

Reflections on the Gospel of John

@ May 2019, July 2020, Quek Koh Choon



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Introduction

The Gospel of John has been called the 'universal gospel'. It is different from the synoptic gospels; Matthew, Mark and Luke are directed at different audience, each of the three traces Jesus' public ministry more or less chronologically. Each tends to focus on Galilee, where most of Christ's public ministry took place.

John's gospel is significantly different; the very first few words bring us into the central mysteries of faith, as John challenges us to look back at the very beginning - and to find there a Jesus who exists not as the son of a carpenter in Nazareth but as God, distinct from and yet with and equal to God.

John selects seven miracles and uses these as the setting for reporting deeply who Jesus really is; John concentrates on events in Judea and he casts Jesus' teachings in universal categories: light versus darkness, life versus death, truth versus falsehood, love versus hate, belief versus unbelief. John set down his most vivid memories of Christ to be both God and Man and he wrote "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:31).

John reminds us that in Jesus Christ God not only revealed Himself to the Jews as their Messiah, to the Romans as their ideal Man of Action, and to the Greeks as the one Model of Humanity. In Jesus Christ God revealed Himself in His Son, as the one and only answer to the deepest, universal needs of a lost mankind.

John 1

The Word

"In the beginning was the Word" in verse 1, in all probability, duplicates the words of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God." The 'beginning' in each case carries the reader back beyond creation into an eternity inhabited by God alone. Before God uttered the first word which called the universe into existence, the Person (the Word) existed as and with God. John the Apostle reminds us as he begins the gospel that we must never ever forget that Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, teacher and miracle worker of Israel, crucified and risen Saviour, is also God enfleshed. He is the immutable, immortal, only wise God, to whom we owe honour and worship for ever and ever. He was with the Father in the beginning - He was never created but existed with God and as God.

The Greek term for the Word is *logos*, which usually focuses attention on the spoken word, but on the meaning rather than simply the sound. In Greek philosophical thought, *logos* was used of the rational principle or Mind that ruled the universe. In Hebrew thought, "the word of God" was His active self-expression, the revelation of Himself to humanity through which a person not only receives truth about God, but meets God face-to-face. Jesus is the pre-existent Word of God, the "*logos*", with its deep roots in both Greek philosophy and Hebrew thought. John's use of "*logos*" is clearly stating that the Word has the same quality as God, and is God; he strongly affirms that the full deity of Jesus who was the Word made flesh.

John then presents Christ as the active agent in creation - all things were created by Him and through Him and for Him (compare Col.1:15-17). John envisions a beginning for the material universe, and for those created beings who populate the spiritual universe - all these were created by Christ and they were created for Him, whether things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all encompassing, without exception. He not only creates all things but in Him, all things hold together.

John then went on to portray the Word, Jesus, as the source of life, who vitalises the living and gives eternal spiritual life to men. The word "life" occurs some 36 times in the gospel of John. Human sin was the source of death. God alone is the source of life, for God "has life in Himself" (5:26). All other life is derived - only God is the source of life and Jesus is declared by John to be the source of life in the universe. Jesus is also the source of vitality for the believer's experience of eternal life here on earth; He, as the Mediator sent from God, is the source in which the eternal life from God can be found (1 John 1:1-2).

He, the life, is "the light of men"; only by seeing a glimmer of hope and turning to the Saviour can we human beings lay hold on eternal life. In a real way, "darkness" represents the world dominated by Satan, whose lost inhabitants are energised by those same passions which led to Satan's fall. Only by following Jesus' words and walking in the light can human beings avoid the "darkness" and not allow it to overtake them. In Jesus, God's light continues to shine and

no matter what forces array themselves against Him, the darkness will never overcome the light; those who are in union with Him continue to remain and 'shine' in that light.

Sadly, the true light was in the world and the world was made through Him, yet the world did not know Him. He came to His own people but they did not receive Him. Then comes this astounding statement - "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, born ..not of the will of man but of God".

And the Word became flesh and dwell among us: With the Old Testament image of the tabernacle in mind, John expounds the incarnation of the Word. The Word that was hidden in the bosom of God, the Word through which all things were made has become flesh, has tabernacled among men and women - the Word has become a man in Jesus Christ. The Word actually becomes flesh in the midst of Israel: it enters our very existence and becomes one with us!

He takes His dwelling as man among humanity; He becomes creature in all His sovereign freedom as creator and without ceasing to be that creator Word He becomes flesh, without any diminishment of His freedom or His eternal nature. John was actually saying that the Word fully participates in human nature and existence, for He became man in becoming flesh, true man and real man.

