Pharisees were to be healing them and having mercy on them. If the Sabbath was made for man, then because it is the first of all "religious institutions" (being instituted at Creation), and has priority, then all subsequent religion must serve the needs of the wholeness and healing of humanity – and not humanity serve the needs of religion!

To put it another way: Church programs are first meant to help make Christians whole - and Christians are not there as mere labor for church programs! Church is for Christians, not Christians for church!

No wonder they wanted to kill Jesus! (In John 7:25 we find that His "paranoia" in v. 19,20 is justified!) He was turning religion upside down and ending its ability to hold people captive to rules and regulations. He was taking away the social power of the religious establishment by breaking their rules – but in a way that was obviously good and right. He was showing up their laws as the silly power plays they really were!

Righteous judgment is when we see things as God sees them – with mercy, compassion, and with a love that which is true and the good. Righteous judgment may contradict social norms and religious rules based in the power of vested interests. The keeping of slaves was one such issue.

The Good Samaritan showed righteous judgment by acting in compassion even though he risked defiling himself by touching a corpse (if the man left for dead had passed away). Righteous judgment breaks human conventions in order to do good to others. This is not the same as moral relativism (which breaks God's laws in order to pander to liberal human conventions).

Righteous judgment humanizes the faith and makes it a meek and gentle servant of the saints. The overbearing requirements of legalistic religion are not what God made religion for at all. Religion is meant to harmonize with all Creation and bless it and to allow it to be fruitful and to multiply. Church is therefore there for healing, wholeness and the growth of the saints (see Ephesians 3& 4)

Our church is there to grow us - and we are not there merely to grow the church as a human institution.

John 7:25-30

I Am From Him

John 7:25-30 MKJV *Then some of those from Jerusalem said, Is this not the one they seek to kill? (26) But lo, he speaks publicly, and they say nothing to him. Perhaps the rulers truly know that this is the Christ indeed? (27) However, we know this one, from where he is; but when Christ comes, no one knows from where He is. (28) Then Jesus cried in the temple as He taught, saying, You both know Me, and you know from where I come. And I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. (29) But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He has sent Me. (30) Then they sought to seize Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.*

Jesus plainly says that He is from God, was sent by God and personally knows God. Jesus also points out that they did not have anything like the knowledge of God that He did with the referential phrase: “but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know.” And on top of this Jesus says these things in a loud voice, in public, in the Temple, in front of the entire religious hierarchy and God-experts. (v.28)

This is a clear attack on the efficacy of the Jewish religion as it was practiced in Jesus day. Jesus is saying that the religious establishment did not really know the truth about God – but that He did!

This builds on what we saw yesterday that is that Jesus consistently interpreted the Sabbath as being “for man”, and for our wholeness and blessing in particular. In other words religious institution is there to serve the saint, not the saint to serve as mere labor for the religious institution.

For the Jews things were like so:

The Saint serves → the Religious Institution, which serves → God.

But in Jesus' view things were like so:

Religious Institution serves → The Saint who serves → God.

In fact Jesus Himself came to seek and serve the lost, so that they might become saints and serve God. So ministers and churches exist to perfect the saints and fit them for Heaven and for the service of the Lord.

[Now this does not excuse the selfish Christians who think everything revolves around them at church! Selfishness is clearly not part of the gospel.]

So the Jewish religious authorities were failing to serve the people in their quest for God – because these same authorities did in fact not know God (v.28). As we saw earlier, they were so bound up by their traditions that they did not judge with “righteous judgment” (v.19-24) and ended up distorting the Law.

So great was their delusion that they wanted to seize and kill Jesus – who was indeed Immanuel, God with us! Their allegiance to their religious system was far greater than their desire for the truth. “Then Jesus cried in the temple as He taught, saying, You both know Me, and you know from where I come. And I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. (29) But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He has sent Me.”

Jesus is saying that He is a messenger sent by God, to the Jews, to tell them the truth about God, which they do not know. As a messenger He is not going on His own initiative, but on the initiative of

the One who sent Him. Jesus did not just decide one day to leave Heaven and tell the world some of His ideas about God. Instead Jesus was sent by the Father to say and do certain clearly specified things that would communicate the nature of God most clearly to those who believe.

In various passages in the gospel of John Jesus explains His role as God's Messenger to humanity:

John 5:30... I can do nothing of My own self. ...I do not seek My own will, but the will of the Father who has sent Me.

John 7:16... My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.

John 7:28 ... And I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true...

John 8:28 ... I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things.

John 8:42 ... for I went forth and came from God; for I did not come of Myself, but He sent Me.

John 12:49 ... For I have not spoken of Myself, but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say, and what I should speak.

John 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 do not speak of Myself, but the Father who dwells in Me, He does the works.

Thus Jesus does nothing on His own initiative, but only does the Father's will, and His doctrine, His mission, His words, His speech and His works were not done by Jesus as a result of His own ideas but instead were done by "the Father who dwells in Me". (John 14:10).

This obviously applies also to us – as Paul says:

Galatians 2:20 MKJV I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf.

Christian ministry does not originate in man's notions or emotions, but rather ministry flows from God's motions within us! This requires the ability to pay attention to our interior life - our being, and our conscience, and to the presence of the indwelling Christ.

John 7:31-36 **Then I Go To Him Who Sent Me**

John 7:31-36 MKJV *And many of the crowd believed on Him, and said, When the Christ comes, will He do more miracles than these which this One has done? (32) The Pharisees heard that the crowd murmured such things concerning Him. And the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to seize Him. (33) Then Jesus said to them, Yet a little while I am with you, and then I go to Him who sent Me. (34) You shall seek Me and shall not find Me. And where I am, you cannot come. (35) Then the Jews said among themselves, Where is he about to go that we shall not find him? Is he about to go to the Dispersion of the Greeks, and to teach the Greeks? (36) What saying is this that He said, You shall seek Me and shall not find Me, and where I am, you cannot come?*

It is interesting that the crowd saw Jesus mainly as a miracle-working spiritual teacher. Their two comments about Jesus are:

- 1) "When the Christ comes, will He do more miracles than these which this One has done?" (v. 31)
- 2) "Where is he about to go that we shall not find him? Is he about to go to the Dispersion of the Greeks, and to teach the Greeks? What saying is this that He said, You shall seek Me and shall not find Me, and where I am, you cannot come?" (v. 35,36)

Given the many characterizations of Jesus as: politician, revolutionary, mystic, entrepreneur, hippie, tragic example, and Ascended Master it is the simple title "Rabbi" or Teacher that is the most used and the most characteristic of Him. Jesus came to teach us, and to make disciples, who in turn would teach others and make disciples.

Matthew 28:19-20 Therefore go and teach (disciple) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen.

Discipling, teaching and baptizing – that is what Jesus did and what we also are to do.

Jesus was God's Messenger to humanity teaching us the way of grace and truth by word and by deed and incarnating that Message in His own self as a perfect example of the fullness of deity in human form. (Colossians 2:9, Philippians 2:5-11, John 1:1-18)

Jesus was God's Messenger on God's journey and one day He would return back to God and the chance to hear the Message would be lost. "You shall seek Me and shall not find Me."

There is a time when the door to grace is firmly shut:

Amos 8:11-12 MKJV Behold, the days come, says the Lord Jehovah, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the Words of Jehovah. (12) And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the Word of Jehovah, and shall not find it.

Luke 13:23-25 MKJV And one said to Him, Lord, are the ones being saved few? And He said to them, (24) strive to enter in at the narrow gate. For I say to you, many will seek to enter in and shall not be able. (25) And once the Master of the house has risen up and has shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, and He shall answer and say to you, I do not know you; from where are you?

Because of this it is exceedingly dangerous to carp and quibble in the presence of manifest signs of grace. Indeed many Jews squabbled away their chance at salvation with silly technical questions.

When grace appears in our midst the right thing to do is to grab it with both hands, to enter in and to go through the narrow door - leaving intellectual doubts and minor questions of interpretation outside.

Grace is never around long enough to satisfy every question of every person. For instance - by the time you check out every theological detail of a given revival it is over and you have missed the blessing!

"Yet a little while I am with you" – it is never a long while. It is always imperative to hear God, you drift and dream and the Sunday sermon is over and you have not heard it. Let the years roll by and you never get to Bible College or to the mission field. Grace in relationships demands alertness as well, friends move, and even our parents pass away and leave us with words unsaid. Many are the opportunities, but how few are ever taken!

“Is he about to go to the Dispersion of the Greeks, and to teach the Greeks?” – this cynical comment was eventually fulfilled as grace passed from the Jews, who did not listen, to the Gentiles, who did! John wrote this in 90 AD, twenty years after the destruction of the Temple. The day of the Jews and their nation was over and the gospel was going to the Greeks and John himself dwelt among them in Ephesus.

“You shall seek Me and shall not find Me. And where I am, you cannot come”. Unbelievers cannot enter Heaven, it is not for all, there is no universal salvation. For those who refuse the grace and truth that are in Christ, the door will be shut against them and it will be said: “you cannot come”.

“and then I go to Him who sent Me.” Jesus came forth from God and returned to God. We were just a stop on His journey. Yes, He came for us, yes He died for us, but we are not the center of Jesus’ journey – rather God was always the center of all that Jesus did. The gospel is not about us, and our needs, it is about God and His offer of salvation.

John 7:37-39

Rivers Of Living Water

John 7:37-39 MKJV *And in the last day of the great feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (38) He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (39) But He spoke this about the Spirit, which they who believed on Him should receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

What is the relationship between our innermost beings and God?

1. The innermost being is a place of wounds and alienation and neurosis and we are to struggle to fix up our innermost being so it can be made acceptable to God.
2. The innermost being is a dream world where we receive messages from God, but God does not actually dwell there, He is “somewhere outside”.
3. The innermost being is the mind and if we fill it with right knowledge we can know God.
4. The innermost being is our emotions and our job is to have nice peaceful emotions and the goal is to end suffering in the innermost being. The less emotions we have the better, the goal is an empty self in a state of disconnected bliss.
5. The innermost being is a volcano of wild urges that must be tamed by Reason in the service of Religion.
6. Our innermost being contains the whole Universe including God, but we are not aware of this yet.
7. There is no innermost being; we are just a physical body.
8. Innermost beings are the chief concern of neurotic middle-aged women and sensible people do not worry about them but just get on with the practical details of life.
9. Good Christians do not concern themselves with subjectivity and introspection and issues of innermost being but solely focus on obedience to the Bible.
10. We can reconstruct our innermost beings and achieve enlightenment through a long and arduous series of disciplined spiritual exercises that only so-called Masters really succeed in.

I have heard people espouse all of the above answers but they are ALL PROFOUNDLY WRONG.

By contrast Jesus tells us that

- a) We have an innermost being (v. 38).
- b) This is something we should develop (v. 38) and be concerned about it.
- c) The abundant inner life is composed of “spirit” - not primitive urges or the mind or the emotions. (v. 39)
- d) That this Spirit is a gift from God, as a result of historical process (Jesus being glorified) and originates in God and not in the individual. (v. 39)
- e) That arduous exercises and lengthy psychoanalysis are not required for an abundant inner life— just faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. (v. 38)
- f) That it is not our own advanced human consciousness but is God’s consciousness within us. (v. 39)
- g) The innermost being can receive the Spirit that is from God (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).
- h) That Christ can dwell in the innermost being. (Ephesians 3:16,17)
- i) That while God may dwell in the innermost being, the innermost being is not the same as God or the Universe. God the Holy Spirit is an objective reality who existed before human consciousness was even created. (Genesis 1:3, Psalm 8))
- j) That the Spirit can flow out of us to others and is not isolated or self-contained but is connected, abundant and communicative. (v.38,39)
- k) The flow of Spirit is not a result of knowledge or of human effort or of psychic evolution by humanity - but is a promised and prophesied result of God’s grace through faith. (v. 38, see also Galatians 3:1-5)

[Homework: See how these Scriptural statements directly contradict the first ten false statements.]

A major leap forward in who we are – our innermost being, comes when we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – and we spend our whole Christian lives living out and understanding this change. Yet some Christians, though born-again do not experience the “rivers of living water” because of reasons such as:

- a) Legalistic striving (Galatians 5:1-11)
- b) Quenching the Spirit – by forbidding prophecy and other spiritual manifestations. (1 Thessalonians 5:19,20)
- c) Grieving the Spirit through wrong and carnal attitudes such as bitterness (Ephesians 4:30-32).
- d) Ignorance concerning the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6)

Since the rivers of living water are promised by Jesus, as a result of faith, and are an important part of the Christian life we should seek to enter into this experience. We need to ask God to let the living waters flow – and to do our bit in removing major blockages such as hatred and unforgiveness.

May I add that the Spirit is given freely and is never earned or deserved. The Galatians tried to earn the Spirit through works of the law – and were rebuked harshly by Paul (Galatians 3:1-5, 5:1-11). The Spirit is given as a free gift Acts 2:38, 10:45 Hebrews 6:4) – and is given without measure.

John 3:34 MKJV For He whom God has sent speaks the Words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

Thus it is not our performance that is the problem! We do not have to do more, say more or know more in order to know the living waters within us, and flowing from us. We just need to believe in Jesus and in the gift of the Spirit and deal promptly with the blockages to His operation.

John 7:40-44

The Identity of Jesus

John 7:40-44 MKJV *Then when they heard the Word, many of the people said, Truly this is the Prophet. (41) Others said, "this is the Christ but others said, Does the Christ come out of Galilee? (42) Has the Scripture not said that Christ comes from the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? (43) So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. (44) And some of them desired to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.*

Two groups are found in the crowd – those that “heard the Word” (v 40) and cried out that He was the Prophet or the Christ (v. 40-41); and those who “judged the Word” by coming up with theological, quibbles about Jesus’ birthplace and dividing the crowd (v. 41-44).

The Jews knew that Jesus was someone of spiritual authority so they tried to find the appropriate spiritual category to place Him in – Elijah (the prophet), the Christ/Messiah, a madman with a demon (John 7:20), a presumptuous untaught Teacher (John 7:15) or just an ambitious “somebody” (John 7:1-5).

They used their theology to try and work out who Jesus was – and thinking He was from Nazareth, and that the Christ would be from Bethlehem, they got it wrong! And yet a simple question would have solved the conundrum. Their failure to ask the obvious question “Sir, where were you born?” shows they were not seekers but in fact were “judges”.

Often a move of God is “judged” for how it fits in to preconceived notions, rather than “sought out” and properly evaluated for what God is (or is not) doing through it.

Back to our two groups: those who “heard the Word” and those who “judged the Word”. We can take two stances in the spiritual life:

- a) that of listening and watching for every move of God through the Spirit. This group humbly learns and grows and hears God; and,
- b) that of listening and watching for every mistake of man and for every supposed theological error. This group simply confirms their own prior beliefs and superiority.

While spiritual discernment is necessary it is not primary. Seeking God is primary and then as we find things we can test them (which makes discernment secondary), but we test them looking for what God may be saying in them and eager to learn. Seek and ye shall find, yet when we find we can “test the spirits” to see whether they are of God (1 John 4:1-3)

But the Jewish critics put their own system and ideas and notions in primary position and evaluated Jesus’ ministry expecting Him to conform. There was a great lack of true seeking and genuine openness to the Truth, especially Truth that brought change.

However those who “heard the Word” got it but did not know quite what to make of it. Was Jesus the Christ or the Prophet? They believed but were not sure just what it was they believed, or rather had personally encountered in Jesus Christ.

Jesus had just taught them about Living Water and this resonated as deeply then as it does today – perhaps more so in such a dry and thirsty land. It seems that the crowd split into “Yes, its available” and “No, I don’t think so” groups. Between those who discerned God’s voice in Jesus’ proclamation on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and those who only heard the voice of their own skepticism, opinions and doubts.

The good news about the availability of the Holy Spirit tends to split people into two groups, between those who “get” the Promise of joy and life and abundant living – and those who sit back with low expectations and think the whole thing is a religious fraud (or even of the Devil).

John spends so much time recording the crowd’s reactions – because they are our reactions, and the reactions of common humanity down the ages. We do not just believe automatically, we question and doubt and raise objections, and sometimes that can be good, but mostly it just gets in the way. It seems that God wants us to err on the side of faith; indeed history tells us that trust is the path to growth. Few great saints have become spiritually great by being highly analytical or distrustful! Indeed most great saints have been accused of almost childish gullibility.

The Kingdom of God does not belong to the paranoid – but it does belong to the child-like, the meek, the trusting and the receptive. Wisdom is child-like, but not immature or childish. In fact God has been described as the Eternal Child – which is shocking at first but which bears some thought.

Jesus did not justify His provocative comments, or explain all the nuances behind them, He simply let them fall and let them be interpreted however they may. Jesus knew that the bulk of people would misinterpret Him, but that those who were seeking would find and those who were just sitting back and judging would be offended and would stumble.

That is why the apostle Peter wrote: *1 Peter 2:7-8 MKJV Therefore to you who believe is the honor. But to those who are disobedient, He is the Stone which the builders rejected; this One came to be the Head of the corner, (8) and a Stone-of-stumbling and a Rock-of-offense to those disobeying, who stumble at the Word, to which they also were appointed.*

So Jesus is both the Giver of Living Water – and the Rock of Offense!

John 7:45-53

The Contention About Christ

John 7:45-53 MKJV *Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees. And they said to them, why have you not brought him? (46) The officers answered, never did any man speak, as does this Man. (47) Then the Pharisees answered them, Also, have you not been deceived? (48) Is it not true that not any of the rulers or of the Pharisees have believed into him? (49) But this crowd, not knowing the Law, is cursed. (50) Nicodemus said to them, (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them), (51) Does our law judge the Man before it hears Him and knows what He does? (52) They answered and said to him, are you also from Galilee? Search the scriptures and see that a prophet has not been raised out of Galilee. (53) And they each went to their own house.*

The envious Pharisees have found their “theological point”: “He is from Galilee, the Christ is from Bethlehem, that settles it, for no prophet comes from Galilee”. They did not BOTHER to check out their statement! It suited them, and they stuck to it!

This reminds me of other such erroneous “devastating proofs” e.g. that being slain in the Spirit is demonic because all those who fell under the Spirit in Scripture fell forwards not backwards! Or that tongues is demonic because some Hindu group also speaks in tongues. By such logic prayer would be demonic because Hindus say prayers. Such “reasons” are pretexts, not proofs! In reality they are desperate defensive strategies called upon by those who feel threatened by the new move of God.

Denominations demonize each other by using these pretexts. Rarely will a Calvinist sympathetically check out Arminianism, or a Pentecostal genuinely try to understand a Southern Baptist or vice-versa. The perpetuation of foolish differences and spiritual ignorance comes about because of these “false proofs”. I once taught simultaneously at a Baptist seminary and a Assemblies of God seminary and said the same things in both places. I used the same textbooks (NIV Study Bible, Lion Handbook of Church History, Grudem’s Systematic Theology, etc.) in both places. The Baptists thought I was a good Baptist and the Pentecostals thought I was a good Pentecostal! The areas of agreement were in fact far greater than the areas of difference!