He who knew no sin became sin for us, exchanging His riches for our poverty, His perfection for our imperfection, His incorruption for our corruption, His eternal life for our mortality. If the Word of God did not actually come into our fallen existence, if the Son of God did not really come where we are, and join Himself to us where we are in sin and under judgement, how could it be said that Christ really took our place, took our cause upon Himself in order to redeem us? He entered into complete solidarity with us in our sinful existence in order to save us, without becoming Himself a sinner. Although the Son enters into resistance and hostility of our flesh against God, He does not resist God but throughout the whole course of His life is obedient and true and faithful. The obedience of Christ in the flesh was not light or sham obedience but was agonising real in our flesh of sin - His obedience was a battle, in agony of blood, 'with strong crying and tears' (Heb. 5:7) in the things that He suffered, bringing His holy relation with sinners to its perfection and completion at last on the cross.

The Witness of John the Baptist

John the Baptist refuses to identify himself as the Christ, as Elijah returned to announce the end, or as the prophet, probably a reference to the prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15). John is less interested in explaining who he is than what he does. So he presented himself as one who is "a voice crying in the wilderness, 'make straight the way of the Lord'" (Isa. 40:3). John the Baptist saw himself as one preparing the nation for the eschatological way of the Lord. When asked why he baptised various ones, John replied that his baptism was preparatory for the main ministry that follows his -one would come and baptise with the Holy Spirit and that was none other than the Messiah Jesus Christ.

Later on, John the Baptist testified that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and Jesus will baptise with the Spirit, showing that He is God's chosen One or Son. John the Baptist merely points to Jesus and he admitted that in the face of the greatness of Jesus, he sensed his own unworthiness, even to carry out a task to untie His sandal.

The First disciples

The Apostle John turns to discuss how some became exposed to Jesus and became disciples of the Lord Jesus. The Baptist's testimony was the catalyst: he pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. John first recounted how Peter and Andrew encountered Jesus. Andrew was the one who told Simon about Jesus. The Lord issued an invitation to Philip to follow Him and Philip told Nathanael about Jesus. Nathanael was initially sceptical whether anything good could come out of Nazareth but subsequently, he recognised that Jesus' awareness of his whereabouts was beyond normal human understanding and he confessed Jesus as both 'Son of Man' and 'King of Israel', acknowledging Jesus as the promised Messiah. Jesus then pointed to Nathanael that many will see an 'open connection' between heaven and earth as the Son of Man ministers in their midst. Jesus is the 'ladder' between heaven and earth, sent with divine endorsement (Gen. 28:12). The "Son of Man" is a human figure who has received divine authority (Dan. 7:13-14) and John the apostle uses this term thirteen times in association with remarks about the cross and an end-time figure.

John 2

Jesus changes water into wine

The scene was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and His disciples were also invited to the wedding. The wine ran out at the wedding celebration. In Jewish society, wine was often associated with prosperity, celebration and joy and to run out of wine in a wedding celebration was an embarrassing social blunder.

The mother of Jesus told Him of the situation. Jesus' reply to the mother may appear rather 'curt' to some: "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." Jesus was actually reminding Mary that it was not yet time for people to know His real identity, 'My hour' refers to Jesus' impending death - the time for Him to be revealed as the Messiah and crucified as the sacrificial Lamb had not yet arrived. Mary's instructions to the servants to do what Jesus directed indicate that she understood His desire to keep His identity concealed and that she trusted His sense of timing.

Jesus told the servants to fill six large stone water jars used for Jewish rites of purification with water and then draw some of the water and take it to the master of the feast. The water had been transformed into good quality wine and this surprised the master of the feast who exclaimed that the good wine is usually served first and the poorer wine last but here the good wine had been reserved for last serving. This is the first of the signs Jesus did at Cana in Galilee.

The symbolic significance of the transformation of water into wine: the water representing Old Testament religion was transmuted by Jesus into a wine that represented the abundant blessings of God, picturing God's eschatological kingdom as a banquet (Matt. 5:6; 8:11-12; Mark 2:19; Luke 22:15-18) and Jesus is the one bringing in this new kingdom and new era. The replacement of the water used in Jewish purification by the choicest of wines is a sign of who Jesus really is, namely, the One sent by the Father who is now the only way to the Father. All previous religious institutions, customs and feasts lose meaning in His presence.

Jesus' cleansing of the temple

All the gospels give details of the cleansing of the temple by Jesus but the first three seem to be different in chronology with that of John's. Some commentators suggest that Jesus cleansed the temple twice although others say that the controversy arising from Jesus' actions at the temple would have ensured that the incident was not repeated. The Apostle John was not so concerned about the accuracy of the chronology; he was more interested in portraying Jesus as the Messiah.

The passage recorded that Jesus found people selling oxen and sheep and pigeons in the temple and the money-changers were also there. He made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple and he even overturned the tables of the money-changers. What made Jesus so angry?

Those who worship at the temple were required to present an unblemished sacrifice and pay the annual head tax using temple currency. The priests refused to accept foreign currency so that they could exchange the travellers' money at exorbitant rates. They also rejected any animal (for sacrifice) that was not purchased at the temple so that they could sell animals for sacrifice at inflated prices. They were exploiting the people and conducting business in the midst of the temple which was dedicated for worship. Jesus was furious that they made the temple (His Father's house) a house of trade and business. Jesus' quote from Isa.56:7 in a parallel passage in Mark clearly indicates that God's house is to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17) - even the court of the Gentiles, not considered by Israel part of the temple proper, was in fact holy, for God intended from the beginning to gather all nations to Himself.

Jesus' act at the temple is seen in messianic terms as a purifying act to get the temple ready for a new era. It was a belief of Judaism that the new era would come with a purity of worship, including a righteousness that the Messiah would bring about (Isaiah 9-11). If the question was where Jesus got the authority to do this act, His reference to His Father's house points to the answer.

After the incident the Jews wanted Jesus to show a sign to justify what He did at the temple. It was common in the Old Testament context for prophets to prove their authenticity by performing a sign. Jesus instead offered them a puzzling statement: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". They replied sarcastically that it took forty-six years to build the temple and yet Jesus was speaking about raising it up in three days. But Jesus was speaking about the temple of His body, referring to His future death and resurrection. Jesus has called for a purifying of the temple courts and presented His death and resurrection as the sign that points to His authority to make such a claim over the temple. John's point is that Jesus is greater than the temple and is qualified to rule over it.

Jesus was reluctant to divulge His true identity as the people expected the Messiah to be a political and military leader who would free them from the rule of Rome. His mission was not what the people expected.

John 3

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus

The passage identifies Nicodemus as "Israel's teacher", indicating that he was no ordinary rabbi but was a member of the Sanhedrin and held a significant place in the theological hierarchy of the time. The fact that Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus took place at night need not imply secrecy, as suggested by some but it could mean that Nicodemus chose a time when he could speak with Jesus in private. Nicodemus' acknowledgement that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God for no one could perform miraculous signs if he were not from God indicates that the religious elite of the day from the beginning knew that Christ spoke with authority granted Him by God; it also seems to suggest an honest desire on Nicodemus' part to hear from Jesus what was His message from God. Nothing seems to suggest hostility from Nicodemus; in fact, Nicodemus was unlike most of his fellows who knew that the miracles performed by Jesus were signs which authenticate Him as God's messenger and yet closed their hearts and minds against Jesus.

When Jesus told Nicodemus that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God", he exclaimed in amazement that how this could be possible. Jesus uses the familiar terminology introduced by John the Baptist: water, symbolising repentance and turning from the old; the Spirit, symbolising that supernatural gift to be given by the One John is sent to announce. Flesh gives birth to flesh, only God's Spirit can provide that spiritual rebirth necessary for a person to enter the kingdom of God, a kingdom whose essence is spiritual rather than biological and material. To enter God's kingdom requires something impossible by human standards: rebirth. Jesus was referring to the work of the Holy Spirit who breathes life into our sinful and dead spiritual nature. When we are born again, we become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), our sins are forgiven (Acts 10:43) and we are reconciled to God - we have peace with Him and are granted an eternal intimate relationship with Him (Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:13-18).

Nicodemus still struggles to understand, and Jesus rebukes him mildly: surely Israel's instructor in spiritual things must understand this utterly basic principle. In fact, the principle of essential inner renewal is taught in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:33-34; Ezek. 36:26). Jesus then pointed to the incident in Numbers 21:4-9: the Israelites were disobedient, unthankful and hostile to God's messenger. God condemned their acts and decreed punishment, sending a plague of serpents. The bite was deadly and there was no hope of recovery. Yet in mercy God commanded Moses to 'lift up' on a pole a bronze serpent, an emblem of their judgement. And then the people were told that if they would only look, they would be healed. The parallels are clear. God's people, and all mankind, were disobedient, unthankful and hostile to the Lord, condemned by Him to death. Yet in mercy God sent His Son, commanded that He be lifted up (on the cross), an emblem of the judgement which sin requires. And we are told that if we but look to Him in faith we will be forgiven and healed.

The Saviour was lifted up, and in the decisive act light burst on mankind's dark world. All who respond to the light with faith have passed from death to life. John then penned the famous

verse: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). To 'believe' in Jesus involves more than just agreeing that Jesus' words are true. It means trusting in Jesus alone for your salvation; it is deciding to place your life and future in the hands of Jesus. It is trusting Him to be your Lord and His Word to be your command.

John the Baptist exalts Jesus

John was told that Jesus was baptising and all were going to Him. John expresses approval of what is taking place, because his ministry is limited to what is given to him from heaven. His role was not to be Christ, but to be sent before Him. John the Baptist understood that his calling to point people to Jesus never changed. Before Jesus became publicly known, John was to be the focus of attention as he preached, baptised and called the nation to repentance. All of John's work was preparatory - it paved the way for Jesus. John compares his task to being the friend of the bridegroom who is in charge of the details of a wedding. He gladly gives way to the groom when He appears (take note of the image of the people of God as a bride). Hence John is thrilled to see the arrival of the promised One and he rejoices that the ministry of the Messiah must increase while his own ministry must decrease. Jesus has come from heaven, while John the Baptist is a prophet from the earth. The One from heaven is "above all".