Nicodemus tries to get them to see reason and act justly according to the evidence but he is rudely rebuffed. People who feel threatened by change value their defense mechanisms and will not listen to pointed and obvious questions that challenge their unreasonable positions.

The temple guards come back empty-handed from trying to arrest Jesus and when asked why they had failed they answer: “Never did any man speak as does this Man” Jesus spoke with such grace and truth that they knew He was a good man, and not just a good man, but a Man beyond all others!

The Pharisees, if they had been reasonable God-fearing people, should have asked “What did Jesus say that was so good?”

Instead they said: “Also, have you not been deceived? Is it not true that not any of the rulers or of the Pharisees have believed into him?” In other words: “We are the elite, we are the people to be believed, you are too dumb to make up your own mind, and you certainly should not be believing that Galilean carpenter, you are deluded, none of “those that matter and are wise” believe such things!

This provoked Nicodemus to declare his colors as one being sympathetic to Jesus. It is impossible to be a secret believer for long because one day we will have to speak our mind on some issue and show that Christ is our all in all!

Ecclesiastical hierarchies are often under the delusion that they are the theological elite who determines what “the unwashed and ignorant masses” (“But this crowd, not knowing the Law, is cursed.”) should or should not believe about God. This position of commanding authority with regard to belief has been greatly undermined by the:

- a) printing press making the Bible widely available
- b) universal literacy and widespread tertiary education
- c) Translations of the Bible into the vernacular
- d) excellent commentaries that are readily accessible to the layperson
- e) Recent wealth of theological material and discussion on the Internet
- f) Most seriously, the blatant differences and contradictions among the “experts”.

Now the ordinary person has all the tools they require to do their own searching and to arrive at their own conclusions about God independent of the ecclesiastical authorities.

The best that bible teachers can do now is to invite people to the Scriptures and point people to God, and let them arrive at their own conclusions. We are no longer the “gurus” at the top of the pyramid of theological belief – and that is a good thing.

Saying that ecclesiastical hierarchies no longer control what people should and should not believe about God, is NOT the same as saying anyone can believe anything they like. Beliefs about God need to be accurate and to be based on the facts, which include Scripture ably, interpreted with the aid of language aids and archaeology and other such helps. There is not much “wobble room”, we cannot play fast and loose with the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection or the Trinity for example.

The Reformers spoke of the perspicacity of scripture, which meant that any ordinary Spirit-filled and guided Christian believer would find the main doctrines of Scripture to be perfectly clear with diligent effort. This was meant to combat clericalism, the restriction of Scriptural interpretation to Roman Catholic clergy. We have to walk a fine line between abdication and anarchy. When we abdicate we hand over bible interpretation to so-called “experts”, when we choose anarchy we hand it over to speculative nonsense. BTW I thoroughly recommend Douglas and Fee’s excellent book “How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth” which is available at most good Christian bookstores.

We cannot let elitist clerics arrogantly dictate our beliefs, neither can we let whimsy and fashion and the mood of the moment dictate them. They must be carefully based on evidence (does our law judge the Man before it hears Him and knows what He does?) and also, weighed up under God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

John 8:1-11

The Woman Caught In Adultery

John 8:1-11 MKJV *But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (2) And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him. And He sat down and taught them. (3) And the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery. And standing her in the midst, (4) they said to Him, Teacher, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. (5) Now Moses in the Law commanded us that such should be stoned. You, then, what do you say? (6) They said this, tempting Him so that they might have reason to accuse Him. But bending down, Jesus wrote on the ground with His finger, not appearing to hear. (7) But as they continued to ask Him, He lifted Himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone at her. (8) And again bending down, He wrote on the ground. (9) And hearing, and being convicted by conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, until the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (10) And bending back up, and seeing no one but the woman, Jesus said to her, Woman, where are the ones who accused you? Did not one give judgment against you? (11) And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more.*

Today’s verses are absent from some major manuscripts but ancient authors attest to their truthfulness and say that they are to be included. These verses ring with the authenticity of Jesus’ actions and as such have always had a prominent place in Christian teaching.

Jesus does not criticize the Law, which is holy and just and good (Romans 7:12) nor does He justify the woman, in fact Jesus tells her plainly to stop sinning. So these verses do not countenance “antinomianism” – which is the utter disregard and disrespect of law. Rather Jesus reinforces the idea that there are absolute standards and that God’s commandments should always be obeyed.

Christian faith and God’s grace are not licenses to sin. Instead grace is given to help us become holy. Jesus did not approve of her sin but rather gave this woman a chance to get her life together at last.

Chapter seven of John was about the Feast of Tabernacles which was a very festive time, when everyone lived in “booths” and in this easy-going holiday atmosphere casual sexual relationships were not unknown. This woman was simply unfortunate enough to be caught in the act.

“Early in the morning” (v. 2) – Jesus was a diligent teacher and was at His post from first light, ready to teach all who might enquire.

“And He sat down and taught them” – Jesus seems always to teach from a seated position, not from a high pulpit. Gill’s commentary on Matthew 5:1 where Jesus sits to deliver the Sermon On The Mount is interesting:

<begin quote>

and when he was set: not for rest, but in order to teach; for sitting was the posture of masters, or teachers, see Matthew 13:2 Luke 4:20. The form in which the master and his disciples sat is thus described by Maimonides (z).

"The master sits at the head, or in the chief place, and the disciples before him in a circuit, like a crown; so that they all see the master, and hear his words; and the master may not sit upon a seat, and the scholars upon the ground; but either all upon the earth, or upon seats: indeed from the beginning, or formerly, "the master used to sit", and the disciples stand; but before the destruction of the second temple, all used to teach their disciples as they were sitting."

With respect to this latter custom, the Talmudists say (a), that: "from the days of Moses, to Rabban Gamaliel (the master of the Apostle Paul), they did not learn the law, unless standing; after Rabban Gamaliel died, sickness came into the world, and they learnt the law sitting: hence it is a tradition, that after Rabban Gamaliel died, the glory of the law ceased." <end quote>

Teaching from a sitting position may just be Jewish culture but it has many advantages - not least of which is that it minimizes “stage theatre”. The emphasis falls on the Word and not on the “actor”.

The accusers swirl around the seated Rabbi (Jesus) and He just ignores them, writing on the ground. (v.6) Jesus knew they were trying to test Him and His legendary compassion. How could Jesus both have compassion and keep the Law? His clever answer “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone” stopped them in their tracks and “being convicted by conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the oldest, until the last” - the older Jews being surer of their sinfulness.

The balance between compassion and justice is always being played out in the courts and in hiring and firing decisions. Are we “too soft” or are we “draconian”? Where should the “line be”? There are innumerable good arguments on both sides. Jesus seems to see great value in giving the woman a chance for repentance. Jesus thinks “long-term” about the great value of a truly penitent soul. Sometimes we can get bogged down in the immediate circumstances and not think of what God can do in and through the person who has sinned.

Jesus never seems to be interested in accusing and condemning people, for He knows that the Devil and all his demons love to do that - along with many people. There is more than enough condemnation in the world, what Jesus wanted to do was bring salvation, to bring sinners to repentance and to seek and to save the lost.

The essence of Christianity is grace not law, and being constructive rather than being destructive. We should be eager to see sinners repent and far less eager to see them executed. A couple of verses from Ezekiel make God’s attitude clear on such things:

Ezekiel 18:23 MKJV Do I actually delight in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Jehovah. Is it not that he should turn from his ways and live?

Ezekiel 33:11 MKJV Say to them: As I live, says the Lord Jehovah, I have no delight in the death of the wicked, except in the turning of the wicked from his way, and so to live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Vengeful, legalistic religion that is quick to judge and slow to forgive is the precise OPPOSITE of the attitude of God and of Jesus!

Matthew 5:7 MKJV Blessed are the merciful! For they shall obtain mercy.

“And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. And bending back up, and seeing no one but the woman, Jesus said to her, Woman, where are the ones who accused you? Did not one give judgment against you? And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said to her, Neither do I give judgment. Go, and sin no more.”

It took two or three witnesses to give judgment in a death penalty case (Deuteronomy 17:6) and so Jesus was legally correct in letting the adulterous woman go, as all the other witnesses had fled in shame.

On Judgment Day all the accusations that we have flung against others will seem trivial in comparison with our own sin. No one who truly comes face to face with his or her own conscience can accuse anyone else of anything!

Does this mean that sin is not sin? Certainly not! While Jesus does not condemn her sin (Neither do I give judgment), neither does permit it. His last words to the woman were “go and sin no more”. Mercy simply gives us a renewed opportunity to become holy – which we should take very seriously indeed!

John 8:12

The Light Of The World

John 8:12 MKJV *Then Jesus spoke again to them, saying, I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

Jesus has truly been the “light of the world” and everyone from Ghandi to Lincoln to Mother Teresa has walked by His light. No teacher other than Jesus is so highly regarded as worthy, and even Mohammed said that Jesus was the only perfect person who ever lived.

The teachings of Jesus are often lauded as a “high moral ethic” however they also constitute the pathway to eternal life! The words of Jesus are ‘spirit and are life’: *John 6:63 MKJV It is the Spirit that makes alive, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life.*

Those that follow Jesus are not morally and spiritually ignorant, they do not walk “in darkness” and confusion about life, and they do not stumble in their walk with God but abide in a teaching that is certain and is true.

The teachings of Jesus purge us inwardly of hatred, unforgiveness, hypocrisy, worldliness and carnality. His teachings uproot sin from within us and thus we are made into a people of a pure heart and a loving disposition – by the Holy Spirit.

Obedience is the key to knowing the Light for it is “He who follows Me” that attains the light – not just those who “have opinions about Me”. *John 7:17 MKJV If anyone desires to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or I speak from Myself.*

The reverse is also true, not only does obedience lead to truth - but sin leads to error. Heresy often begins as an attempt to justify a most-cherished sin – such as greed or homosexuality or fornication. Thus certain verses have to be “re-interpreted” and the light is lost as Jesus is disobeyed.

But what is the practical use of being enlightened? Surely money and sex are far more useful and enjoyable than mere enlightenment? What use is knowing the Truth and living in the light if it is a poor and joyless existence? These are the sort of questions people ask when they look at the sacrificial lives of certain Christians. People associate enlightenment with Yoda in Star Wars and Ghandi and Buddha and rightly conclude it is weird and ascetic and “not for them”.

However Christian enlightenment is not about astral travel or states of being. It is the simple certainty that God loves you. This holy certainty irradiates all of life, removes all confusion and anxiety and makes sense of both world history and everyday life – including our own identity. God’s love directs our actions and ensures their rightness and appropriateness and gives us a solid grounded-ness as an individual human being.

The enlightenment Jesus brings enables you to truly know who you are, and that who you are is already accepted in God, without any need for striving or change (though, paradoxically change will come as we realize that we do not have to change in order to be loved.)

The acceptance by God is prior to the changes God makes. This is much like marriage, where the love in the relationship enables us to go about the necessary changes. We marry first, and change later. We are loved by God first and get sanctified later on.

Without the light that Jesus brings our lives will slowly but surely become discordant and maladaptive, we will not understand our actions or ourselves and we will search for love and acceptance in ways that are ultimately self-destructive. Without God’s enlightenment we can end up like the Hollywood actors, or Princess Diana, outwardly blessed but inwardly a complete mess. Money, sex and power cannot bring about inner congruence or self-understanding. Only the love of God, found in the face of Jesus Christ, can do that.

Psychoanalysis can bring flashes and insights but it cannot bring salvation, analysis is like the light of a firefly – compared to the light of the Sun. For salvation is in realizing you are in a safe Universe, were you are loved by the Creator Himself and that you are an eternal being who will never cease to exist or stop enjoying His life and His love.

Jesus is the true light of life and no other source of “light” can do – not Einstein nor Buddha nor Oprah Winfrey nor Dr. Phil. This is not to say that what these people say is not useful or good, it is simply not adequate when faced with the twin problems of sin and death. We need the cross to put our mess to death, and to completely forgive it and forget it - not just to rearrange it or understand its childhood origins. As Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 MKJV (18) For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those being lost, but to us being saved, it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the understanding of the perceiving ones." (20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. (22) For the Jews ask for a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; (23) but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. (24) But to them, the called-out ones, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. (25) Because the foolish thing of God is wiser than men, and the weak thing of God is stronger than men.

All the equations in all the physics books in the world, and all the teachings of the great philosophers cannot make sense of your existence the way the love of God in Christ can.

John 8:13-20 **I Judge No-One**

John 8:13-20 MKJV *Therefore the Pharisees said to Him, You bear record concerning yourself; your witness is not true. (14) Jesus answered and said to them, Though I bear record concerning Myself, My witness is true. For I know from where I came, and where I go. But you do not know from where I came, and where I go. (15) You judge after the flesh, I judge no one. (16) And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me. (17) It is also written in your Law that the testimony of two men is true. (18) I am one who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness concerning Me. (19) Then they said to Him, Where is your father? Jesus said to them, You neither know Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. (20) Jesus spoke these words in the treasury, as He taught in the temple. And no man laid hands upon Him, for His hour had not yet come.*

“You judge after the flesh, I judge no one.” Jesus is telling us here that truly spiritual people:

- a) do not judge “after the flesh” - based on appearance or by carnal standards.
- b) Actually do not judge anyone at all!

Grace takes away our need to judge others – so spiritual people have no inner need to judge other people. Why do we seek out the faults in others? Why do we look for failings we can pounce on? Why do we become “fruit inspectors” checking everyone else’s spiritual walk? Because deep down we are insecure about how much God loves us.

A simple illustration helped me to understand this some years ago. The controversial theologian Matthew Fox, in his book, *A Spirituality Called Compassion* wrote about “Jacob’s Ladder” spirituality. This is based on the spiritual model of Jacob’s ladder where Christians are trying to climb up to heaven, rung by rung, with arduous effort and have to cling to their hard-won spiritual position. Such folk are always checking to see how far along the ladder they have come, who is below, and who is above, and are very careful to maintain the “order of the ladder”. However, as Fox points out – Jesus put us all at the top of the ladder! We are now in a circle of celebration with Jesus at the center!

Ephesians and Colossians spend considerable time assuring us that the “ladder spirituality” is now obsolete and we no longer need to climb upwards, in fact we are there already!

Ephesians 1:3-5 MKJV *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ; (4) according as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, (5) having predestined us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,*

Ephesians 2:4-7 MKJV *But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us (5) (even when we were dead in sins) has made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved), (6) and has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

Therefore there is no longer any competition for blessing, and there is no spiritual hierarchy whatsoever! We have all the blessings, and we got them for free, because we were chosen and this same choosing, places us in the heavenly realms, seated there with Christ Jesus!

So all born-again Christians are brothers and sisters in a grand circle of grace that meets in the heavenly realms with Christ at the center and there is no ladder. None. Not one single rung. And don't you dare invent one!

Colossians 2:16-18 MKJV (16) Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or in respect of a feast, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbaths. (17) For these are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. (18) Let no one defraud you, delighting in humility and worship of the angels, intruding into things, which he has not seen, without a cause being vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Once we understand that God loves us, and that we are saved by grace and do not have to strive for his love, and that we are not in a race for spiritual prestige – then all desire to judge others ceases. Once my ego is saturated with the love of God, and then it ceases to have any power over me. Its needs are met and I can rest from striving and criticizing.

Now I may still need to confront others in healthy ways, or to discipline children, or to ask an employee to come to work on time. But that is not what Jesus means by “judging”. Judging is all about using certain human standards (looks, money, power, IQ, conventional morality) to assay the ultimate value of a person. It looks down and weighs up. Judging is closely related to accusation, which is Satan's special work. By contrast honest confronting and discipline aims to restore the value of the person in a very constructive and life-affirming way, it is closely related to repentance, which is the Holy Spirit's special work.

Does that mean that we let people get away with slackness and disorder? Do we become soft and overly forgiving? Don't they have to be made responsible for their actions? They will be made responsible – on the Last Day. All human beings will have to give an account of their life to the Lord one day – but I (and you) do not have to give an account to every Christian busybody! If Jesus did not judge people (though He confronted some impenitent sinners) we should completely refrain from judging others. It serves no useful purpose and we lack the true knowledge and discernment to judge others well. In the vast majority of His encounters with folk Jesus did not judge sinners but simply invited them to repentance and left the judging to well in the future.

Romans 14:10-13 MKJV But why do you judge your brother? Or also why do you despise your brother? For all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (11) For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (12) So then each one of us will give account concerning himself to God. (13) Then let us not judge one another any more, but rather judge this, not to put a stumbling block or an offense toward his brother.

Thus instead of watching and waiting until someone stumbles, then eagerly judging them we should instead do our best to prevent their stumbling in the first place and if they do slip up we should restore them with a spirit of gentleness.

Galatians 6:1-5 MKJV Brothers, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you the spiritual ones restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. (2) Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the Law of Christ. (3) For if anyone thinks himself to be something, being nothing, he deceives himself. (4) But let each one prove his own work, and then he alone will have a boast in himself, and not in another. (5) For each one will bear his own load.

John 8:21-26

You Will Die In Your Sins!

John 8:13-26 HCSB *So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself. Your testimony is not valid." (14) "Even if I testify about Myself," Jesus replied, "My testimony is valid, because I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I come from or where I'm going. (15) You judge by human standards. I judge no one. (16) And if I do judge, My judgment is true, because I am not alone, but I and the Father who sent Me judge together. (17) Even in your law it is written that the witness of two men is valid. (18) I am the One who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me." (19) Then they asked Him, "Where is Your Father?" "You know neither Me nor My Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew Me, you would also know My Father." (20) He spoke these words by the treasury, while teaching in the temple complex. But no one seized Him, because His hour had not come.*

(21) Then He said to them again, "I'm going away; you will look for Me, and you will die in your sin. Where I'm going, you cannot come." (22) So the Jews said again, "He won't kill Himself, will He, since He says, 'Where I'm going, you cannot come'?" (23) "You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (24) Therefore I told you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins." (25) "Who are You?" they questioned. "Precisely what I've been telling you from the very beginning," Jesus told them. (26) "I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the One who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him--these things I tell the world."