John 4

Jesus and the Samaritan woman

The meeting with the Samaritan woman took place at Sychar in Samaria, near Shechem about a mile from Jacob's well and located on the shoulder of Mount Ebal opposite Mount Gerizim. Jesus is tired and finds Himself at the well at about noon. What is unusual is that a conversation occurs with a Samaritan woman. Samaritan women were regarded as perpetually unclean by the Jews and for Jesus to ask a drink from her would mean drinking from a vessel handled by this woman which would make the one who drinks from it becoming unclean ritually. For Jesus, a Jew, to speak much with a woman is something discouraged by the rabbis of the day.

Interestingly, rather than being worried about how unclean He is likely to get, Jesus approaches the woman and communicates what He could offer her if she realised who is speaking with her. If she knew the gift of God, described as "living waters", and who is speaking to her, namely, One with the capability to give it, she would be asking Him and would receive the gift of living water (Zech. 14:8; Ezek. 47:9; Isa. 12:3, 44:3; 49:10; 55:1-7). Jesus is actually speaking of a divine provision tied to the life-giving Spirit (Jn. 6:63) which is a way that John refers to the gospel.

The woman misunderstands Jesus, assuming that Jesus is referring to well water and noting that He lacks a bucket to draw the water. She then asks whether Jesus is greater than Jacob, the patriarch who provided the well which has served so many for so many years. Jesus replies by saying that the water He gives will allow one never to thirst again and this water will leap up from within unto eternal life. The woman, still thinking of real water, asks for this water so that she will not have to make any more trips to the well.

Jesus then turns from what He offers to reveal who He really is. Jesus then asks her to go and find her husband. She replies she has none; the Lord then reveals her marital history by pointing out that she has had five husbands and the one she has now is not her husband. The woman noted Jesus' insight and unusual knowledge of her and she concluded that He must be a prophet. She then asked the Lord a theological question: whether one should worship at Mount Zion or Mount Gerizim, the contrast between the understanding of the Jews and that of the Samaritans respectively. Jesus' reply focused not on where God is worshipped but how - He shared that an hour is coming when the true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth. The reply hints at a new era and structure for worship - God seeks worshippers who can worship Him anywhere from within; He is not so concerned with external issues of location.

The woman then shared that she is aware that the Messiah is coming and that he will tell them and show them all things. Jesus replies simply without any hesitation, "I who speak to you am he." The Messiah, the One who can give life from the ongoing supply of the Spirit is present. The Spirit is given in a way that leads to eternal life; as living water, the Spirit works from within, creating worshipers of God who worship in spirit and truth. The text gives a summary

of the gospel, which is about a promised new, unending quality of life in fellowship with God, grounded in the Spirit.

At this point, the disciples show up, amazed to see Jesus having a conversation with a Samaritan woman. In conversing with this woman, Jesus has crossed the barriers of both race and gender; more than that, He was prepared to interact with one who would be noted by others as a "sinner" and an "outcast" (explaining perhaps why she prefers to come alone to the well at noon). Those will not be obstacles to His offer of the gift of "living water" The woman departs to the village and gives an uncertain witness to Jesus. She is clear that He knew all about her and asks, "Could this be the Christ?" The remarks cause those in the village to come out to see Jesus. By going out to tell others of her experience with Jesus, the woman has become a witness.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus to eat. Jesus' reply: 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' His lack of interest in eating the food makes the disciples think that He already had received some food. Jesus repeats Himself and notes that His food is to do the will of the One sending Him and to accomplish His work (John loves to describe Jesus as the one sent and the Father as the sender). The disciples misunderstood Jesus because His remarks are interpreted as dealing with physical reality rather than spiritual truth. The time has come to collect the 'harvest' of those enabled to worship the Father in spirit and truth through the sent One and by the Spirit. The result of Jesus' sowing of the word in His interaction with the woman - many Samaritans did believe, and confess Him as "Saviour of the world".

The Second sign: The healing of a royal official's son

Jesus came again to Cana in Galilee, where He had made the water into wine. An official in Capernaum is tending to a sick son. He goes to meet Jesus to beg the teacher to come and heal his son who is at the point of death. The request brings a rebuke from Jesus: "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." It reminds us that if all that draws us to Jesus is His miraculous work, then it is rather superficial, focusing on Jesus' remarks elsewhere that blessed are those who do not see and yet believe. Despite the challenging 'rebuke', the official asks Jesus to heal the boy. Jesus simply tells him to return home, promising him that his son lives. The man turns to go home, believing in Jesus' word.

Here is the life-giving power of Jesus' word, effective even from a distance. As the official returns, his servants meet him to tell him that his son lives. When the official asks when the boy got better, the reply is at the "seventh hour" (1.00pm). The official realises that this was the very time of his conversation with Jesus and the moment when Jesus uttered the promised word of healing. So the official and his whole house believe. The official had moved from faith in seeking a miracle to an appreciation for and trust of Jesus the person.

The miracle illustrates the claim that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Jesus has shown how He brings the new era of the new wine. He brings the new birth. He brings the living water. He heals with His word from a distance. All of it means that He is the Saviour, the provider of life.

To believe in Him is to have access to life. John stayed focused on who Jesus is and what He does.

John 5

The chapter begins with a miraculous healing in Jerusalem by the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was in Jerusalem for an unspecified feast and the location of the healing was the pool at the 'sheep gate' in Bethesda. A sick man, an invalid, incapacitated for some 38 years was the object of Jesus' attention. Jesus asked him whether he wished to be healed but his reply was that there was no one to bring him to be first in the water of the pool to be healed. Apparently there was the belief that when the water was stirred, the first one to go into the water would be healed of his ailment. Jesus simply told him to take up his bed and walk and he did. This is the third sign, pointing to who Jesus really is.

However, it was a healing on a Sabbath and the Jews believed that taking out anything from one place to another was prohibited on a Sabbath day. The man who was healed was told that he was violating the Sabbath but he just replied that he was told to carry his bed by the one who healed him. Later, Jesus encountered him again and warned him to sin no more lest something worse would happen to him. The man went and informed the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him. John attributes the rise of official persecution against Jesus to His doing 'such things' on the Sabbath.

Jesus' explanation of His action was even more offensive than the healing on the Sabbath. First, Jesus calls God "my Father", denoting an intimacy of relationship unparalleled in Judaism. Jesus claims to work as the Father does. Because of the intimate relationship with the Father and their joint work, Jesus claims to be able to work on the Sabbath as God does. The healing in fact is evidence that God has healed and worked through Jesus. The claim of co-labouring with God on the holy day of rest is what the Jews considered to be blasphemous.

From verse 19, the discourse defending the Sabbath healing is the most focused discussion of the unity between the Father and the Son and it also points out clearly who Jesus really is in relation to God. There are basically three parts in the discourse:- an articulation of the unity (vs 19-24), the authority bestowed on the Son over life and judgement (vs 25-30), and the witnesses for Jesus (vs 31-47).

In discussing His unity with the Father, Jesus affirms His sonship as One who does nothing out of His own accord or initiative. Whatever the Father does, the Son does. Thus the two form an inseparable unit in their activity and exercise of authority. This unity is however grounded in a love relationship between the Father and the Son.

What the Father does is raise the dead and give life - this is one of the great and unique powers of God, with its roots seen in many instances in the Old Testament accounts (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6; 2 Kings 5:7; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). Jesus now argues that this unique authority also is in the hands of the Son. The Father has given all judgements into the Son's hands, just as the Father has willed that honour be shared equally between the Father and the Son. The two are so united that failure to honour the Son is in fact failure to honour the Father. To believe that the Son shares this authority over life and to embrace it is to have eternal life. It is to pass

from death to life and to no longer be subject to judgement. All these must be startling to Jewish ears. Life is something that Jesus offers not just in the future but even now.

Jesus turns to the issue of witnesses. He begins by stating that if He only bore witness to Himself, then such testimony would be considered untrue. What is required are witnesses beyond Himself; the Jews themselves would only accept a testimony to be true if there are at least two witnesses. However, in the case of Jesus, He has a list of witnesses which makes the case for His claims. The one fundamental witness, the key witness, who stands behind all the witnesses that Jesus will mention is the Father whose testimony is true (vs 32). The first witness mentioned by Jesus is John the Baptist. John was a 'shining lamp' that points to Jesus as the Messiah and the lamb of God. John's witness acts as a catalyst to prompt his own disciples to follow Jesus.

The second witness is the testimony of the Father through his works. When Jesus acts, God speaks - no one can do what Jesus does without the support of the Father. Jesus' miracles point to who He really is.

The third witness is the Scripture - it bears witness to Jesus and so in refusing to come to Jesus, the Jews refuse to enter into life; it would also mean that they refuse to believe the Scripture's witness. Jesus pointed out that not seeking the glory of God but instead seeking glory from one another is an approach that will never embrace God's way and God's messenger.

It is Moses who wrote of Jesus in Genesis and Deuteronomy; so to believe Moses is to believe in Jesus - Moses is therefore the fourth witness. Failure to believe Moses leads to failure to believe Jesus and His teachings. Moses is the one in whom the Jews hope and look up to - yet Moses himself testified of the coming of the Messiah, a 'prophet' like himself who would lead God's people to the truth.

All the four witnesses point to the truth that one should believe in the unique sent one in order to have life.

John 6

In this chapter, the one miracle that appears in all the four gospels, the fourth sign, the feeding of the five thousand, surfaces.

Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias during John's time, and a large crowd was following Him because of His healing of the sick. John noted that the Passover was at hand. The Sea was located near a set of mountains, from which Jesus taught His disciples.