This is a passage with MANY alternative translations (just compare a couple of the translations you have at home) so I will largely take it from the Greek, I will also include some reference to verses we skipped over in yesterday's passage. Here are some of the main points:

1. Jesus is explaining His role as God's representative or messenger Who was sent from Heaven to communicate the nature of the Kingdom.
2. Jesus has just said that he is the Light of the world – and the Jews have said that His testimony is false because it is mere self-promotion. "You are testifying about Yourself. Your testimony is not valid."
3. Jesus replies saying they are carnal judges - and besides the Father also testifies to Him (via the miracles etc)
4. The Jews say "Where is Your Father?" and Jesus sensing their great spiritual blindness replies, "You know neither Me nor My Father," Jesus answered. "If you knew Me, you would also know My Father."
5. Jesus repeats His claim about His journey from God, to earth and back again; "I'm going away; you will look for Me, and you will die in your sin. Where I'm going, you cannot come." (See John 7:33,34)
6. The Jews think He may be suicidal "He won't kill Himself, will He"
7. Jesus makes clear the distinction between carnal, earthly people and those who are of the Spirit:) "You are from below," He told them, "I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.
8. The Jews ask Jesus to reveal His identity and he gives them a short answer: "Precisely what I've been telling you from the very beginning,"
9. Jesus then attributes His tough message to God the father: "I have many things to say and to judge about you, but the One who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him--these things I tell the world."

10. Jesus makes plain that those who do not believe in Him will die in their sin. "Therefore I told you that you would die in your sins. For if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

Jesus was in the Temple, teaching good Temple-going Jews. Why would He say such terrible words? The Jews knew their Bible and thought they loved and obeyed God and they tithed even down to the herbs they grew, and the Jews did many good works such as almsgiving. But they were far from the Kingdom! Though religious they were sinners, and hardened and blinded sinners, who would die in their sins.

The Jews quibbled with grace and disputed with God. They would not learn, and refused to receive, because it would have meant a loss of face and position. To believe in Jesus you first have to agree that you are a sinner, and these were absolutely sure they were righteous!

Jesus does things the reverse of what we would first expect, for instance He is always tough on religious experts and always gracious to learners, enquirers and repentant sinners. It is those who listen and learn who receive grace – not those who "know it all".

Despite many years of religion the temple-going Jews were unreceptive to grace and ignorant of the voice of God. They were spiteful and contentious and neither knew Jesus or the Father nor could they understand obvious spiritual analogies.

"For if you do not believe that I am (He) you will die in your sins". This is the well known "ego eimi" construction of John the "I AM" that harks back to the ancient personal name of God YHWH which means "I am that I am". At the very least it should be interpreted "unless you believe that I am who I say I am" and more likely "unless you believe that I am YHWH" .you will die in your sins. This is what makes the claims of Jesus so crucial. Unless we believe them we bear our guilt and are lost from grace forever. The "liberal" churches that challenge the deity and resurrection of Christ are empty and powerless because grace only comes where Christ is believed.

"Who are You?" they questioned. "Precisely what I've been telling you from the very beginning," The last part of this verse "from the very beginning" is hard to translate. "From the beginning I have said it to you" or "The Beginning, what I also say to you." Would be approximate literal translations. However given John's specialized use of the word for beginning - arche (pr. ar-kay) as the primordial spiritual realm it probably means "I am the One who has been speaking to the Jewish nation from the beginning, I am Yahweh".

Jesus is the Voice in Creation and the Voice from Sinai, and the Voice of grace. It has always been the same Voice and the Jews chose to ignore it and substitute their own understanding instead. Jesus speaks the Word of the Father: "But the One who sent Me is true, and what I have heard from Him these things I tell the world." Thus to fail to heed Christ is to be out of tune with Creation, with law and with grace, even with all things, it is lost-ness indeed!

John 8:27-36

The Truth Shall Set You Free

John 8:27-36 MKJV *They did not understand that He spoke to them of the Father. (28) Then Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things. (29) And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things which please Him. (30) As He*

spoke these words, many believed upon Him. (31) Then Jesus said to the Jews who believed on Him, If you continue in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. (32) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (33) They answered Him, We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How do you say, You will be made free? (34) Jesus answered them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever practices sin is the slave of sin. (35) And the slave does not abide in the house forever, but the Son abides forever. (36) Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

Interestingly the CIA's motto is John 8:32 – “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Which in the spy world probably means something like “knowing the truth about the enemy helps to maintain freedom and democracy.” Everyone wants to know the truth, for all sorts of reasons, even jealous husbands to UFO chasers! But the truth these people are talking about is very different from the kind of spiritual and existential truth that Jesus is talking about.

The “facts” are what most of these people mean, but facts come and go. The truth Jesus speaks of is abiding and eternal – it is the truth of God, known and lived by that brings true inner freedom. The CIA agents are not “free” in the sense that Jesus talks about freedom and especially those involved in rather dubious activities: “Truly, truly, I say to you, Whoever practices sin is the slave of sin.”

So we need to redefine truth and freedom here to mean non-political truth and non-political freedom. We are looking at the inner human person, the eternal self, the truest part of ourselves, that can be liberated by Christ, and which is compromised and bound up by sin.

It is a deep part of Jewish identity to be a liberated people, the spiritual themes of liberation and bondage date back to Exodus and more recently to the Holocaust. So when Jesus talks about needing to be free they are indignant: “They answered Him, We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to anyone. How do you say, You will be made free?”

The Jews simply did not grasp inner freedom, which is freedom from neurotic self-centeredness, freedom from obsessions, and compulsions, from lusts and fears and from sin. There is an inner prison that we must all be liberated from - and Christ holds the Key. The key to freedom is to know the truth about us and about the forging grace of God in Christ. Knowing the truth about us alone will only lead to despair. Salvation is a two-fold movement of repentance and faith!

The truth that Jesus brings is grounded in His relationship with the Father: “Then Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself, but as My Father has taught Me, I speak these things. (29) And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things which please Him. (30) As He spoke these words, many believed upon Him.”

Jesus speaks His truth from a listening ear “as My father has taught Me”, and an obedient life “for I always do those things which please Him.” Thus it is a truth, which Jesus has heard first and obeyed first before He has ever asked us to live by it.

Jesus lived in close communion with God the Father and did not indulge in idiosyncratic philosophizing; “The Father has not left Me alone” – thus the Word came out of divine fellowship, not from a wild notion or emotion.

“ When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you shall know that I AM, and that I do nothing of Myself” The cross, resurrection and ascension were conformations of Jesus' claims about Himself. If these claims were just self-promotion then Jesus would stay in the grave along with all the rest of the world's philosophers, but if God was really with Him , He would rise from the dead. And this is indeed what happened!

When Jesus says something radical such as “I do nothing of Myself” then it is worth probing deeply as to what He really means – for Jesus was certainly not a passive person! The key is ‘of Myself” - that is without consulting the Father. God is a Trinity and to put it very simplistically the Trinity is an extremely close team! The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are perpetually in communion over what shall be done. So every step of the way Jesus was consulting the Father and was empowered by the Holy Ghost.

So the Truth that Jesus speaks is an eternal truth that emerges out of communion with the Father and which sets us spiritually free – from sin and other inner afflictions. This is extremely important for the success of inner healing ministries. God can set us free the way no amount of medication or advice can. Deep inside every person is an eternal realm that is the key to the whole personality and when this is strengthened and healed the whole person experiences freedom, wholeness, joy and love.

Paul writes of this glorious inner transformational work of the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 3:16-19 MKJV That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, (19) and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 5:18-20 MKJV And do not be drunk with wine, in which is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (20) always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 MKJV (17) And the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (18) But we all, with our face having been unveiled, having beheld the glory of the Lord as in a mirror, are being changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord Spirit.

Thus the truth that Jesus brings us is not mere political factuality but an inner existential and spiritual liberation through the knowledge of God and the power of the Holy Spirit!

John 8:37-47

Having The Devil For A Father

John 8:37-47 MKJV *I know that you are Abraham's seed, but you seek to kill Me because My Word has no place in you. (38) I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you, then, do what you have seen with your father. (39) They answered and said to Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus answered them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. (40) But now you seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth which I have heard beside God; this Abraham did not do. (41) You do the deeds of your father. Then they said to Him, We are not born of fornication; we have one father, even God. (42) Jesus said to them, If God were your father, you would love Me, for I went forth and came from God; for I did not come of Myself, but He sent Me. (43) Why do you not know My speech? Because you cannot hear My Word. (44) You are of the Devil as father, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not abide in the truth because there*

is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it. (45) And because I tell you the truth, you do not believe Me. (46) Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe Me? (47) He who is of God hears God's Words. Therefore you do not hear them because you are not of God.

There is hardly seeker-sensitive talk! Jesus does not appeal to His audience here but rather rebukes them in the strongest possible terms. As Paul Tournier says Jesus was “Weak with the weak but strong with the strong.”. Jesus’ direct accusations include the following:

1. “You seek to kill Me because My Word has no place in you” (v. 37)
2. You are of the Devil as father, and the lusts of your father you will do. (v. 44)
3. He who is of God hears God's Words. Therefore you do not hear them because you are not of God. (v. 47)

And not so direct accusations include:

4. They were not the true spiritual children of Abraham. (v.39,40)
5. They were not children of God. (v. 42)
6. They were murderers (v. 37, 40, 44)
7. They were liars (v. 44)
8. They were unbelievers (v. 43, 45-47)

Now this extraordinary discourse points to a not-so-hidden spiritual reality - that there are both children of God, and children of the Devil. And these two groups represent opposite spiritual principles being active in the lives of men and women in the same location at the same time.

Now there are a number of possible views here – remember Jesus was not speaking to “average” people, to seekers and the like. Jesus was speaking to hardened enemies of the gospel full of hatred and contention. It is possible that the term “sons of the Devil;” only fully applies to those people who have completely refused the grace of God.

Murderous, envious, resentful Cain is the archetype of the sons of the Devil: *1 John 3:12 MKJV Not as Cain who was of the evil one, and killed his brother. And for what did he kill him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's things were righteous.*

Judas is often associated with the Devil:

John 6:70-71 MKJV Jesus answered them, Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? And one of you is a devil? (71) But he spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon; for it was he who was about to betray Him, being one of the Twelve.

John 13:2 MKJV And when supper had ended, the Devil now having put into the heart of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon to betray Him,

John 13:27 MKJV And after the morsel, then Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him, What you do, do quickly.

And Paul calls Elyamas the sorcerer a ‘son of the Devil;’ for opposing the gospel:

Acts 13:10 MKJV and said, O son of the Devil, full of all deceit and all craftiness, enemy of all righteousness, will you not stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?

Ananias comes close for his greed: *Acts 5:3 MKJV But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart for you to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back part of the price of the land?*

And the false apostles certainly fall into this category: *2 Corinthians 11:13-15 MKJV (13) For such ones are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. (14) Did not even Satan marvelously transform himself into an angel of light? (15) Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works.*

Ordinary non-Christians are ensnared by the Devil and held captive by Satan (Ephesians 2;1-3, Hebrews 2;14,15, 2 Timothy 2;26) they are not necessarily in the same category as the more hardened Cain, Judas, the sorcerer Elyamas or the false apostles.

However at the end of the Age it is going to be either / or – you will either be a Son of God or a beast-worshipping ‘son of the Devil’ and this is reflected in the parable of the tares/weeds:

Matthew 13:36-43 CEV After Jesus left the crowd and went inside, his disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the story about the weeds in the wheat field." (37) Jesus answered: The one who scattered the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seeds are the people who belong to the kingdom. The weed seeds are those who belong to the evil one, (39) and the one who scattered them is the devil. The harvest is the end of time, and angels are the ones who bring in the harvest. (40) Weeds are gathered and burned. That's how it will be at the end of time. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather from his kingdom everyone who does wrong or causes others to sin. (42) Then he will throw them into a flaming furnace, where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain. (43) But everyone who has done right will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. If you have ears, pay attention!

How do people end up in such a terrible spiritual state and end up totally belonging to the Devil? A number of main causes are suggested:

1. Sexual immorality – such as certain widows were indulging in: *1 Timothy 5:15 MKJV For some have already turned aside after Satan.*
2. Unrighteousness – especially hatred: *1 John 3:10 MKJV In this the children of God are revealed, and the children of the Devil: everyone not practicing righteousness is not of God, also he who does not love his brother.*
3. The continual practice of sin: *1 John 3:8 MKJV He who practices sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed, that He might undo the works of the Devil.*
4. Anger, Resentment and Unforgiveness: *Ephesians 4:26-27 MKJV Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, (27) neither give place to the Devil.*
5. The love of wealth (the undoing of Judas & Ananias): *1 Timothy 6:9-10 CEV People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them. (10) The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain.*

Perhaps it works like this: Person X becomes offended and unforgiving in some way and starts rejecting God, they decide to pursue worldly pursuits instead of church, and run after wealth, as rebellion sets in they indulge in some immorality and to justify it they start denying the faith. The pleasures of sin take hold and soon they are enslaved by it. The truth becomes threatening to their now chosen lifestyle of sin and they start to rail against it, eventually reaching the murderous rage of Cain and of those who crucified Christ.

This is a dire warning to keep us from resentment, anger and from all forms of sin. But Jesus does give us an encouragement: "He who is of God hears God's Words." If we are listening to God and obeying Him we can be assured that we are "of God"

1 John 2:5 MKJV But whoever keeps His Word, truly in this one the love of God is perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.

1 John 4:6 MKJV We are of God. He who knows God hears us. The one who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John 8:48-53

He Shall Never See Death

John 8:48-53 MKJV *Then the Jews answered and said to Him, Do we not say well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon? (49) Jesus answered, I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. (50) And I do not seek My own glory, but there is One who seeks and judges. (51) Truly, truly, I say to you, If a man keeps My Word, he shall never see death. (52) Then the Jews said to Him, Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham and the prophets are dead, and you say, If a man keeps my Word, he shall never taste of death. (53) Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets are dead; whom do you make yourself?*

The Jews are now thoroughly insulted since, as we saw yesterday, Jesus had called them "sons of the Devil" and plainly said that they did not know God. So they "up the ante" with: "Do we not say well that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" By Samaritan they probably mean "heretic/schismatic" for they knew quite plainly that Jesus was of Jewish descent. A Samaritan, in Jewish theological parlance, was a heretic, schismatic, an excommunicated person with no inheritance in the Temple (Ezra 4:3, 6:12) or in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:20), whose prayers were an abomination and who played fast and loose with the Law. Thus Jesus was being accused of being a demon-possessed heretic.

Jesus is often accused of being demonic (Matthew 9:34, 12:24, Mark 3:22,30, Luke 11:15, John 7:20, 10:20) as is also John the Baptist (Matthew 11:18) and if I remember my Church history just about every Reformer or revivalist or bringer of change has received the same appellation.

In the New Testament there are two common terms the first is simply "has a demon" with the common verb "exo" (ech-o) which is about the same meaning as the English expression "having a cold" or "having a fit". The second is "demonized" (Kg: daimonizomai) and this represents the state someone is in after having a demon. The terms seem to be interchangeable. So the person who "has a demon" is by definition a "demonized one".

In verse 49 Jesus points out they are dishonoring him, not for any supposed sin (of which they had just tacitly admitted could find none see John 8:46), but for His obedience to the Father! He brought glory to the Father and for this they wished to kill Him!

Jesus then goes on to say: "And I do not seek My own glory, but there is One who seeks and judges." In other words Jesus did not seek to attach "value" to Himself by seeking glory or status or social position, instead He left His value as a person to the judgment of God. God "seeks and judges". God seeks people to lift up and honor. God also seeks out the wicked to punish them. Our value is not our

concern. To aim for status is to go astray. Instead we should aim to bring “honor to the Father” and leave the attribution of value up to Him!

Jesus suddenly moves from judgment to eternal life and says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, If a man keeps My Word, he shall never see death.” Is this a promise that good people will not see death but instead be like Enoch or Elijah and be taken up alive into heaven? The answer can be posed as two questions a) Did Jesus keep God’s Word? (Yes) b) Did Jesus “see death” ? (Yes He died on the cross!) So physical death is not prevented by virtue – otherwise Jesus would not have died! The reference here is to spiritual death, loss of being, loss of continued consciousness, growth as a person and connection with God and with love.

Jesus’ death and resurrection tells us that consciousness continues beyond the grave. Even while physically dead He was still conscious and went and preached to spirits that were in prison – these spirits were also dead, had been dead for thousands of years since Noah, and yet were also capable of hearing the gospel. (1 Peter 3:18-20)

Eternal death is the agonizing disintegration and corruption of being and consciousness in Hell. Eternal life is the constant growth of one’s being and one’s consciousness in love and grace both now, and later on in Heaven.

In verse 52 and 53 the Jews take the statement of Jesus literally and say that Abraham and the prophets were dead so how can He say that the obedient do not see death. However on another occasion Jesus had also answered this question using one of the best-known texts in the Jewish scriptures- God speech to Moses at the burning bush:

Matthew 22:31-33 MKJV But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, (32) "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (33) And when the crowd heard this, they were astonished at His doctrine.

The force of this passage is that when God said this Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been dead for over 400 years! So if God was “the God of the Living” then they were still living 400 years later, as active conscious beings in heaven with God. In fact Moses himself comes back after being dead for some 1400 years for a chat with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration! (Mark 9:4,5).

The Bible does not teach reincarnation, Moses continued to exist and did not reincarnate as Jesus or anyone else. Neither was John the Baptist a reincarnation of Elijah as Elijah also appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration! (Mark 9:4,5). The Bible teaches complete continuity of consciousness and hints at a grand expansion of consciousness especially after the final resurrection.

1 Corinthians 13:12 MKJV (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall fully know even as I also am fully known. 1 Corinthians 15:35-58 tells us that Christians become immortal, spiritual beings of great glory, in the image and nature of Jesus Christ!

There is no annihilation and there is no reincarnation. Those who “keep My Word” continue as immortal, imperishable, spiritual beings of great power and glory, sons of God and citizens of heaven and “brothers” of Jesus Christ!

John 8:54-59

Before Abraham Was – I Am

John 8:54-59 MKJV *Jesus answered, If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say that He is your God. (55) Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I should say I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I know Him and I keep His Word. (56) Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and He saw and was glad. (57) Then the Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? (58) Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I AM! (59) Then they took up stones to throw at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went forth out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and passed on by.*

“Jesus answered, If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say that He is your God.” Jesus now directly equates “the father” with God, with YHWH. He also says the father is NOT truly the God of the Jewish religionists. They thought they were worshipping the true God but in fact they were ‘liars’(v. 55). They had not a clue about who God the Father was like and what He really wanted from them – which was repentance, humility, mercy and justice.

Many people are sure they are serving God, when in fact they are wicked. This includes terrorists, suicide bombers, the IRA, lynch mobs, and those who kill abortion clinic doctors. Many bible-believing people run cults such as the Branch Davidians. They are SURE that they serve God the father, but they are in fact serving the Devil. In fact, as we saw two days ago they are literally “sons of the Devil”.