Jesus, seeing the multitudes and seeking to test Philip's faith and understanding, took the initiative by asking how bread could be purchased to feed the people. The fact that Phillip is asked is not surprising, because he was the local boy from nearby Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). Philip's reply is not surprising as it was not possible to provide bread for so many, even with 200 denarii (a denarii was a day's wage for a labourer).

Jesus was setting up the event to instruct the disciples about who He is and what He is capable of doing. John noted that there were five thousand men present, making a crowd of about twenty thousand if women and children were counted as well. Andrew pointed out that there were five barley loaves and two fish from one of the young men present but this would not be sufficient for so many.

Jesus has the crowd sit down. He takes the loaves, gives thanks, and distributes as much as the people want of both the bread and the fish. He has the disciples gather up the remainder and the leftover bread alone fills twelve baskets full - the twelve baskets symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel which is a possible conclusion. The entire event shows Jesus's supernatural ability to provide food and sustenance for life, for bread was the staple that sustains life. It is a miracle - because of its proximity to the Passover, that recalls the manna in the wilderness and brings forth favourable and even surpassing comparison with Moses. The miracle made them think of Jesus as a leader-prophet like Moses, or maybe even as the hoped-for ruling Messiah or even as the king. They do yet perceive the kind of kingdom and kingship Jesus intends to bring; Jesus's feeding them did not involve a political goal, because His provision highlighted a more spiritual end. Their intention to make Him king caused Jesus to withdraw again to the mountains by Himself.

When evening came, the disciples started to cross the sea in a boat to Capernaum. It was dark and Jesus had not yet come to them. A strong wind arose and made their progress difficult. They were about half way across the lake when what they saw frightened them: Jesus was walking on the water. This was the fifth sign: Jesus was giving signs of the extent of His authority. Jesus simply announced, "It is I; do not be afraid." They received Him gladly and they arrived safely on land. Jesus not only had walked on the sea, but He also calmed the seas and brought them safely to land - it gives the image of authority and protection, setting for the bread of life discourse, in which Jesus asserts His power over life and sustenance.

The crowd realised that Jesus had crossed somehow to the other side of the lake and they searched for Him and found Him in Capernaum.

Jesus rebuked the crowd for seeking Him because of the provision of bread rather than to find out what the 'signs' meant.

Jesus proceeds to explain the importance of the feeding; the crowd should not labour for food that will perish but instead, they should seek food that "abides to eternal life".

The remarks about labour cause the crowd to ask what works they should do but Jesus refocuses the discussion on Himself. He redefines the work that a person must perform: "Believe in Him whom the Father has sent". The crowd responds by asking a sign - it seems odd given that Jesus has performed so many signs already. However, the crowd seems to want Him to prove that He is greater than Moses who provided their ancestors with manna for some forty years.

Jesus corrects them by telling them that Moses was not the source of the manna (bread). The miracle of providing manna is the work of God His Father. Manna was only a hint of the bread of God that now comes down from heaven and "gives life to the world." The crowd exclaims, "Give us this bread."

Jesus responds by identifying Himself as this bread. This is the first of several "I am" statements in John - the rest: "I am the light of the world (8:12); the door (10:7, 9); the good shepherd (10:11, 14); the resurrection and the life (11:25); the way, the truth and the life (14:6); the vine (15:1, 5).

The one who partakes of this bread neither hungers nor thirsts. Jesus performs not His own will but the will of the One who sent Him. Their mission is united: the Father's will is that all who see the Son and believe in Him should have eternal life, and the Son will raise them up on the last day when judgement is given. The Father's sovereignty is highlighted here, but in a work that inevitably includes the Son.

Jesus's claim to be the bread from heaven causes murmuring from the crowd who choose to focus on His earthly relations, Mary and Joseph. How could Jesus possibly claim a heavenly origin?

Jesus claims that He alone has seen the Father; He speaks as one who has a unique relationship with God that no one else has shared. Then Jesus adds a new detail: the bread that He will give for the life of the world is His own flesh. In other words, to provide life for others, He will give His own life.

Then Jesus made the analogy even more extreme, and promised that whosoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood has eternal life. This imagery shocked and repelled the Jewish leaders.

For the Jews, blood may be shed for sacrifice but drinking blood was specifically prohibited. The imagery was misunderstood.

Jesus has stated: "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing (or profits nothing). The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." Here is a powerful metaphor of faith - appropriating Christ, entering into union with Him, and sharing His life - that is what eating His flesh and drinking His blood means. The relationship with Christ symbolised by eating His flesh is initiated and sustained by faith's participation in all that Jesus is and all He has done for us. It is an abiding, ongoing quality of faith that leads to a lasting living relationship in Him. It is like the living relationship that Jesus has through the Father who sent Him; it is about the reception of life with the Father through the divinely sent Son.

The crowd, including some who have been disciples, gives a mixed reaction to Jesus's claims, with many unable to receive them. The disciples who walk away see Jesus's teachings as too hard to accept. The departure of many who cannot accept His claims causes Jesus to turn to the twelve and ask them if they also wish to go away. Peter speaks for the group and affirms that Jesus has "words of eternal life" and they have believed and come to know what is going on. They accept Him as the "holy one of God".

John 7

Jesus continued to travel in Galilee, avoiding Judea because the Jewish leaders sought to kill Him. The Feast of tabernacles or feast of booths was at hand in Judea. It commemorated God's provision in the wilderness; the people lived in booths for a week; it fell about six months after the Passover.

Jesus's brothers sarcastically told Him to go to the feast if He wished to be well known and to show His works; His brothers also did not believe in Him. Jesus replied that they can go to the feast, but the specific time for Him is not yet. Later on, He went in a way that would not attract undue attention.

The situation in Jerusalem is tense; the leaders are looking for Him and the crowd is discussing Him. There is rising hostility and opposition to Jesus. Publicly, some see Jesus as a 'good man' while others think He is leading the people astray. Jesus appears in the middle of the feast (which lasts eight days) to teach openly in the temple. The teaching leaves the Jewish crowd amazed because Jesus was not formally trained as a man of rabbinic letters. This reaction allows Jesus to affirm once more that His teaching has its roots in the One who sent Him. Anyone who really wants to know whether Jesus speaks from God can determine whether He speaks from His own authority or from God directly; Jesus does not seek His own glory but He seeks to glorify God.

Jesus challenges the Jews in two steps. They claim to follow Moses and yet seek to kill Him. With respect to the Jewish practice to Sabbath law, circumcision is allowed on the Sabbath because it is an act of faithful relating to God and transcends any law about Sabbath labour, how can one then complain that a person is restored to well-being on the Sabbath? There is no basis for them to claim that Moses's law had been violated by Jesus when He healed a man on a Sabbath. Jesus shows that His works are true, as is His message. Real judgement has to do with the source of Jesus's authority - He exhorts the Jews to judge His actions righteously.

Jesus claims that He has not come of His own accord - He was sent by the Father. They do not know the One who sent Him but Jesus does know Him because He comes from Him. This declaration of unity of mission of the Father and the Son splits the crowd; some believe in Him while others seek to arrest Him but they cannot because His "hour" has not yet come. Jesus tells them that He is with them only for a while longer, and then He goes "to Him who sent me". They will seek Him and they will not find Him and where He is they cannot come.

Jesus is referring to His resurrection-exaltation and also His roots with the Father. The crowd is stumped and puzzled by what He communicated.

On the last day of the Feast, Jesus presents Himself as the One who permanently satisfies spiritual thirst by providing the gift of the Holy Spirit, a theme the other gospels and Acts also highlights. During the Feast of the Tabernacles, the priest would gather water from the pool of Siloam in a golden flagon and bring it, after a procession, to the temple amid sounds of trumpets

and rejoicing. There the water was poured into a bowl besides the altar, where a tube would bring it to the altar's base. This act thanked God for His provision in the past and expressed hope for His future provision.

The symbolism is appropriate: Jesus is the source of the living water that brings an abundance of refreshment - He gives the Spirit to those who believe in Him, but that will happen only after Jesus is glorified, a reference to His approaching death, which is followed by His exaltation back to the One who sent Him. Thus, Jesus associates God's provision of the Spirit with His mission. It is to Him one must come for such a drink.

Once again, the crowd is divided in its opinion. The chief priests and Pharisees had sent some temple guards to arrest Jesus but they went back without Him and when they were asked why they did not arrest Him, they replied, "No one ever spoke like this man!" The respect given Jesus unnerves the Pharisees, who ask if the guards now are being led astray. The guards' wavering is troublesome. They should avoid being like the crowd, who do not know the law and are accursed in their ignorance. Nicodemus, showing some courage in the face of all of this pressure, raises the issue of fairness. Is it right to judge without a hearing and an examination of the evidence? Nicodemus's suggestion earns a sarcastic remark.

Here is a reminder of how our prejudice and distorted understanding can affect our conclusions of the truth; those who claim 'knowledge' are being truly ignorant of the truth and the justice of the Jewish leaders' response must be questioned. Their minds are already made up - they are no longer open to the reality and the truth - instead they cling stubbornly to what they want to believe and boastfully dismiss others as foolish and ignorant. This is a warning to be teachable and always open to God and His Spirit. We need to be like little children in our attitude towards the almighty and transcendent Lord and God of the universe: we are finite, He is infinite; we are the creatures, He is the creator.

John 8

John 8:12-59

Jesus's next discourse is set in the temple (8:20) and also draws on imagery related to the Feast of the tabernacles. During this feast, four candlesticks with bowls at the top were lit in the court of the women, where the treasury receptacles also were located. Much celebration took place under these lights as the people sang through the night. It is said that every courtyard in Jerusalem reflected this light. The light symbolized God's presence in the pillar of fire guiding the people in the wilderness.