How can we be sure that we are not among them? How can we be sure that we are not like a sincere Pharisee in Jesus’ day? The small epistle of 1 John uses the words “of God” / “not of God” some 30 times and “of the Devil” / “of the evil one” at least three times. It is a manual for spiritual discernment and helping us to know what is “of God” and what isn’t and tells us to “test the spirits to see whether they are of God. (1 John 4:1-3)

There are four main tests: (1) Practical Love (2) A Lifestyle Of Consistent Ethical Righteousness (3) Correct Basic Doctrine and (4) The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Basic doctrine includes the Incarnation, Jesus being the Son of God and the Blood (the Cross & Resurrection). There are also strong warnings against worldliness and numerous exhortations to a simple New Testament lifestyle. Most cults go wrong on at least one, and often two or more of these four points.

We need to stop and check to see if we are in the faith. Are we loving or are we filled with resentments? Are we righteous or do we disobey some of God’s commandments without blinking? Are we in agreement with correct basic doctrine such as the Nicene Creed? Are we conscious of the indwelling of God’s Holy Spirit? Having one or two is not enough – for instance we cannot say “ I believe the Bible, I just hate everything that moves!” and be a true Christian and worshipper of God the Father.

Jesus then confronts the Jews by contrasting His walk with God, with their own. “Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I should say I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you. But I know Him and I keep His Word.” Jesus is utterly committed to telling the Truth – even when that Truth is so “in your face” and insulting. Jesus knew God and was going to say so, even if they didn’t like it, because it was true. By contrast the Jews were “liars” because they said they knew God – but they did not.

Jesus saw these kinds of liars – that is people falsely claiming to know God, as a real problem and taught against them often. One passage in Matthew stands out:

Matthew 7:15-23 MKJV *Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (16) You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? (17) Even so every good tree brings forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree*

brings forth evil fruit. (18) A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits, nor can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. (21) Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

People can claim to do miracles and cast out demons and prophesy and still not know God. The sign of really knowing God is love and good fruits. People who really know God are simple, meek, humble, holy folk who are full of love, joy, peace and patience.

1 John 4:7-8 MKJV Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves has been born of God, and knows God. (8) The one who does not love has not known God. For God is love.

1 John 2:3-6 MKJV And by this we know that we have known Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) He who says, I have known Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (5) But whoever keeps His Word, truly in this one the love of God is perfected. By this we know that we are in Him. (6) He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk even as He walked.

Jesus then moves to make yet another amazing claim that he knew would only further infuriate His opponents: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and He saw and was glad.” This is saying that Abraham was in favor of Jesus and by implication not in favor of the Pharisees! John frequently portrays Jesus as the One who was truly carrying on the true Abrahamic faith. Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus because Jesus and Abraham were in true spiritual agreement.

“Then the Jews said to Him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” This passage gives us some clue to Jesus’ age “not yet fifty”. In fact he was probably “around 33” in which case it is puzzling why they said “not yet 40” – the age of Jewish eldership. Some manuscripts in fact do read forty. Fifty was the age of seniority and of priestly retirement. According to Gill, a Methurgeman, or an interpreter in a congregation, was not chosen under fifty years of age.

Jesus then adds fuel to the fire with: “Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I AM!” Jesus is claiming His eternal pre-existence, as the eternal Son of God, and the One who co-existed with the Ancient of Days. The use of I AM – the equivalent of the name YHWH is part of this claim. He knows the father because He has always been with him, since before the Creation of the world. (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1: 15-20, etc).

“Then they took up stones to throw at Him. But Jesus hid Himself and went forth out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and passed on by.” As they go to find some stones Jesus slips away. No further dialogue was possible; they would not listen.

1 John 4:6 MKJV We are of God. He who knows God hears us. The one who is not of God does not hear us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

John 9:1-7 Who Sinned?

John 9:1-7 HCSB *As He was passing by, He saw a man blind from birth. (2) His disciples questioned Him: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (3) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him. (4) We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work. (5) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (6) After He said these things He spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. (7) "Go," He told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means, "Sent"). So he left, washed, and came back seeing.*

Jesus is trying to illustrate a new paradigm here. He is trying to break the tight linkage between personal piety and personal prosperity. The old Jewish ethical paradigm went a bit like this: "Good people have good lives, bad people have bad lives, therefore if you have a bad life, you must be a bad person. If you were born blind and suffered as a beggar all your life then some terrible sin must have been perpetrated by you or by your parents."

Jesus says: "No-one sinned" There is no connection. There is no explanation, but there will be a good outcome – the glory of God.

There is no ready explanation for most of life's sufferings - such as Job's suffering or this man being born blind. I became an epileptic at the age of three and it profoundly affected my life up until the age of 40 when I was healed. Why did the Lord "allow this" – was it because of my sins or my parents sins or to teach me some lesson? I don't know and I may never know this side of glory.

We expect our sufferings to have an explanation and we expect that the explanation will (a) seem fair and reasonable to us (b) be evident to us. But the Scriptures do not promise us reasons; instead they promise us outcomes – which is even better. God does not promise that we will understand our suffering, but God does promise that it will work a "surpassing weight of glory" for us:

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 HCSB (16) Therefore we do not give up; even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. (17) For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.

1 Peter 1:6-9 HCSB You rejoice in this, though now for a short time you have had to be distressed by various trials (7) so that the genuineness of your faith--more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire--may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (8) You love Him, though you have not seen Him. And though not seeing Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, (9) because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 5:8-10 HCSB Be sober! Be on the alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. (9) Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your brothers in the world. (10) Now the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will personally restore, establish, strengthen, and support you after you have suffered a little.

Romans 8:17-18 HCSB and if children, also heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ--seeing that we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (18) For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

All of these verses above promise certain outcomes – but do not give personal explanations for individual suffering. Our suffering is simply part and parcel of life as Christians in a fallen world - which is largely under the power of an evil being called the Devil (1 John 5:18,19).

At a deeper level Jesus is saying that undeserved suffering is common. The blind man did not deserve his condition – it was not his sin, or the sin of his parents. There was no moral reason for it. No matter how foolish people may be they do not deserve to be raped, kidnapped or murdered. And no child deserves to be hit by a car, even if he was determined to play on the road! A lot of human suffering is way out of proportion to the mistake that caused it. Someone dives into a swimming pool at the wrong angle, and hits their head on the bottom and drowns. A tiny mistake with a terrible consequence – and such things are common (especially with medical errors). And of course our suffering can be caused entirely by the careless, irrational or evil acts of others.

Since the vast bulk of human suffering is undeserved in part or in whole we have to find a new theology of suffering unconnected to our personal merit. Personal merit does not get us into Heaven nor does it save us from pain in this life – just look at the life of Paul or the crucifixion of Christ! Grace through faith gets us into Heaven and grace through faith gives meaning and resonance to our sufferings and yes, reward for our sufferings – as we saw in the passages above.

"This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him." Why was I an epileptic? Perhaps so the works of God could be displayed in me! Perhaps so the angels could glory in what God did in making a servant of God out of such a person - and finally the glory of the healing and restoring. God has done a mighty and glorious work in Joni Eareckson-Tada and Helen Keller and many others.

Jesus then says that good works can help alleviate suffering: "We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work." Jesus addressed suffering, He healed it, removed it exorcised it and brought it to an end.

1 John 3:8 HCSB The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the Devil's works.

The 'we must do' invites us to join Jesus in His work of ending suffering. In fact those who make no effort to alleviate suffering are sentenced to endure it forever:

Matthew 25:41-46 HCSB Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels! (42) For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; (43) I was a stranger and you didn't take Me in; I was naked and you didn't clothe Me, sick and in prison and you didn't take care of Me.' (44) "Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help You?' (45) "Then He will answer them, 'I assure you: Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me either.' (46) "And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

"As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." – Jesus is the healing light of the world.

The unusual method of healing follows: "After He said these things He spit on the ground, made some mud from the saliva, and spread the mud on his eyes. "Go," He told him, "wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means "Sent"). So he left, washed, and came back seeing." Go and be a sent-one and you will see! How often we go out on Christ's work with "mud on our eyes" and come back seeing life far more clearly! The first thing the man would have seen as he washed the mud off his eyes - was his own reflection in the pool of water! When we do God's work we come to an accurate and true sense of our own identity.

John 9:8-12

I Am The One!

John 9:8-12 HCSB *His neighbors and those who formerly had seen him as a beggar said, "Isn't this the man who sat begging?" (9) Some said, "He's the one." "No," others were saying, "but he looks like him." He kept saying, "I'm the one!" (10) Therefore they asked him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" (11) He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and told me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So when I went and washed I received my sight." (12) "Where is He?" they asked. "I don't know," he said.*

The once blind-man had to keep saying, "I'm the one!" because no one would believe the mighty change that had occurred to him. They thought he was 'just a normal person' and not the recipient of a miracle.

We need to cry out: I am the one God saved, I am the one God healed, I am the one who has been transformed and made whole! After healing, we are made "normal" just like anyone else and there is no sign on us that says: "a mighty miracle was done here".

You see God hides His miracles! The leper is made clean and just looks like a normal man. Lazarus rises from the grave and walks around like any other man. The drunkard becomes sober and goes and gets a normal job in the gas station. The child is healed from the fever and goes out and plays ball. At the end of all God's miracles is a "normal" person, someone no different from anyone else. We would almost expect someone who received a miracle to have a shiny halo, or at least a tag saying: "a miracle happened here". But God is too humble for that!

Most miracles do not take us from sickness to superman. They just return us to our place in society and in ministry.

Normality may be the greatest miracle of all. Some figures just came out saying that 46% of Americans will have a mental illness at some point in their life and 26% have had a severe mental illness in the past twelve months. Nearly everyone feels somewhat weird inside.

God seems to want a world full of normal functioning people who "take up their mat and walk", who live independent lives and contribute to society. He does not seem to want "miracle junkies" who turn to God for "miracles" to solve ordinary problems they should be solving themselves. God's aim is to produce loving maturity, wisdom and strength, in His sons and daughters. If healing is needed, for this to happen then we can ask Him for a miracle, if just our own effort is needed for this to happen – then we should get to work.

Many people have come to me with great inner pain and anxiety and after a few session of inner healing, much to their surprise they just "feel normal". The pain is gone, the anxiety is relieved etc. And they are often mildly disappointed! Normal was not what was expected, generally ecstasy or some other holy pious feeling is expected as the result of healing. However true healing leaves us solid, strong, wise., balanced, with inward poise and perception and feeling just a normal sane person going about life as it should be gone about.

It is surprising how MANY people have experienced healings, dreams, visions, and the like. Not every day, but once or twice in their life or even more. "Oh that is just when I was healed of my back problem when the pastor prayed for me." Is a common type of response – and they probably even forgot to tell the pastor!

After the miracle – the man stopped begging! He used to sit begging, but now no more. After a life of blindness he now had to go out and learn new skills and perhaps work in the field. Miracles end something, that is why some people do not want them, an identity is lost, a place, an occupation a “sitting” somewhere. Miracles often lead to increased responsibility – when Paul was knocked off his horse and then healed of his blindness, it was so he could become an apostle.

“The man called Jesus” - Jesus means Savior and he saves us from sin and sickness and death. At this point the once-blind man had no theology, he did not even call Jesus a prophet or a rabbi, but he was still healed. It was only later in the chapter, when Jesus meets him that he comes to faith. This tells us that a right heart is more important than right theology when it comes to seeing God at work.

“So when I went and washed I received my sight.” So when I went, and washed, I received. If we want to receive God’s blessing we must follow his instructions. Naaman, the leper who was a Syrian general was told to wash seven times in the Jordan. He felt belittled by the instruction but he was persuaded to obey, and his obedience brought the blessing. Many of God’s promises are contingent on certain instructions “Seek and ye shall find...” (Matthew 7:7) “Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed (James 5:16) repent and turn back ...so that times of refreshing may come..(Acts 3:19). You must follow the instruction if you want the blessing.

“The Pool of Siloam..’ why not wash off the mud with “any old water” perhaps from a pool by the side of the road? Certainly the Pool of Siloam was noted for its water, but perhaps Jesus wanted him to go to a place associated with the history of Jerusalem. God’s instructions can be very, very specific. 1 Kings 13 tells the story of a prophet who was told by God not to “eat bread, or drink water, or go back by the way he came”. When another prophet tricked him into disobeying this he was killed by a lion!

God’s instructions are not open to our interpretation. We are simply to do what God says – and not make any convenient substitutions! If God says “go to China” we cannot substitute Greenwich Village instead. If God says “bible college” we cannot substitute Harvard.

The once-blind man is a very honest person. He never makes anything up and he sticks by his guns the whole chapter. He is absolutely factual, and when he does not know – he says so. I like him and I think Jesus liked him too!

John 9:13-16

Being Easily Offended

John 9:13-16 MKJV *They brought him who once was blind to the Pharisees. (14) And it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. (15) Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said to them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and I see. (16) Therefore some of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because he does not keep the Sabbath. Others said, How can a man, a sinner, do such miracles? And there was a division among them.*

No matter how good your ministry is it will always offend someone: When the sharply sartorial Smith-Wigglesworth was healing thousands of men and women in the first great healing ministry of the twentieth century there were those who said: “This man cannot be of God because he dresses so well!” And when Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers was drawing crowds of thousands in London, and seeing many saved, some decried his ministry - because he smoked a pipe! And when

Billy Graham went to New York the great theologian Reinhold Neibuhr opposed him because “The Rev. Graham makes the gospel too simple for the complexities of a nuclear age.”

The reasons people are offended are often as superficial and trivial as those above. The church furniture is moved, a tie is worn, or is not worn by the preacher, the version of the Bible is incorrect, or the church flowers are too old! This easily offended spirit can be quite intimidating for a pastor who has to endure the wrath of the person concerned. However we need to remember that we are not responsible for the contents of someone else’s imagination. And the “great offence” in these cases is simply the product of their own mind and has not substance or reality to it.

In this case the Pharisees were again offended because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. (We have covered their view of the Sabbath in other studies) The point I want to explore is the whole territory of “being offended”. Love is patient and long-suffering and is not easily offended. If you think about it all of the fruit of the Spirit work towards keeping community intact – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, meekness, long-suffering, and self-control. These things keep the body of Christ whole, as one body, and enable community to flourish. But being easily offended splits people apart and destroys community.

When there is a major change in a church many people leave, they are offended by this or that and go to another church, or even to no church at all. This is an offense against community, against love and against Christ. It is OK to leave a church if there is terrible sin or clear doctrinal heresy over the basics of the faith. But to leave because the piano was moved or because an administrative decision went the other way – is sin. [To leave because you are moving to another state or for some neutral reason is fine.]

The Pharisees offense at Jesus eventually led to murder and to their damnation. In fact being offended can lead to some very dark places spiritually:

Matthew 12:24-32 MKJV But when the Pharisees heard, they said, This one does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub the ruler of the demons. (25) And Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them.... Therefore I say to you, All kinds of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven to men. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him. But whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come.

The Pharisees were so offended by Jesus that they called His miracles and exorcisms ‘demonic’ and thus sinned against the Holy Spirit. This led them to a place of such terrible hardness against God that they could not be forgiven, because they could not repent.

Thus being easily offended is extremely dangerous to our spiritual lives. We need to learn how to bounce back from situations that annoy us and irritate us. We need to recognize when we are becoming angry and irritable and easily offended and we need to rebuke it in Jesus’ name.

Remember the “four Rs” - Resolve, Resent, Reject, Revenge. If an issue is not resolved it leads to resentment, which if it is not dealt with leads to rejecting other people, which if it continues leads to acts of revenge. Nearly all-mass murderers are described as “such a quiet person who kept to himself” in other words he was isolating himself from people! This is a sign of the “rejection” phase and dwelling in rejection eventually led to violent revenge.

If we let resentment and offense take hold in us we can end up saying and doing evil things and even becoming an evil person ourselves. This can happen despite our best intentions. It is a fact that the Pharisees set out to become good people. Their whole aim was to become as good as possible. But

unfortunately they became evil and wicked and murderous – simply because they let their offenses and resentments dwell inside them.

Ephesians 4:26-27 MKJV Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the Devil.

These verses tell us that if we let anger dwell inside us unresolved we “give place to the Devil”. When Judas got offended at Jesus’ anointing in Bethany – that is when Satan got hold of him. (Luke 22:3, John 12:3-5, Matthew 26:6-14)

Not all anger is wrong, brief anger has its place, Paul says “be angry” - and do not sin. But Paul also tells us that anger should not last 24 hours or even 12 hours, we are to fix it the same day. You perhaps cannot help getting angry, but you can help staying angry.

We can bring our anger under control if we want to. Each of us has a “red button” like the “STOP” buttons on trains, that we can use as an ‘emergency stop’ to cool our emotions. Even when you are really mad and shouting and your face is red, and the phone rings, you can pick it up with a calm voice and say “Hello Mother”. In a few seconds you can go from angry to calm – if you want to. We have all done this, we have all shut off our anger and brought ourselves under control in an instant. The key was “deciding to” – we decided to shut down the anger response and as soon as we genuinely decided to that – it ceased.

We can decide to NOT be offended or resentful or irritable. We can see these responses as far more deadly than any poison and we can deal with them firmly and put them far from us. How we respond is our decision – and its implications are huge. Being easily offended is against love, against Christ, and against Christian community. It isolates us and darkens us, makes us lonely and miserable and may even open us up to demonic influence. That is why it is essential to cultivate a forbearing and forgiving spirit.

Matthew 6:14-15 MKJV For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; (15) but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

John 9:17-25

Now I See

John 9:17-25 MKJV *They said to the blind man again, What do you say about him, for he has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet. (18) But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him having received sight. (19) And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, whom you say was born blind? How then does he now see? (20) His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. (21) But by what means he now sees, we do not know. Or who has opened his eyes, we do not know. He is of age, ask him. He will speak for himself. (22) His parents spoke these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. (23) Therefore his parents said, He is of age, ask him. (24) Then a second time they called the man who was blind and said to him, Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner. (25) He answered and said, Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that being blind, now I see.*

The enraged Pharisees are trying to disprove the miracle. In doing so they demonstrate their 'spiritual blindness while the blind man demonstrates his spiritual perception. Over the next few days we will see the "blind man" growing in faith while the Pharisees become further and further from God.

Now the Pharisees did not want to be sinful, they were not what we usually picture as a "sinner" – that is Las Vegas style wild, wanton and wicked high-rolling gamblers and long-legged ladies of luxury. In fact the Pharisees set out to be good, clean living, righteous and religious. They would not be seen dead (or alive) in a casino. They even tithed dill and mint and cumin. They knew their Bibles and strove to obey the Law. They were pure, patriotic and pious. But they were going to Hell on roller-skates because of their inner life.

Jesus portrays their inner life in the most scathing of terms:

Matthew 23:23-33 MKJV Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and dill and cummin, and you have left undone the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith. You ought to have done these and not to leave the other undone. (24) Blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (25) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of extortion and excess. (26) Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of them may be clean also. (27) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outside, but inside they are full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (28) Even so you also appear righteous to men outwardly, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (29) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the righteous, (30) and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. (31) Therefore you are witnesses to yourselves, that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets; (32) and you fill up the measure of your fathers. (33) Serpents! Offspring of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?

Pride, the love of human praise, the desire for appearance, the desire for control, hypocrisy, hatred and resentment all poisoned their inner life until they raged against the Son of God and crucified the Christ.

In direct contrast the once-blind man sticks to his guns despite all their rage and pressure. The Pharisees try to get him to deny Jesus but he says "He is a prophet" and later on he gives an answer that stands as one of the greatest sentences in the Bible: "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that being blind, now I see."

His parents are timid but their timidity just adds to their credibility when they aver, "he was born blind but how he came to see we do not know". Someone once said "many a beautiful elegant theory has been destroyed by a single, brutal, ugly fact." The facts of the blind man, and later of Lazarus were not "ugly facts", quite the contrary, but they stood as clear testimony against the Pharisees contention that Jesus was a sinner.

So we have two groups, the Pharisees who loved the religious system that gave them social position and the disciples who loved the grace that worked miracles in their lives. These two groups still exist today in practically every Christian denomination.

The people who have grace can say: "I once was blind but now I see". There is a change in their lives, a gentle movement from darkness to light. And there is a deep tenacious appreciation of Jesus.

Saul was sure he was right as he charged down the Damascus Road, but it was only after a blinding light and the voice of the Lord followed by three days of blindness and a healing by Ananias that he could say, "I once was blind but now I see" and became Paul the apostle.

It is so easy to be spiritually blind while possessing a big black study bible and sixteen sets of commentaries and a record of making many convert. It is so easy to love church position more than Christ and to hold onto respectability above grace and to seek control over others more than mercy and compassion. It is far easier to be “right” than to be loving and kind.

Grace astonishes us – it breaks into our world with a burst of light in the midst of our suffering and neediness. “I was blind but now I see” or “I was ashamed but I found forgiveness” or “I was depressed and I found the joy of the Lord”. Grace is not just a new doctrine; it is a new state of fellowship with God. Grace always changes us inwardly and frequently changes us outwardly as well. Grace breaks into the continuum and turns it upside down. Has that happened to you?

John 9:26-34

The Rejected Disciple

John 9:26-34 MKJV *Then they said to him again, What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? (27) He answered them, I have told you already, and you did not hear. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also desire to be His disciples? (28) Then they reviled him and said, You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. (29) We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know from where this man is. (30) The man answered and said to them, Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know from where He is, and He has opened my eyes. (31) But we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. (32) From everlasting it was not heard that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. (33) If this One were not of God, He could do nothing. (34) They answered and said to him, You were altogether born in sins, and do you teach us? And they cast him out.*

The man born blind is now given words by the Holy Spirit:

Luke 12:11-12 MKJV And when they bring you into the synagogues, and to rulers and authorities, take no thought as to how or what thing you shall answer, or what you shall say. (12) For the Holy Spirit shall teach you in the same hour what you ought to say.

He makes five main points:

1. The Pharisees are just being contentious and keep asking the same thing to no good purpose. (v. 27)
2. The Pharisees claim to not know where Jesus was from was absurd. (v. 30)
3. God does not hear sinners – but did hear Jesus. (v. 31)
4. The miracle is too great to be done by a “sinner” – in fact it exceeded the miracles of the prophets of old. (v. 32)
5. If Jesus were not of God, He could do nothing. (v. 33)

Now we need to balance this with the later revelation that the Anti-Christ will come with false signs and lying wonders performing great miracles and even causing fire to come down from heaven (Matthew 7:21-23, 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, Revelation 13:13,14, 16:14,19:20) Yet as we saw a couple of days ago to attribute the miraculous to Satan is extremely dangerous territory and can only be done if there is clearly “bad fruit” such as wickedness, gross immorality or idolatry.

[See my article: for details on false miracles in the end times.]

With that cautionary note being sounded the general tone of the New Testament is to expect and approve of miracles and to see them as authenticating the man of God who does them. The principle that: "If this One were not of God, He could do nothing." Is still generally a good one!

Romans 15:18-19 MKJV For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ did not work out by me for the obedience of the nations in word and deed, (19) in power of miracles and wonders, in power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem, and all around to Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:11-12 MKJV (11) I have become foolish boasting. You compelled me. For I ought to be commended by you. For I lacked nothing of the highest apostles, if even I am nothing. (12) Truly the signs of the apostle were worked out among you in all patience, in miracles and in wonders, and by works of power.

Hebrews 2:3-4 MKJV how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by those who heard Him; (4) God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with different kinds of miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Miracles are always part of the gospel narrative and the apostolic proclamation. Signs and wonders are a sign of the presence of the Kingdom and by ignoring this sign the Pharisees were ignoring the clear revelation of God about Christ.

For his logical reasoning about Christ the man-born-blind-who-now-sees is cast out of the synagogue, a potentially devastating Jewish social punishment. Here is what one commentator (Vincent's Word Studies) says:

"Three kinds of excommunication were recognized, of which only the third was the real cutting off, the other two being disciplinary. The first, and lightest, was called *rebuke*, and lasted from seven to thirty days. The second was called *thrusting out*, and lasted for thirty days at least, followed by a "second admonition," which lasted for thirty days more. This could only be pronounced in an assembly of ten. It was accompanied by curses, and sometimes proclaimed with the blast of the horn. The excommunicated person would not be admitted into any assembly of ten men, nor to public prayer. People would keep at the distance of four cubits from him, as if he were a leper. Stones were to be cast on his coffin when dead, and mourning for him was forbidden. If all else failed, the third, or real excommunication was pronounced, the duration of which was indefinite. The man was to be as one dead. No intercourse was to be held with him; one must not show him the road, and though he might buy the necessaries of life, it was forbidden to eat and drink with him."

This raises the obvious question: "Why are good people persecuted for being logical and truthful?" And why is this such a consistent pattern that Paul can write to Timothy and say: "*2 Timothy 3:12 MKJV Yea, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*"?

There are over 40 references to persecution of believers in the NT. Persecution is seen as part of the standard expectation of being a true believer and something that brings great eternal reward.

1 Peter 4:12-14 MKJV Beloved, do not be astonished at the fiery trial which is to try you, as though a strange thing happened to you, (13) but rejoice according as you are partakers of Christ's suffering, so that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy. (14) If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of God and of glory rests on you. Truly according to them, He is blasphemed, but according to you He is glorified.

In the Sermon On The Mount we are told to expect rejection and persecution (Matthew 5:10-12) and to not react against it but to do good to and pray for those who persecute us. A loving Christian community that embraces the rejected is essential during times of persecution. We will see tomorrow that Jesus goes and finds the man cast out and accepts him as a disciple.

John 9:35-41 **Lord, I Believe**

John 9:35-41 MKJV *Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and finding him, He said to him, Do you believe on the Son of God? (36) And he answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him? (37) And Jesus said to him, You have both seen Him, and it is He who is speaking with you. (38) And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped Him. (39) And Jesus said, I have come into this world for judgment, that they who do not see might see, and that they who see might be made blind. (40) And those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, Are we also blind? (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 is a stark contrast between the once blind man who seeks the Truth and believes, and the Pharisees who seek to justify themselves – and so become spiritually blind.

The blind man makes two statements:

“Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?”

“Lord, I believe.”

These are clearly the statements of someone seeking after the Truth and looking for a solid relationship with God. He is not quibbling and arguing but uses his conscience and the light of his soul to find Christ.

And the Pharisees make one statement:

“Are we also blind?”

This is a sarcastic response to Jesus’ teaching and expects the answer “No”. It is the equivalent to the “How stupid do you think I am?” rhetorical question. They were confident of the light of their laws and doctrines, and sure of their spiritual standing, but in fact they were spiritually blind, and did not know it.

Now let’s look at the four statements of Christ:

“Do you believe in the Son of God?” This question probes for a true believer. Interestingly the once blind man becomes a full believer after he is persecuted for the name of Christ. Jesus sees someone who loves the Truth and invites him to believe.

“You have both seen Him, and it is He who is speaking with you.” The Son is not a doctrine, but a person. The Son of God is someone who can be seen and heard. Jesus is no abstraction but a living Being who we must trust. The person the blind man had now seen (he didn’t see him the first time because his eyes were only opened at the Pool of Siloam) was Jesus. What an awesome statement...the Son of God is speaking to you! Jesus still speaks to us today.

“I have come into this world for judgment, that they who do not see might see, and that they who see might be made blind.” Jesus is so powerful and overwhelming that we are only left with two choices – faith or darkness. Neutrality about Jesus is impossible. He judges us by our reaction to Him. Those

believe His Words receive eternal life, those who choose to walk in their own light instead – end up spiritually blind.

“If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, We see. Therefore your sin remains.” People who have no knowledge of God’s will, have no sin, but those who do know God’s will - should obey it. For sin is rebellion against the revealed will of God. The slave who did not know that what he was doing was wrong will “receive but few blows” while he who knew perfectly well that it was wrong “will be beaten severely”. (Luke 12:47-48) Thus we are to be careful stewards of God’s revelation:

Luke 8:18 MKJV Therefore be careful how you hear. For whoever has, to him shall be given; and whoever has not, from him shall be taken even that which he seems to have.

The Pharisees who claimed to know God’s will and be a light to the blind were in fact in deep trouble because they disobeyed the clear light of God, so it was taken from them, and they “became blind”. All of us who call ourselves pastors, missionaries or Christian leaders need to keep that in mind!

Paul wrote about this problem in Romans:

Romans 2:17-24 HCSB Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rest in the law, and boast in God, (18) and know His will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from the law, (19) and are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, (20) an instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having in the law the full expression of knowledge and truth-- (21) you then, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach, "You must not steal"--do you steal? (22) You who say, "You must not commit adultery"--do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob their temples? (23) You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? (24) For, as it is written: The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Jesus keeps making a contrast between people who say “I believe” and others who say “I know” or “we see”. Being a believer leads to salvation, but just “knowing” leads to hypocrisy and blasphemy.

Someone who truly believes lives by that belief. If a person truly believes they should be honest, they will live by that, and they will not steal. Their “not stealing” is a sign that they genuinely believe in honesty.

On the other hand a person can “know” all about something but not live it out in real life. An easy example of this is fitness and dieting where many people “know it all” but actually do next to nothing. You can be a complete slob – who knows everything about Pilates and push-ups!

The gospel makes a clear distinction between believers and experts. The believer is always a learner and a disciple, and never “arrives” because he or she is always on the pilgrimage of faith. The expert thinks they have arrived because they are in some way superior to other Christians and have got a small or large following that confirms this erroneous belief. Experts can become believers but it is such a drastic change that when Jesus spoke to the “expert” Nicodemus He called it being “born-again” – which involves taking on a new identity entirely with a whole bunch of uncertainties (The wind blows wherever it wills).

Those of us who teach the Word should be cautious lest we stop being disciples and learners and believers – and become arrogant experts and hypocrites.

John 10:1-5

The Good Shepherd Part 1

John 10:1-5 HCSB *"I assure you: Anyone who doesn't enter the sheep pen by the door but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a robber. (2) The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) The doorkeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. (5) They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't recognize the voice of strangers."*

The doorkeeper of the soul is the conscience that recognizes the voice of God in Christ and admits the True Teacher. We are made in the image of God, with a conscience that is supposed to hear God's voice. There is also something in us that senses lies and manipulation and the conscience that functions correctly will reject a false teacher and recoil from heresy.

The true conscience recognizes Christ as the Good Shepherd so the True Teacher appeals to this conscience and does not try to manipulate the believer by any other way. The True Teacher teaches Christ and appeals to the inner workings of the image of God in the person in a completely honest and non-manipulative fashion:

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 MKJV (1) Therefore since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not faint. (2) But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor adulterating the Word of God, but by the revelation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 5:11 MKJV (11) Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men. But we are revealed to God, and I trust also that we are revealed in your consciences.

On the other hand the false teacher cannot get in through the door of the conscience so has to use other means such as fear, greed, flattery, deception and seduction.

2 Timothy 3:13 MKJV But evil men and seducers will go forward to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Peter 2:12-15 MKJV But these, as unreasoning natural brute animals having been born for capture and corruption, speak evil of the things that they do not understand. And they will utterly perish in their own corruption, (13) being about to receive the wages of unrighteousness, deeming indulgence as pleasure in the daytime, and reveling in spots and blemishes, feasting along with you in their deceits, (14) having eyes full of adultery and never ceasing from sin, alluring unstable souls, having a heart exercised with covetousness. They are cursed children (15) who have forsaken the right way and have gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,

Highly manipulative people will not allow you to use your conscience and to think for yourself in the light of Scripture and the facts. Extreme manipulators try to control four things- your feelings, your thoughts, your access to information and your behavior. They will often deny followers access to information in newspapers, TV or the Internet and attack "logic" and thinking as somehow unspiritual. On the other hand a true spiritual guide leaves you free to follow your conscience and simply presents the facts of Scripture in a straightforward clear and prayerful manner.

Jesus never does a "hard sell", nor does He ever manipulate anyone – even to save him or her from Hell. God is a God of personal freedom and the gospel is a gospel of personal freedom and nothing in the Kingdom is to be done "under compulsion".

1 Peter 5:2-3 MKJV Feed the flock of God among you, taking the oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor for base gain, but readily; (3) nor as lording it over those allotted to you by God, but becoming examples to the flock.

2 Corinthians 9:7 CEV Each of you must make up your own mind about how much to give. But don't feel sorry that you must give and don't feel that you are forced to give. God loves people who love to give.

So right persuasion is simply presenting the gospel clearly and truthfully to the consciences of the listeners and letting the Holy Spirit do the rest.

In chapter nine the Pharisees had shown themselves as spiritually blind – that is, unable to recognize the voice of God, their consciences were defiled and distorted (Titus 1:15-16, 1 Timothy 4:1-3).

So we have four groups of people here, the sheep – who have a pure conscience and run from the “voice of the stranger” and the Good Shepherd, who appeals to their conscience in sincerity and truth. The audience is the Pharisees who have a defiled and legalistic conscience, and the “stranger” is the false teacher who bypasses the gate of the pure conscience entirely and “enters in another way”.

This has HUGE implications for Christian ministry in an age of “marketing”. If the New Testament is correct (which it is) then we have two groups, one who are “being saved” whose consciences respond to the Truth and those who are perishing who do not love the Truth but pursue their own personal agendas instead. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12)

1 Corinthians 1:18 MKJV (18) For the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those being lost, but to us being saved, it is the power of God.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 MKJV (14) Now thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ, and He revealing through us the odor of the knowledge of Him in every place. (15) For we are to God a sweet savor of Christ, in those being saved, and in those being lost; (16) to the one we are the savor of death to death, and to the other we are the savor of life to life. And who is sufficient for these things? (17) For we are not as many, hawking the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

Paul asks the question “who is sufficient for these things” and then answers it by renouncing commercial practices in his preaching: “For we are not as many, hawking the Word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.”

So our “audience” is not all humanity – but a group within it, who love the truth and seek salvation and whose consciences respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and they are best reached by preaching the clear, pure, unadulterated gospel in all sincerity.

John 10:6-9

I Am The Door

John 10:6-10 MKJV *Jesus spoke this parable to them, but they did not understand what it was which He spoke to them. (7) Then Jesus said to them again, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. (8) All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. (9) I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.*

Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheep". Now the word "door" has a mystical meaning as the entrance to the soul. In this study we will look at the initial references to the "door" in Scripture, and make a case for this being a very special word with very deep meanings indeed. Here we go!

The very first use of the word "door" in Scripture is in the words of the Lord to Cain:

Genesis 4:7 MKJV If you do well, shall you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door; and its desire is for you, and you shall rule over it.

This is evidently not a literal door, it is the door of Cain's soul, which can admit evil or refuse it. The "principle" of first reference" states that: The first appearance of a word or phrase often serves as the basis of its theological meaning from that point on in Scripture. The meaning may expand but the first reference is nearly always the core meaning. So we see that "the door" is the entrance to the soul, that is under human control and can admit or refuse evil.

The next reference to the word "door" in Scripture is the door to salvation:

Genesis 6:16 MKJV You shall make a window in the ark, and you shall finish it above to a cubit. And you shall set the door of the ark in the side of it. You shall make it with lower, second and third stories.

This door to salvation was closed by the Lord, just prior to the Flood: *Genesis 7:16 MKJV And they that entered, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him. And Jehovah shut him in.*

Thus "door" represents divine opportunity, here for salvation in the ark, and later for salvation in Christ, and this opportunity may close just prior to divine judgment falling. (Matthew 25:10; Luke 12:25). The door of salvation theme is later taken up in Exodus during the Passover when the blood of the Lamb is to be applied to the "doorposts".

Exodus 12:22 MKJV And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip in the blood in the bowl, and strike the lintel and the doorposts with the blood in the bowl. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

The next reference to "door" in Genesis is to God's momentous encounter with Abraham:

Genesis 18:1 MKJV And Jehovah appeared to him in the plains of Mamre, and he sat at the tent door in the heat of the day.

This is the door of spiritual experience, the place of meeting God in the soul and of receiving divine promises. This door opens to meditation and contemplation and to the faith of the believer.

Revelation 3:20 MKJV Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me.

This theme of the "door" as a place of spiritual encounter continues with Lot's salvation brought about by angels who "came to the door". Lot is someone who is in a deep struggle with an evil environment that assails him "at the door" and the door becomes the vital battleground for all the follows.

Genesis 19:10-11 MKJV But the men put out their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. (11) And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

Later the “door” is a place of oaths, formal agreements, anointing and ordination.

For instance the pledging of loyalty by a slave also happened at the door:

Exodus 21:5-6 MKJV And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my sons. I do not want to go out free (6) his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door or to the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him forever.

And the anointing and ordination of the Aaronic priests was done at the door of the tabernacle:

Exodus 29:4-7 MKJV And you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shall wash them with water. (5) And you shall take the garments, and clothe Aaron with the tunic, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breast pocket, and bind it to him with the band of the ephod. (6) And you shall put the miter upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the miter. (7) Then you shall take the anointing oil, and pour on his head, and anoint him.

And the place of God's presence and the people's worship:

Exodus 33:10 MKJV And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door. And all the people rose up and worshiped, each man in his tent door.

There are over 50 references to the “door of the tabernacle” as the place of sacrifice and ceremony. It was where business was done with God. Thus when Eli's sons defiled it with fornication they were killed by the Lord. (1 Samuel 2:22-25)

Thus the “door” is the place of great spiritual transactions where the soul is made or destroyed and where business is done with God. By saying that He is the door of the sheep Jesus is comparing Himself with the door of the tabernacle through which people found the Presence of God and where the great sacrifices and anointing took place.

What matters with a door is where you are in relation to it. Are you inside the door or outside it? Is it open to you or is it shut against you? Are you welcomed or rejected? Have you entered in fully or are you still standing outside? The door changes everything, going through it means all the difference between standing outside in the heat or the rain, or being inside in loving fellowship. The door represents a spiritual choice, a moment of decision: *Revelation 3:20 MKJV Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with Me.*

So when Jesus says; “I am the door. If anyone enters in by Me, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.” He is saying that He is the entrance to true deep and abundant spiritual experience. He is the “narrow gate” that we must go through for the world of the Spirit to be opened up to us.

Matthew 7:13-14 MKJV Go in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in through it. (14) Because narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Luke 13:23-24 MKJV And one said to Him, Lord, are the ones being saved few? And He said to them, (24) Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. For I say to you, many will seek to enter in and shall not be able.

John 10:10

Abundant Life

John 10:10 MKJV *The thief does not come except to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

Jesus is incredibly positive. This verse alone should put strained holiness and mean-spirited asceticism to flight. Jesus has come so that ordinary people, sheep, might have abundant life and still more abundant life.

But there is another force at work in this world also. A negative, death-dealing principle that comes to “steal, kill and destroy” and this is represented by the devil and his agents – the Pharisees and false teachers who stole ‘widow’s houses” (Matthew 23:14) murdered the prophets (Matthew 23:34) and took counsel as to how to destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14).

As we saw in the series on Solution-Focused Faith, Jesus is positive and constructive. His aim to build a perfect grace-filled community of faith that is resonant with love and which dwells in peace. The abundant life is always in community “for He hath prepared a city for them”. (Hebrews 11:16)

I am listening to Beethoven’s 6th Symphony as I write, the Pastoral Symphony and this whole composition is one glorious celebration of the true abundant life, and ends with thanks being given to God. Yet, interestingly in the middle of the symphony is a great storm. It is after the storm that true abundance is most deeply felt and glory is given to God.

The abundant life may have its storms but the storms only serve to deepen the sense of abundance in the end. Job is an example of this truly abundant life (abundance -> trial -> deeper abundance). Going through the great trial, which involves Satanic “stealing, killing and destroying”, just, ends up with greater abundance and deeper faith in the end.

Let us take a moment to look at “the storm” and Satan’s devices for “stealing, killing and destroying”. False religion acts against true abundance in several ways:

1. It substitutes material or sexual or emotional abundance for the abundant life of love in community. (2 Peter 3:1-22)
2. Or it sanctifies misery and pain and derides the full enjoyment of life. (1 Timothy 4:3,4 6:17)
3. Or in the name of being unworldly it becomes unnatural and denies our creaturely humanity. (Colossians 2:8-23)
4. Or it creates a false community that is cultist and destructive and even lethal.
5. Or it creates something “higher than” a person in the image of God - such as a law or cause or principle, and for this law or cause or principle everything must be sacrificed – and thus anything becomes permissible.

True Christianity always leads to joy in the end, through many tribulations admittedly, but always to joy. False religion steals joy, kills faith and destroys peace and love, while Christ brings these things to joyful abundance.

If Christ has come to give us life and life more abundant – why do we have to pay the rent and deal with phone companies? We could put all this down to the Devil but the Scriptures seem not to do so. Christ came as the incarnate Word, born in a stable, trained as a carpenter, and well aware of dusty,

weary, thirsty normal life, trudging on foot from one hot village to the next. Jesus did not flit around Galilee on angel's wings - He walked. So Christ redeems the routine.

If Jesus gives people abundant life, then He must have possessed abundant life Himself. Thus when we look at Jesus we are seeing the abundant life – sandals, fishing nets, and all. It is a life redolent with grace, abundant with love, showered in the miraculous and blazing with significance that echoes down the centuries. However it is somewhat lacking in chariots, fine robes and palatial mansions! For the abundant life has nothing to do with such things (though it may on occasion include them).

The abundance of Jesus is the abundance of the true saint. The true saint comes to a point one day when he knows that the whole universe is his! The trees, the birds, the sun and moon and stars are all his to enjoy for free. For true ownership is simply the ability to enjoy something! Suppose a certain rich man buys a large yacht but he is perpetually busy with buying and selling so he never gets to enjoy it. Yet he has a poor man that he hires to take care of the boat and live on it and sail it now and then for guests. Whose boat is it in reality? The one who enjoys it! Now the saint knows that the sun and the moon and the stars and the breeze are all his to enjoy fully and completely, without let or hindrance - and so they are "his".

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 MKJV (21) Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours, (22) whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, (23) and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Revelation 21:7 MKJV He who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son.

1 Timothy 6:17 MKJV Charge the rich in this world that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, He offering to us richly all things to enjoy,

Now I do not mean that I can go out and claim the oil rights in Alaska! But I am rich in the things that God gives me to enjoy. Good health, an excellent wife, two cats, good friends, great music, books and food and drink and nature and sunshine - and truly these things can be an abundant feast!

The pure heart adores God, loves life, enjoys all things and knows true abundance. The pure heart knows the vibrancy of an abundant and joyous life. It sees beauty, it finds joy, and it even sings in prison. As Billy Sunday once said "If they put me in a barrel to keep me quiet, I would shout 'Hallelujah' out the bung-hole!"

John 10:11-18

The Good Shepherd - Part 2

John 10:11-18 MKJV *I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (12) But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away. And the wolf catches them and scatters the sheep. (13) The hireling flees, because he is a hireling and does not care for the sheep. (14) I am the Good Shepherd, and I know those that are Mine, and I am known by those who are Mine. (15) Even as the Father knows Me, I also know the Father. And I lay down My life for the sheep. (16) And I have other sheep who are not of this fold. I must also lead those, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd. (17) Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I might take it again. (18) No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down from Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment from My Father.*

Jesus talks about laying down His life five times in four verses (v11, 15, 17, 18) and sees this self-sacrifice as an essential quality of the Good Shepherd (v11), a sign of true intimacy with God (v.15) including being the reason for the Father's love (v.17) and an indication of Christ's authority over matters of life and death (v.18).

In stark contrast the professional paid Jewish clergy (the Pharisees, Sadducees, and High Priests) were self-preserving hirelings without any ethic of self-sacrifice who let the common people be devoured by the 'wolves' (v12, 13). The difference is that Jesus "owns the sheep" (v. 12), He is strongly invested in them, whereas the Jewish clergy were more invested in their careers and positions - rather than in the sheep.

Jesus is the Head of the Church and truly "owns the sheep" and we are all made by Him and for Him and He shed His blood to buy us back from sin and judgment so that we are His by Creation and His by redemption. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Jesus is different from most human leaders. Most leaders ask us to make sacrifices for them, but rarely do they make meaningful and difficult sacrifices for us. Human leaders enjoy the good life while the common people man the trenches and make the actual sacrifices. Jesus of course reverses this and is the first one to lose His life – and He does this "for the sheep".

Self-sacrifice, not self-aggrandizement should be the chief characteristic of Christian spiritual leaders. It is wrong for a Christian leader to ask people to "dig deep" for a ministry while they themselves drive luxury cars. If the ministry really needs cash that badly the Mercedes should be sold first, and the sacrifice should come from the board members first of all.

The Good Shepherd does not sit at the head of the table gobbling up all the food while everyone else starves. Yet Christian ministries that massively over-pay their executive staff and grossly underpay (or not pay at all) their office staff and volunteers are doing precisely that! Jesus does not seek the abundant life for Himself – but for the sheep.

The Good Shepherd "knows the sheep by name", that is He has a personal interest in each of them, from little lambs to old rams. There is infinite care in this, we are not just management statistics in a religious marketing campaign, the sheep are individuals with names and places, histories and relationships. This is not just a one-way relationship but a mutual knowing of each other: "I know those that are Mine, and I am known by those who are Mine."

That fact the Jesus knows His sheep is not that surprising – but we know Him as well! Our consciences, automatically "recognize" Christ – in humane actions, in worship, in the Scriptures, in Creation and in other believers.

Jesus adds a cryptic comment about "other sheep" – that is non-Jewish Christians: "And I have other sheep who are not of this fold. I must also lead those, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd." The Church is universal, a global organic body of Christ. They are one flock – of many folds (denominations, localities, races etc) and have only one Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ - therefore pastors and Christian workers are simply under-shepherds of this "invisible" Church. The two passages below illustrate this point:

Hebrews 13:20-21 MKJV Now may the God of peace (who brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant) (21) make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:1-4 MKJV I exhort the elders who are among you, I being also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. (2) Feed the flock of God among you, taking the oversight, not by compulsion, but willingly; nor for base gain, but readily; (3) nor as lording it over those allotted to you by God, but becoming examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a never-fading crown of glory.

Finally the Good Shepherd has great authority – including authority over life and death: “No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down from Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment from My Father.”

Jesus as God is indestructible apart from His own will. No one could take His life from him by force. And even if it is laid down it is not lost forever, he could take it up again. This is so contrary to common experience that it is mind-boggling. Jesus had an eternal and indestructible life force, the life of God Himself dwelling in Him bodily. (Colossians 2:9). The ISV correctly translates the Greek of *Hebrews 7:16* when it says *Jesus' priesthood is on the basis of "an indestructible life"*: *Hebrews 7:15-17 ISV This point is even more obvious in that another priest who is like Melchizedek has appeared (16) who was appointed to be a priest, not on the basis of a regulation concerning his ancestry, but rather on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. (17) For it is declared about him, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*

So Jesus does not just give us abundant life (John 10:10) He gives us indestructible abundant life (John 10:18, Hebrews 7:16), and a peace the world cannot take away, even with persecution.

John 16:33 MKJV I have spoken these things to you so that you might have peace in Me. In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.

John 10:19-30

The Good Shepherd Is God

John 10:19-30 MKJV *Then a division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. (20) And many of them said, He has a demon and is insane. Why do you hear him? (21) Others said, These are not words of one who has been possessed by a demon. A demon is not able to open the eyes of blind ones. (22) And the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem, and it was winter. (23) And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's Porch. (24) Then the Jews encircled Him and said to Him, How long do you make us doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. (25) Jesus answered them, I told you and you did not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. (26) But you did not believe because you are not of My sheep. As I said to you, (27) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (28) And I give to them eternal life, and they shall never ever perish, and not anyone shall pluck them out of My hand. (29) My Father who gave them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. (30) I and the Father are one!*

We have moved from Tabernacles (September) to Hannukah (December), the mellow fruitfulness of autumn harvest has given way to a cold winter of discontent. Jesus is still dodging the direct question of His being the Messiah. Why? Because it was so obvious!

“Jesus answered them, “I have told you, but you do not believe it. The works that I do in my Father's name testify on my behalf, but you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep.”

In other words “if you have not figured it out by now, after all these miracles, you are just a stubborn unbeliever”. And if they were stubborn unbelievers claiming to be the Messiah would not turn them into believers, it was far more likely to just drive them into a frenzy of murderous hate. And that could easily get out of control in the political powder keg that was Jerusalem under Roman occupation.

Jesus then defines two distinct groups – “not sheep” and “sheep”. The “not sheep” lack spiritual perception and “do not hear my voice” but the true sheep have active spiritual perception and “hear my voice....and they follow Me”

“But you do not believe because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.”

The believers, the sheep, are secure because they have the spiritual faculties to hear God and follow Him. They do not go astray any more than someone with a GPS unit in their car goes astray. They get direct guidance from God that keeps them on the right track:

Isaiah 30:21 MKJV And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.

Isaiah 35:8-10 MKJV And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called, The Way of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it. But He shall be with them; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err in it. (9) No lion shall be there, nor any beast of prey shall go up on it; it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. (10) And the ransomed of Jehovah shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The voice of Jesus is not heard by all, but it is heard by His sheep and because of this a spiritual communion develops – we “have fellowship with Him” and we know Christ and Christ knows us. . “I know them”

1 John 1:3 MKJV that which we have seen and heard we declare unto you, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 13:14 MKJV (14) May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

This fellowship creates such a strong bond of love that men or demons cannot break it: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (29) What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it from the Father's hand.”

It is God the Father who creates people and sets the spirit within them and who forms their consciences, therefore He is the One who “gives them” to Jesus. He gives them to Christ by creating within them the ability to believe Christ and to receive Him and to love Him and have fellowship with Him. Spiritually sensitive people often feel this spiritual attraction at a young age though it may be years before they are truly born-again. It seems that there are those that Christ draws - and those that Christ repels.

God guards those who are His and protects them and because of His great might Satan is not able to wrench them out of the Father's grasp. No matter how much suffering a saint goes through, or how tempted she may be, or how confused a man may become God is able to remedy the situation of provide a way of escape. .

1 Corinthians 10:13 MKJV (13) No temptation has taken you but what is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but with the temptation also will make a way to escape, so that you may be able to bear it.

Finally Jesus tells us the real reason that His sheep are safe – “I and the Father are one!” in other words the Good Shepherd Is God!

John 10:31-39

The Elephant In The Garden Bed

John 10:31-39 MKJV *Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. (32) Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from My Father; for which of these do you stone Me? (33) The Jews answered Him, saying, We do not stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God. (34) Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your Law, "I said, You are gods?" (35) If He called those gods with whom the Word of God was, and the Scripture cannot be broken, (36) do you say of Him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, You blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God? (37) If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me. (38) But if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him. (39) Then they again sought to seize Him, but He went forth out of their hand.*

Just prior to these verses Jesus has made His famous claim: “I and the Father are One”. The Jews interpret this as a claim to divinity (v.33). Jesus replies with a puzzling quote from Psalm 82, which refers to some finite and mortal beings as “gods”.

Yet there is a strange and very deep relationship between humanity and divinity. We were made, alone of all creatures, “in the image of God” and are capable of being God-indwelt, by His Spirit, and of being transformed from glory to glory into the image of God. Such is humanity’s capacity for divinity that Jesus could be both fully man and fully God, the fullness of deity in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

It is almost as if Christ blurs the boundary between man and God. Somehow humanity and divinity can unite seamlessly in the one Person.

Anyone can claim divinity including lunatics and charlatans – but only One has been able to convincingly demonstrate divinity – that is Christ Jesus! Not even death could hold Him! Therefore Jesus points to His works first of all when He says: “I have shown you many good works from My Father; for which of these do you stone Me?”

Jesus reminds them that He is not evil, that in fact that He does many good works, works that everyone acknowledges are from the Father.

The Jews reply that it is not for all the good deeds they stone Him, but for blasphemy: “We do not stone you for a good work, but for blasphemy, and because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

Jewish thought then was very much like Islamic thought today – where any hint of a connection between humanity and divinity is blasphemous. God is “wholly other” and inaccessible. He is Mysterious would never be plainly revealed, let alone incarnated as flesh and blood. According to this doctrine God is Holy and unapproachable and there is vast unbridgeable gulf between humanity and divinity.

But Jesus bridges this gulf, in fact almost seems to obliterate it. He is God incarnate and those who follow Him receive eternal life, become citizens of Heaven and dwell with Him as brothers and sisters. We receive His Spirit, and dwell in His heaven and will receive immortal and glorious bodies at the resurrection. The redeemed become ‘sons of God’ a title to which the Jews vigorously objected as a blasphemy.

Our future state is a mystery that is still to be fully revealed but St. John gives us a hefty clue: *1 John 3:1-2 MKJV Behold what manner of love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. But we know that when He shall be revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

We shall be like Jesus and Jesus is perfectly like God. (John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9) There will be a family resemblance between you and I and the Almighty! Like God we can make moral and spiritual choices and act with authority – though in a much more limited domain. We are in His image!

The fact that the clay of humanity can bear the image and stamp of divinity was shocking to the Jews. For a man to be one with God was impossible in their thought – but was realized in Jesus, the God-Man who stood in front of them and did the works that proved it.

Jesus points to the ability of human clay to bear the stamp of God in His quote from Ps 82: “Is it not written in your Law, “I said, You are gods?” (35) If He called those gods with whom the Word of God was, and the Scripture cannot be broken, (36) do you say of Him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, You blaspheme, because I said, I am the Son of God?”

In Psalm 82 God is speaking to a group of beings whom He calls “gods”:

Psalms 82:1-8 MKJV A Psalm of Asaph. God stands in the congregation of the mighty; in the midst of the gods He judges. (2) How long will you judge unjustly and lift up the faces of the wicked? Selah. (3) Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. (4) Deliver the poor and needy; save them out of the hand of the wicked. (5) They neither know nor will understand; they walk on in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. (6) I have said, You are gods; and all of you sons of the Most High. (7) But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. (8) Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit in all nations.

These may be magistrates as many commentators suggest or perhaps demonic principalities and powers that influence human politics and empower wicked human agents. The demons would “lift up the faces of the wicked” by empowering their regimes. In the end these “sons of the Most High” would die like mere men and fall like one of the princes (which implies they were higher than human princes and therefore unlikely to be mere magistrates).

Jesus merely calls them “those to whom the Word of God” came – thus leaving us in doubt as to what they were, but whatever they were they were not the Father, or even the Word of god, but ones under the judgment of god, and even though God was judging them they are still described as “gods” and “sons of the Most High” -even though they are mortal in that in some sense they can ‘die like mere men’. So if finite, mortal, contingent beings under the judgment of God can still have these designations how much more than ‘Him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world’.

Jesus is claiming to be holy humanity, divinized flesh and blood, sanctified and sent into the world, - and the proof of this is His works: “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me. (38) But if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works so that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.”

His works are a sign of the Power that indwells Jesus - "the Father is in Me". The works are also a sign of Jesus' relationship to the Father - "and I in Him".

Even if they could not believe His words, they should believe the plain evidence of His deeds. Commonsense tells us that if something happen, and then it happens, there can be no denying it - even though we may not like the implications. If an elephant walks into our garden and tramples the petunias it is no use saying "but there are no elephants in Carson" because there is one in Carson now, and it is as plain as day and crushed daisies!

The elephant in the garden bed was Jesus' miracles in the midst of the Jewish religious establishment. He was there, He was doing mighty works, and there was no denying it.

John 10:40-42 Beyond The Jordan

John 10:40-42 MKJV *And He went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John baptized at the first, and He stayed there. (41) And many came to Him and said, John indeed did no miracle, but all things that John said concerning this One were true. (42) And many believed on Him there.*

After what was possibly six months of unending contention in Jerusalem Jesus goes back to where it all began and recharges His soul. He went out to the wilderness, to Aenon by Jordan, where the air was clear, the water pure and the nit-picking theologians few and far between. Jesus moves away from Judea, the Temple and the religious authorities out into the trans-Jordan wilderness, out into the land of "crazy prophets" like John the Baptist. There, Jesus finds the true believers, folk who would walk right out into the countryside to hear a man of God.

"And many believed on Him there" - there on the fringes, in the wilderness, faith was found! Lots of faith! I have often found "faith on the fringes", in small towns in outback Australia, in urban slums, in strange and wonderful tribal villages in Papua New Guinea, in all the places that "temple-bound theologians" rarely visit.

Such places are where some independent thinking, some real thinking, can be done. In Jerusalem there was instant irrational condemnation of unorthodox ideas. But in the wilderness a man can ponder and think and talk to the trees and a few friends and come up with a wild notion or two, or three.

Many of the greatest works of philosophy have been written "out on the fringe" or even in prison! Such works include Don Quixote, Pilgrim's Progress, Bonhoeffer's Letters from Prison, Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, and much of Ghandi's philosophy. An amazing amount of Scripture was written in prison, in the wilderness or in exile - from the Exodus wanderings that produced the Pentateuch, to Elijah at the brook Cherith, and from Jeremiah's prophecies in jail to Paul's Epistles to the book of Revelation written on Patmos. In fact no book of the New Testament that we know of was written under what could be described as "conducive circumstances"

Yet it was comfortable out there, in the wilderness, where it all began and when the call came that Lazarus was ill the disciples did not want to go back to Jerusalem. *John 11:7-8 MKJV* *Then after that He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. (8) The disciples said to Him, Rabbi, the Jews lately have sought to stone You, and do You go there again?*

Jesus lived in a dynamic rhythm dictated by God. Now in the crowds, then in solitary prayer, one day feasting, the next fasting, a few months in the midst of the city and of conflict, then some time apart in the desert. Stormy seas, pressing crowds, dusty roads, small villages, big cities, mountaintops and wildernesses were all part of the journey.

I am not really a “big city” person but the last five years have been mainly spent in two giant megacities – Manila and Los Angeles. This is the current phase of events; I also find my time split between times of intense travel and busyness, and quieter months of writing and reflection. Every year is meant to have at least four seasons! It is good to be aware of God’s rhythms as He works through you. Common cycles include: work/rest, solitude/community, action/reflection, prophetic/pastoral, mountaintop /valley. Each has its “time” in our life. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11)

Jesus goes out to a place full of John the Baptist’s disciples: “And many came to Him and said, John indeed did no miracle, but all things that John said concerning this One were true.” John the Baptist was the forerunner, He was not the Light and did no miracle but pointed to Jesus and his testimony was true. When John’s followers met Jesus and got to know Him there was this “click” that yes - this is the One John spoke of! These perfectly prepared disciples believed in droves!

The wilderness seems to “select” seekers and believers. The bored and apathetic cannot bother to go the few miles out of their way. The small-minded stay at home and gossip about why it cannot be so. And the “we are sure we are right” crowd stays in their self-confirming circles and think they have no need of the Galilean. But the seekers saddle their donkeys and head out beyond the Jordan, beyond where the respectable people dwell, to find the prophet in the wilderness.

You may be in a “wilderness” now. You may be a soldier on a boring post in the New Mexico desert, or a pastor in a small town in the middle of nowhere. You may even be in jail! Use the wilderness to do your thinking and to sharpen your ideas about God, yourself and the ministry. Or use for the time study, but do NOT waste the wilderness! Life will turn a corner one day and you will be back in the swing of a thousand activities wishing for some time to think!

Look for the prophet! I find small towns and odd corners often have someone who is doing some real thinking and has some very useful notions, People in wild places often can see the world without all the accretions of spin and duplicity. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Yes indeed!

Heretics abound in the desert as well. Not all that is creative is good. The desert can drive men mad. Yet the desert allows us room to think and we need to go there now and then. If you are not yet mature enough to be alone with your own thoughts, then you need to grow up! Christians need to be able to reflect on life and to see through media manipulation and political spin.

The true desert is simple, free, and non-commercial. In the wilderness it is just us and the trees and the big blue sky. Gradually the call of God comes to us instead of the call of the advertisers. Gradually we come to see what we should have seen all along – rather than what we were told to see if we wanted to fit in. In the wilderness the social pressure is off, so we can be ourselves and find our true faith.

John 11:1-4

So That The Son of God Might Be Glorified By It

John 11:1-4 MKJV *And there was a certain sick one, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (2) (And it was that Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with*

her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) (3) Then his sisters sent to Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick. (4) When Jesus heard, He said, This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God might be glorified by it.

The family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus dwelt in Bethany and were close friends of Jesus. They seemed to often give Him hospitality and Mary had anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. They seem to be poor - because they had no servants and Martha had to do all the work herself on one occasion. The perfume Mary used must have been their most expensive possession.

Now their brother was sick and they called on Jesus. They were not above a little persuasion and sent a message saying: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." Now, as we saw yesterday, Jesus is some distance away in the wilderness on the other side of the Jordan

Jesus gives what seems to be a hopeful response: "This sickness is not to death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God might be glorified by it." But Lazarus does die – and a few days later rises again! There is death, grief, suffering and pain – and yet it all turns out "for the glory of God".

The glory of God is often "on the other side of pain". David becomes king – after 14 years of living in caves and being chased by King Saul. Israel enters the Promised Land –after 40 years in the wilderness, and Israel returns from exile – after 70 years in Babylon.

It is always the final outcome that really matters. God does not promise us constant personal comfort, but He does promise good and glorious final outcomes. It is better to be on an uncomfortable raft that makes land than to be on the very comfortable Titanic, which sinks!

As with the man born blind two chapters before this sickness was "for the glory of God" and even Lazarus' death was "for the glory of God". It seems that God is making us suffer so He can be glorified! Yet not only is He glorified, but we are glorified also! Lazarus, Job and the man born blind will be remembered as long as the earth endures.

Suffering and glory are closely connected in the NT, in fact there are so many I have had to select just a few:

Luke 24:26 MKJV Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?

Romans 8:17-18 MKJV And if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; so that if we suffer with Him, we may also be glorified together. (18) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed in us.

Colossians 1:11 MKJV being empowered with all power, according to the might of His glory, to all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness,

1 Peter 5:1 MKJV I exhort the elders who are among you, I being also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

Sickness, death, and tough circumstances can all work for BOTH God's glory and your glory. *Romans 8:28 MKJV And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

At the time, there may seem to be no point and no glory in the suffering. It may seem unreasonable, unjust and unfair, but God is far bigger than that situation and will redeem it. God redeemed the death

of Lazarus, the suffering of Job and the crucifixion of Jesus. As Corrie Ten boom said after many years in German concentration camps during WW2 – “No matter how deep the suffering, God’s love is deeper still”

It is easier for us because we know the glorious ending of the Lazarus story as Jesus booms out “Lazarus come forth” and he staggers out of the tomb, still wrapped in grave clothes. If we know the end will be good, then any suffering becomes endurable.

Thus we should always have hope, we should always believe that God will be glorified by it and that we will be glorified by it, as God works all things together for good. God is not trifling with your life, just so He can show off His powers. You will also be blessed, and blessed mightily. For God is not unjust in any way.

As Christians we need to know that “through many tribulations you will enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) and be prepared to live in the light of the cross:

Matthew 16:24-27 MKJV Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (25) For whoever desires to save his life shall lose it, and whoever desires to lose his life for My sake shall find it. (26) For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He shall reward each one according to his works.

Magic is focused on manipulating the spirit world to achieve earthly prosperity. Christianity does not go down that route! Christians take up their cross in this life, so that they may be glorified in eternity. Christians are willing for God to get glory from their sickness, and even from their death. Let me quickly add that Christians do not seek to be sick or dead, or penniless or ashamed, but the true Christian knows that God is able to work good out of even the worst of circumstances. Out of great personal tragedy the hymn “It is well with my soul” was written. Yes, it is so “that the Son of God might be glorified in it” that we live and minister.

John 11:5-10

Walking In The Light

John 11:5-10 MKJV *And Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. (6) Therefore, when He had heard that he was sick, then indeed He remained two days in the place where He was. (7) Then after that He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. (8) The disciples said to Him, Rabbi, the Jews lately have sought to stone You, and do You go there again? (9) Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble because he sees the light of the world. (10) But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because there is no light in him.*

Verse 5 tells us that “Jesus loved Martha”, this is the only woman anywhere in the gospels, that it is said that Jesus “loved” – certainly not Mary Magdalene as the DaVinci Code and other wild accounts have it. And Jesus loved her as part of a family unit of Mary, Martha and Jesus.

Jesus also had the habit of driving Martha wild with exasperation. Firstly, He lets Mary sit at His feet while Martha slaves in the kitchen; secondly, He seems to dawdle in His response when Lazarus is dead. It seems that Lazarus was dead when the messengers first arrived. We find that when Jesus gets there that Lazarus had been dead “four days”. These four days is accounted for thus - one day while the messengers went to Jesus, two days while Jesus delayed, one more day as He walked back

to Bethany. Thus Lazarus probably died shortly after the messengers left. Jesus delayed because He knew that Lazarus was already dead (John 11:14).

Jesus was not being cruel, but neither would He be compelled. Jesus is not a “first-responder”, pulled here and there by emergencies. Jesus only did things “in God’s time”. And sometimes that frustrated those He loved. This has great and obvious application to prayer. We cannot compel God to answer our prayers according to our timetable and our wishes. God answers them on His terms, and in His time and for His glory.

When Jesus does respond the disciples don’t like it. It seems to be a suicide mission: “Then after that He said to the disciples, Let us go into Judea again. (8) The disciples said to Him, Rabbi, the Jews lately have sought to stone You, and do You go there again?” and evokes Thomas’ confused but loyal response “John 11:16 MKJV Then Thomas (he being called Twin) said to his fellow disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him.”

In response to this terrible fear of certain death Jesus starts talking about “walking in the light”. The disconnection seems vast until we understand Jewish and Roman astrological times and the concept of auspicious times. Each of the twelve hours of the day was ruled by one the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and the days of the week were ruled by various planets and Gods – Sunday was the day of the Sun, Monday the day of the Moon, Tuesday was ruled by Mars, Saturday by Saturn etc. Much effort was put into calculating whether journeys would be auspicious or inauspicious according to the “stars”. The whole project planning of the Roman Empire, from peasants in the field planting crops, to emperors in state making war, was literally held in iron bondage to horoscopes. The disciples were saying “this journey does not auger well... it is not the right time”.

Jesus disabuses them of this and makes a case that He is vastly more powerful than the ancient world of omens and prognostications. References to this continue with Thomas’ name being “The Twin” a reference both to a constellation (which we call Gemini) and to the obvious falseness of astrology as twins such as Jacob and Esau can have very different destinies despite being born at the same time, in the same location, and from the same parents. Augustine makes much of twins in his refutation of astrology.

Jesus reply is “walking in the light = perfect safety” no horoscopes needed. On the other hand - being dark within (possibly because of astrology) = stumbling always, despite any horoscope that is cast!

So Jesus puzzling answer is therefore saying: “There are no auspicious times or inauspicious times if you have the light of God and walk according to His will. The whole twelve hours are illuminated by Me as the light of the world. What really matters is for you have light in your soul. If you don’t have light in your soul, you will stumble, no matter how auspicious the timings of the planets and stars. I am the light of the world, not those tin gods and goddesses! If you walk with Me, in the day, you will not stumble into misfortune because God Almighty will protect you. If you are in My will, no time is evil or inauspicious, however if you are in the darkness, all times are evil”.

This may seem obscure to many of you but to a world increasingly soaked in astrology, witchcraft, the New Age and indigenous tribal religions and shamanism it is a reality. It has even reached the White House - when Nancy Reagan employed an astrologer so that President Reagan would travel only at “auspicious times”.

Any time that Jesus tells you to do something is the right time - even if humanly speaking it looks like the wrong time. Many of my major blessings have come when I have had the faith and courage to do God’s will, in God’s timing, despite circumstances.

Jesus moves into Bethany and towards the Cross, in part because of His love of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. He was about to do the miracle that would crystallize the opposition to Him to the point of fierce and lethal hatred. Jesus and His disciples could have stayed there beyond the Jordan, where many came to believe, and perhaps lived there in peace for years, and founded a community much like Qumran. But in Bethany, in Judea, in the territory of the Jews who hated Him, lay a great opportunity for the glory of God and a great demonstration of His power and of the resurrection.

John 11:11-16 Falling Asleep...

John 11:11-16 HCSB *He said this, and then He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm on My way to wake him up." (12) Then the disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well." (13) Jesus, however, was speaking about his death, but they thought He was speaking about natural sleep. (14) So Jesus then told them plainly, "Lazarus has died. (15) I'm glad for you that I wasn't there so that you may believe. But let's go to him." (16) Then Thomas (called "Twin") said to his fellow disciples, "Let's go so that we may die with Him."*

Here Jesus calls death "sleep" as does Paul (1 Corinthians 11:30) and quite a few OT authors (Psalm 13:3, 76:5,6 Job 14:10-12, Daniel 12:2). Here is just one example:

Daniel 12:2-3 HCSB Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal contempt. (3) Those who are wise will shine like the bright expanse of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

For the Christian there is the certainty of waking to a resurrection morning. But for the wicked there is deep uncertainty – as in the words of Shakespeare's Hamlet

To die, to sleep--
To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.

Now there are two viewpoints on this.

1. We undergo 'soul sleep' and lose consciousness until the resurrection.
2. We retain consciousness and enjoy god's presence but are fully redeemed at the resurrection and arise with new bodies then.

The second option is supported by references such as the following:

Revelation 6:9-11 MKJV And when He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held. (10) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, Until when, Master, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? (11) And white robes were given to each one of them. And it was said to them that they should rest yet for a little time, until both their fellow servants and their brothers (those about to be killed as they were) should have their number made complete.

The souls of the martyrs are:

- a) conscious
- b) aware of God
- c) able to communicate with God.

Philippians 1:21-24 MKJV (21) For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (22) But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor. Yet I do not know what I shall choose. (23) For I am pressed together by the two: having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. (24) But to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

Paul thought that to die was to be immediately with Christ, and was far better than this life, which cannot be said of total unconsciousness.

Matthew 17:1-4 MKJV And after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain apart. (2) And He was transfigured before them. And His face shone as the sun, and His clothing was white as the light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with Him. (4) And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If You will, let us make here three tabernacles; one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

At the Transfiguration Moses and Elijah came down on the mountain and talked with Jesus in the presence of the three main apostles (Peter, James and John). Thus Moses and Elijah were conscious and aware, able to travel and communicate and not unconscious at all.

Luke 16:22-26 MKJV And it happened that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich one also died and was buried. (23) And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. (25) But Abraham said, Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. But now he is comforted and you are tormented. (26) And besides all this, there is a great chasm fixed between you and us; so that they desiring to pass from here to you cannot, nor can they pass over to us from there.

Here Jesus teaches full consciousness after death and prior to resurrection, this includes consciousness of both agony and bliss, including the ability to perceive other souls and to know their condition and to communicate with them.

Thus when Jesus said Lazarus "slept" He meant that He was conscious of God's love and perhaps of God's plan during His four days in the grave.

So death is not to be feared by the righteous for we will be with God in glory and in great comfort. We will not vanish into a big black hole, but will meet Christ and the angels and know the Presence, power and glory of God.

John 11:17-22

Whatever You Will Ask Of God

John 11:17-22 MKJV *Then when Jesus came, He found him already being held in the tomb four days. (18) And Bethany was near Jerusalem, fifteen stadia (2 miles, 3 kilometers) away. (19) And*

many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary in order to comfort them concerning their brother. (20) Then when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she met Him. But Mary was sitting in the house. (21) Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. (22) But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give You.

Jesus comes at the darkest time for the family – four days after Lazarus' death. In popular Jewish thought the soul hung around the body for three days then departed to the world of the dead. Thus Lazarus was now completely "gone". St. John uses a few words to paint a most moving scene. Mary and Martha are true to form, Mary is quiet and passive, sitting in the house. Martha is up-front and tell Jesus off: "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Martha, ever the activist, wants Jesus to "do something" - But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give You." There is also a great grief stricken procession of Jews from Jerusalem, walking the 2 miles to show their respects to the ones who Jesus loved. (In the ancient world 15-20 miles was a day's walk, so 2 miles was easy walking distance!)

In this moving scene I would like to focus on Martha's theology: "Then Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give You."

Martha wants Jesus to ask God to fix things, and she is certain that if Jesus asks, then God will answer. And deep down Martha feels that she can boss Jesus around a little bit, because every time we see her, that is what she is trying to do! And this time it works! Jesus does raise Lazarus from the dead!

There is a holy persistence in intercession that Martha has and which many great intercessors also have. They know two truths a) God is all-powerful, and sovereign and does not have to do what anyone says. And b) Yet God invites us to influence Him, to pray to Him, to enter His heart and to move Him.

Now I want to move a couple of steps ahead – God hears the requests of Jesus and answers them, so when our prayers are "in Christ", when they are truly "in Jesus name", when they are the sort of requests Jesus would make, then God answers them, just as He would answer a request from Jesus Himself.

John 15:16 MKJV You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatever you shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you.

John 16:23-24 MKJV And in that day you shall ask Me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name, He will give you. (24) Before now you have asked nothing in My name; ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

God always answers the prayers of Jesus, and we are in Him, and our righteous prayers are "in Christ" and are prayed through the Holy Spirit directly to God Himself (Romans 8:26).

1 John 5:14-15 MKJV And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (15) And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.

The other part of Martha's theology is "its never too late for God to show up": "But I know that even now, whatever You will ask of God, God will give You."

Nothing seems more final than death – but it wasn't (and isn't) final and irreversible. We are used to the finality of irreversible situations. Spilt milk cannot be put back in the bottle – so we say “there is no use crying over split milk” – it cannot be undone. Death, divorce, a broken vase, a missed opportunity - the pieces of life are all over the ground. And Humpty-Dumpty has had a great fall and all the King's horses and all the King's men cannot put Humpty back together again. But God can!

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt and the captives back from Babylon, Lazarus out of the grave and Jesus out of the tomb, and Israel back as a nation in 1948! God has reversed the most utterly hopeless and irreversible situations. Cancer has been beaten; divorces have been healed; drunks have become sober and lives have been turned around. This is the sovereign miraculous work of God, it is rare but it is there. No situation is greater than God. No situation can overpower Him and His grace!

Martha somehow believed that Jesus would do one of these great miracles, or reversing the irreversible in life, for her and for Mary. Martha was almost cocksure in her relationship with Jesus, she did not fear approaching Him, she came right out with it, because she knew she He was her friend and the she was His friend. In the verses a few paragraphs above it says, “if we know that He hears us” (1 John 5:14,15). Martha KNEW that Jesus would listen to her! “And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”

Seasoned prayer warriors come before God with amazing confidence and power in prayer. They know Jesus as their personal friend and are bold and importunate in bringing the needs of people before Him. They are sure they can come before the “throne of grace”.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted just as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Those who see the most miracles often are the most brazen in prayer, to the point of appearing “disrespectful” in the eyes of conventional religion. They have learned the confidence that comes from being a true friend of Jesus.

John 11:23-28

I Am The Resurrection And The Life

John 11:23-28 *"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told her. (24) Martha said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (25) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. (26) Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die--ever. Do you believe this?" (27) "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (28) Having said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."*

Jesus tells Martha that Lazarus will rise from the dead, and then demonstrates it later. Lazarus's resurrection is thus a prefiguring of the resurrection of Christ and later of believers.

When Jesus says: “Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever” He is not meaning that Christians will not die physically. This is evident because:

- a) Jesus Himself said that He Himself would die physically, which He did on the cross.
- b) John's gospel was written in about 90 AD when thousands of believers had died in the persecutions, including all the other apostles.

- c) The phrase: "The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live." Points out that it is possible for believers to die physically.

For Christians the body dies, but the soul lives on – in a conscious state, which we discussed at length in the previous Eternity –DBS on Lazarus' "sleep". The Christian finds himself or herself fully alive and in the presence of God, even though the body has passed on.

Faith in Jesus also ensures our participation in the resurrection where our bodies will be raised, glorified and transformed into imperishable, immortal and spiritual bodies. (1 Corinthians 15)

John is telling us that Jesus is the source of real eternal life. It is connection to Christ that transforms us, resurrects us and enlivens us.

The resurrection makes us into angel-like immortals - who do not have to procreate to preserve the species:

Luke 20:34-36 Jesus told them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. (35) But those who are counted worthy to take part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. (36) For they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection.

The resurrected ones "cannot die anymore" as they are sons of the God who is eternal, immortal and deathless.

Our qualification for the resurrection is not wealth or talent but faith in Christ: "The one who believes in Me, even if he dies, will live. (26) Everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever."

Life is not merely biological and earthly; it is deeply spiritual and heavenly. We sense this when we admire a rose, we intuitively know the life and beauty in the rose comes from something beyond the rose. Life is spiritual and eternal and for a while life takes on a biological form, which it can then express itself its unique life characteristics in, or leave behind and return to eternity. We see this in the Jesus cycle of pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification. The life of Christ always was, and always will be, but for 33 years, was biological. That is the nature of eternal life.

Martha captures this eternal nature of life and pre-existence in her confession of faith: "Yes, Lord," she told Him, "I believe You are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

The phrase: "who was to come into the world." Naturally implies that Jesus pre-existed, and then came into the world, and the phrase "son of God" implies His eternal nature and thus that He would go back to Heaven where He truly belonged.

If believers will truly rise again, and if life is not merely biological, then this has huge implications for the way we live now. It makes our eternal reward to be of ultimate importance. It also makes present physical comfort of minor importance. We will leave this body behind. It will be like the 33 years of Christ compared to His entire eternal existence. Yet what we do in the body is not unimportant!

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 Therefore, though we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord-- (7) for we walk by faith, not by sight-- (8) yet we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord. (9) Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad.

Thus what we do “in the body” has consequences when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The temporal and the eternal connect in the act of judgment. Yet while the body is important, while we are in it we are “away from the Lord” because “flesh and blood does not inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable”. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

Our death ushers us into a far greater presence of God. So much so that “we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord.” Thus, as eternal beings, who will inherit Heaven and know the resurrection and the life we should adopt Paul’s injunction: “whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him.”

John 11:29-37

A Fallen, Broken World

John 11:29-37 *As soon as she heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. (30) Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. (31) The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw that Mary got up quickly and went out. So they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to cry there. (32) When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and told Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!" (33) When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, He was angry in His spirit and deeply moved. (34) "Where have you put him?" He asked. "Lord," they told Him, "come and see." (35) Jesus wept. (36) So the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (37) But some of them said, "Couldn't He who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"*

John is following Jesus as He enters into Bethany, to the place of death and sorrow, through all the complex reactions of the people involved. It has many of the emotions of a person visiting a bombsite or a terrorist attack. There is anger and grief and crying and blaming. There is a sense that something awful has happened, that ought not have happened. In one sense it was “just a poor man dying of an illness” - all over the world the poor die early, simply because they are poor. People cannot afford medicine, or hospitalization, or treatment or even the bus fare to see the doctor. I remember the terrible shock when I went to Mindanao in the Philippines and heard of people being disconnected from dialysis because their family had run out of money. The family had sold everything they could, but it still was not enough. Coming from Australia, where medical treatment is free or close to it, this “death from poverty” enraged me, just as Lazarus’ death enraged Jesus.

The death of Lazarus is somehow representative of all other tragedies and is an iconic example of human suffering, grief and pain. Lazarus was loved, and yet he died, despite Mary and Martha and Jesus and all their friends. His death blew their worlds apart and they were still in intense mourning four days later. There was something wrong with the world for this to happen. He was not an old man, his sisters were apparently unmarried, therefore they were probably young women, so at a guess Lazarus would have been perhaps about the age of Jesus or even younger. This was the tragic early death of a young man that everyone clearly loved. He wasn’t supposed to die now. The death of Lazarus was a clear marker saying “there is something deeply wrong with a world in which something like this can happen.”

Twice Jesus is mentioned as being angry (John 11:33,38), but no angry words escaped His lips. Jesus was angry at the evil in the world. He was a prophet, and here was something clearly wrong, clearly out of place, and people were hurting. Jesus wept with the hurting people, but was angry at the

situation. Just like the dialysis example above – one weeps with the family, and gets angry at the situation.

And the others were also angry – at Jesus, the one person who could have prevented it:

When Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and told Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died!"

But some of them said, "Couldn't He who opened the blind man's eyes also have kept this man from dying?"

God gets the blame for such events; perhaps He is the only one we can blame. The L.A. Times just ran an article on a pastor whose four-year-old daughter was smothered to death by the "nanny", who managed to escape charges for the infant's death. The pastor resigned and lost much of his faith because; as he and his wife saw it, God was punishing them for doing well. (His faith is returning – albeit slowly.) Such examples can be multiplied without number. God is supposed to prevent evil and to recompense injustice. God is supposed to not let bad things happen.

However that is a major misrepresentation of how God acts. God plainly does allow bad things to happen but a) He weeps with us b) He enters into the situation and produces a "resurrection outcome" working all things together for good (Romans 8:28) including tragedy. The prototypes are Job and Jonah who had bad things happen to them – but there was a "resurrection outcome". God takes us into the depths of pain, then out the other side, eventually. I have lived long enough to know that this is true in my own life and in the lives of many who love the Lord. God does NOT promise insulation from evil but He does promise the transformation of evil. God does not offer the comfortable life but He does offer the redeemed life.

If God's own beloved Son was to suffer betrayal, an unjust trial, torture and crucifixion and shame then we are not exempt either. But God raised Jesus and God will raise us to glory.

Jesus wept at the tragedy. He is compassionate, His emotions and God's emotions and He reaches deeply into the grief with His spirit – and weeps. Jesus knows He will raise Lazars, but He still weeps, and those around said: "See how He loved him". It was a loving response to a sad situation.

The spirit of God knows human suffering deeply and weeps with our sorrow. There are times when I have sense Another with me in my pain, Another that was deeper than my pain and Who was weeping with me, and working in me to strengthen me and to comfort me. This Unnamed Other, who visits us in our pain is none other than God Himself.

To sum up:

1. This world is fallen, and broken and not at all what it should be - and tragedy and "wrong suffering" is everywhere along with grief, anger and pain.
2. Jesus allows these situations but is angry at them.
3. Jesus weeps with those hurt by tragedy.
4. Jesus works powerfully to resurrect the situation and to redeem the evil and to bring things around so we can confidently say that a good outcome will be eventually brought out of this broken.
5. So our response should be to try to be patient with the process and to invite God into each painful situation so He can work out His redemptive plan..

Romans 8:28 We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.

John 11:38-45

Topic: Lazarus, Come Out!

John 11:38-45 *Then Jesus, angry in Himself again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. (39) "Remove the stone," Jesus said. Martha, the dead man's sister, told Him, "Lord, he already stinks. It's been four days." (40) Jesus said to her, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" (41) So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You heard Me. (42) I know that You always hear Me, but because of the crowd standing here I said this, so they may believe You sent Me." (43) After He said this, He shouted with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (44) The dead man came out bound hand and foot with linen strips and with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him and let him go." (45) Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary and saw what He did believed in Him.*

The raising of Lazarus is the high point of the first part of John's gospel and the Grand Miracle, the sign and the wonder that astonishes many and causes people to believe. As such John has been very careful and detailed in the telling. John is trying to teach us a lot about how God acts in 5 steps:

1. Remove The Stone - Take the obvious obstacle to the miracle out of the way!
2. If You Believe - Then you will see the glory of God.
3. I Thank You That You Heard Me - Thanking God in advance, assurance of being heard. (1 John 5:14,15)
4. Lazarus Come Out! - The command prayer, the use of spiritual authority.
5. Loose Him And Let Him Go - Removing the bandages, undoing bondages, release into new life

Three of these five steps are done by the bystanders (1,2 & 5) - and two by Jesus Himself (3 & 4). We can use this process, or something similar to it, in our own ministry, especially in exorcism. For instance:

1. Removing The Stone: remove obstacles to deliverance through prayer, repentance, confession and the exercise of forgiveness. Burn objects associated with the occult.
2. Believe – believe in the spiritual authority we have in Christ, believe in the name of Jesus, believe in the power of God to deliver people from demon possession.
3. Thanksgiving – Praise God in advance for the deliverance, assert that it will happen.
4. Command – issue an authoritative command in the name of Jesus “come out of him”, “be healed”, “be delivered”, “be made clean” etc.
5. Loosing – Deal with the follow-up issues, bondages and problems that may have.

This is also a clear case of God doing the “impossible” in raising someone who had been dead four days, and creating awe, wonder and faith. The whole point of raising Lazarus was to “give glory to God” – and it succeeded. Even today we read of the account and are stunned. As Lazarus walked out of that grave old legalistic Judaism began to crumble. The scribes and the Pharisees had nothing to match this, they were outgunned and the gospel was triumphant. Jesus' teaching was clearly a better teaching and a vastly more powerful teaching.

The raising of Lazarus points to the possibility of resurrection, even after physical decay has set in “he stinketh”. There can be little left of people buried two hundred or more years ago in active soil, or in graves where water has seeped in, or at sea. And absolutely nothing left of those who have been cremated. How will God raise them? I think God has a complete record of our physical bodies and has the ability to “back-up and restore” at the resurrection. A clue to this is given in verses such as:

Matthew 10:30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Psalms 103:14 For He knows our form; He remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 139:13-16 For You have possessed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. (14) I will praise You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are marvelous and my soul knows it very well. (15) My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully formed in the lowest parts of the earth. (16) Your eyes saw my embryo; and in Your book all my members were written, the days they were formed, and not one was among them.

“In your book all my members were written...” (Psalm 139:16) God knows every atom of our physical form and has it recorded in His “book”. So to be a “bit fanciful” and imaginative I envision the Almighty saying on Judgment Day: “Reformat infected and corrupted Universe, then replace with incorruptible version from back-up copy!”

God can “restore to normal” just as the leper’s flesh was restored to normal, or Lazarus’s decaying body was miraculously restored to a perfectly functioning form.

Matthew 12:13 Then He said to the man, Stretch out your hand. And he stretched it out, and it was restored whole like the other.

2 Kings 5:14 And he (Naaman the leper) went down and dipped seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. And his flesh came again like the flesh of a little boy, and he was clean.

This also applies spiritually and psychologically – no matter how damaged you are, God can resurrect you, bless you, heal you and make you normal! Particularly I have seen Theophostic prayer ministry have incredible results in bringing damaged people back to normality. The love of Christ is more powerful than any inner wound, no matter how deep.

God restores! God resurrects! God makes whole! God delivers!

John 11:46-53

The Sanhedrin’s Plot

John 11:46-53 *But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. (47) Then the chief priests and Pharisees gathered a Sanhedrin, and said, What can we do? For this man does many miracles. (48) If we let him alone this way, all will believe on him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation. (49) And one of them, Caiaphas, being the high priest of that year, said to them, You do not know anything at all, (50) nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation perish. (51) And he did not speak this of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; (52) and not for that nation only, but also that He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. (53) Then from that day they took counsel together that they might kill Him.*

The reaction in the verses above is entirely typical of the frightened thinking of a threatened elite. Their regime is unstable and is predicated of the support of an occupying military power. Jesus is a popular leader, and a threat to the delicately balanced status quo. They live for their political power “our place and our nation” and so react to any perceived threat to their privileged world with utter ruthlessness.

At first they are largely correct: “What can we do? For this man does many miracles. (48) If we let him alone this way, all will believe on him.”

That was certainly the case. Jesus was increasingly popular. He did perform many miracles and Lazarus was a most noted example. In the light of all these miracles the logical thing would have been to say “so God must be with Him and therefore God is among us and will help us and may even rescue our nation”. But they thought politically and pragmatically, and in their view God was out of the picture and the people and the Romans were in the picture. There is a theory that John was a nephew of the high priestly family and may have had access to information about this meeting of the Sanhedrin.

Instead of joy at the miraculous there was an uneasy dread. They were losing their grip on the people and this usurper, this populist, was winning their loyalty instead. Order had to be restored, the old families had to be kept in power and the challenge to the authority of the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests “nipped in the bud”.

Their rationalization was “to prevent Roman intervention”. They may have thought that Jesus, who was of the line of David, was trying to assume the Kingship. (A chunk of the rest of John’s gospel plays around the theme of Christ’s kingship and Pilate’s question “Are you a King?”) Any restoration of the Kingship would have plunged the country into conflict and turmoil.

Caiaphas, one of the murderous and treacherous line of Annas the High Priest takes the line of expediency and advocates the murder of Jesus “for the sake of the nation”. This was a ‘prophecy’ given in his role of High Priest – but without his realizing it. God can speak through Balaam’s donkey, and even through evil men like Caiaphas! Thus the mere fact of prophesying does not make a good person. Even Balaam prophesied accurately concerning Israel – but is the archetype of false prophets! What made Balaam a false prophet was his greed, and what made Caiaphas a wicked high priest is his murderous intent. The fact that it was an accurate prophecy of salvation does not make Caiaphas any less culpable.

While coming from an evil man with a wicked heart it is still an important prophecy, which is why John both mentions it and explains it. Let’s go clause by clause:

“You do not know anything at all” – True, they had no knowledge of God

“That one man should die for the people” – as Christ died on the cross, the second Adam, the One Man through whom salvation comes.

“And not that the whole nation perish” - For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son so that whosoever believes in him might not perish....(John 3:16)

John then adds: “And he did not speak this of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; (52) and not for that nation only, but also that He should gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

Christ gathers all the “children of God” Jewish and non-Jewish, whoever seeks after God, into one holy people. What wicked men intend for evil, God turns into good. Just today I read of an incident in Laos where a young persecuted believer sadly recanted his faith to escape punishment and threw his New Testament in the river, where it was found and read by fishermen, who then told others so that 24 people were saved and a church planted. The Word of God was not stopped, but even advanced by persecution.

“Then from that day they took counsel together that they might kill Him.” The only times the conservative Pharisees and high-priestly and liberal Sadducees were united was in their determination to kill Jesus. This wicked meeting of the Sanhedrin sets the stage for John chapters 12-21 which we did last year. From this point on we are entering into the passion narrative and the Last Supper, crucifixion and resurrection. This is the point when the leadership of Israel united in lethal hatred of their Saviour. Thus the giving of life to Lazarus would result in death for Jesus. This is a principle of gospel ministry that explains while the apostles were destitute while people were blessed:

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us; (8) in every way having been troubled, but not having been hemmed in; having been perplexed, but not utterly at a loss; (9) having been persecuted, but not having been forsaken; having been thrown down, but not having been destroyed; (10) always bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus in the body, so that the life of Jesus also might be revealed in our body. (11) For we who live are always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus might also be revealed in our body. (12) So then death works in us, but life in you.

John 11:54-57

Jesus Returns To The Wilderness

John 11:54-57 *Therefore Jesus walked no more openly among the Jews; but He went away from there to a country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and continued there with His disciples. (55) And the Jews' Passover was near. And many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to purify themselves. (56) Then they sought Jesus, and spoke with one another as they stood in the temple, What does it seem to you, that He will not at all come to the feast? (57) And all the chief priests and the Pharisees had given commands, that if anyone knew where He was, he should make it known so that they might seize Him.*

Life has become increasingly dangerous for Jesus. The plot against Him is now systematic and widespread and involves the entire national leadership. They are focused on Him like laser beams and there is a price on His head.

“and the Pharisees had given commands, that if anyone knew where He was, he should make it known so that they might seize Him.”

Jesus does not dignify their rage with a single comment. He just goes elsewhere and continues with His ministry.

“He went away from there to a country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and continued there with His disciples.”

This is a principle I call “flowing around the obstructions”. Often we are obstructed in ministry, and we are tempted to explode in anger or make cutting comments. This is always unwise and often ungodly. Just leave the obstruction in place and flow around it like a creek flowing around a large rock.

- If your pastor does not let you preach – then set up a website and “preach online”.
- If your church does not let you do sound, find a para-church ministry that needs a sound technician and help out there.
- If the mission board won’t send you to the field, go anyway and with the blessing of your church, set up your own small mission agency with a few good friends - as so many have done (e.g. Paul).
- If you want to work with children and there is no vision for full-time children’s ministry in your church, then join an organization that focuses on this area.
- If you have written Christian songs and cannot get anyone interested then record them as MP3 files and put them online to an international audience.
- If you are keen on evangelism but seem to be alone in your desire get a group of two or three friends and start just anywhere – on a college campus, among friends, even with the homeless – start however you can.

Find your “Ephraim” – the place you can go when you cannot minister where you would most like to minister. There is a place hidden away in God that will gladly receive your gifts, it may seem “out of the way”. It may be “near the wilderness”. But it will be peaceful and fruitful.

Notice the word “continued” – “and continued there with His disciples.” Ephraim was not a silent period - it was a continuing in ministry, a valuable time of preparing His disciples prior to the traumatic Passover in Jerusalem.

When you head out to Ephraim you are being prepared for the next phase in your ministry, often much larger in scope. Ephraim is not the end; the obstruction to your ministry has not relegated you to obscurity, but to continuing ministry and preparation.

Jesus’ absence is noted. The rest of Israel is purifying them, but Jesus does not need that. He is pure, the One who sanctifies is Himself sanctified.

And the Jews’ Passover was near. And many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover in order to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke with one another as they stood in the temple, What does it seem to you, that He will not at all come to the feast?

“They sought Jesus” – but to what end – to kill Him, to see more miracles, or to believe? Jesus was a “topic on conversation” a subject of national interest, but little more than that for many. They were going on with their routines, doing what tradition demanded, and gossiping about the Messiah with little real intent to believe. This is the power of the routine and the familiar. Passover was familiar and it entrained the mind into a certain groove. They went on with their habitual behaviour and missed Christ – who is the True Passover. We can rush through our days and discuss God and theology as so much interesting gossip, but it has no real impact.

We need a faith that stops us in our tracks and takes over our life, a faith that commands our attention!