In this context, Jesus declared Himself to be the light, not just of Israel but of the world. This image was used in Israel not only for God's presence but also for God's instruction in the law. Isaiah shared that God's servant was to be light to the gentiles (Isa. 49:6). So this image is rich with significance and meaning. Light and darkness are soteriological terms, images which contrast the bright joy the saved experience in the presence of the Lord, with the fearful gloom through which those separated from God must trudge. God is the Source of salvation, of hope and of joy. In the midst of the feast, Jesus spoke, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenge Jesus's testimony as invalid because it comes from Himself. Jesus's reply is that even if He accepts their premise of a problematic self-testimony, it still holds true because of His origins and destiny. Jesus knows where He came from and where He is going, while the Pharisees do not.

Jesus came to save; any judgement that emerges through His coming arises from a failure to receive the saving opportunity that He brings. But even if He does judge, that judgement is true because He does not judge on His own but judges with the One who sent Him. To know Jesus is to know the Father; He is inseparable from the Father in their mission. In order to know the Father, a person must see and embrace Jesus.

Jesus again disclosed that He is going away but they (the Jewish leaders) are unable to come and they will not share His exalted destiny but will die in sin unless they believe in Him and who He claims to be. He speaks next of the Son of Man being lifted up, a dual reference to Jesus being lifted up on the cross and being exalted. When that happens, they will know and have more evidence that Jesus is the sent one and the Son of Man. At this point, many believe in Him.

Jesus exhorts those who believe to abide in His Word and know the truth and this will set them free. The mention of being set free implies that the Jews are in bondage and the Jews deny that they are in bondage. Jesus declared that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. Jesus as the Son makes people free, leading to genuine freedom. He acknowledges His opponents' descent from Abraham but notes that their desire to kill Him results from their refusal to accept His word and that of the Father. This proves a lack of real descent from God,

showing their roots in another father (implying Satan). In response, the Jews insist that they are children of Abraham. Jesus challenges their remark by arguing that if they were children of Abraham, they would respond as Abraham did and believe God's testimony; instead they seek to kill Him for telling them the truth from God. Jesus repeats the charge about their following their father.

The implication leads them to retort that their paternity does not reside in fornication, a retort carrying a suggestion that Jesus's birth came in unusual circumstances that were the topic of rumours. In contrast, the Jews claim to have one father, even God. Jesus responds that if God were their Father, then they would love Him, for His mission is not His, but God's. Their incapacity to appreciate what Jesus said has roots in their spiritual ancestry in their father, the devil, who is a liar and who rejects the truth. Jesus speaks the truth and He asks, "Who can convict Me of sin?", indicating how Jesus reflects and lives authentically with a pure clean conscience in communion with the truth.

The Jews deny that Jesus speaks for God and accuse Him of being a Samaritan and being possessed. Jesus replies that, far from being possessed, He seeks to honour His Father while their remarks dishonour Jesus. He does not seek His own glory; God Himself will make the judgement between them. Life, however is a matter of keeping Jesus's word. The one who does keep His word will definitely not see death. The claim for authority over life is a claim for heavenly authority. Jesus's claim that He can give life implies that Jesus also will not die. The Jews seize upon this and argue that even Abraham and the prophets died; surely Jesus is not claiming to be greater than Abraham and the prophets?

Jesus replies that Abraham rejoiced that he would see His day and he saw it and was glad. The Jews question how Jesus could know what Abraham thought and saw, given that Jesus could not be more than fifty years old. This leads to one of the greatest claims to be divine that Jesus makes anywhere in the scriptural material: Jesus replies, "Before Abraham was, I am," claiming not only to predate Abraham, but also sharing the divine name, "I am" (Exodus 3:14). Jesus is actually claiming that He existed before the patriarch Abraham and He is greater than Abraham; in fact, He is one with God. Neutrality no longer was possible; what identified God identified Him.

The Jews concluded that this was blasphemy and sought to stone Him. Jesus hid himself and left the temple; it was not yet the hour for 'night' to come (John 13:30),

John 9

This chapter focuses on the healing of the man born blind by the Lord Jesus. It is the sixth sign that John brought forth to show who Jesus truly is.

The healing pictures Jesus's ability to bring someone from darkness to light. One striking feature of the story is that the blind man takes centre stage in the debate with the Pharisees.

The disciples ask Jesus whether the man or his parents are responsible for this situation. The common understanding among the people is that sickness or calamity is the direct result of sin of the individual or that of the parents. The book of Job shows that this understanding, the retribution principle, stating that the upright will prosper because of their righteousness and the wicked will suffer because of their evil, does not always hold true in outworking; it is more complicated than this simplistic principle, for bad things can happen to good people and good things can happen to bad people as seen in the life of Job.

However, Jesus places the event at the feet of God's glory, since it was an opportunity for the works of God to be made evident. These works are something that Jesus and His disciples must do while the day of His ministry is present. When night comes, such work will cease, alluding to Jesus's arrest and death.

Jesus works the miracle by taking some spittle and making a mud cake. In the ancient world, spittle was believed to have some 'powers' although here the symbolism could be the creative work of a fresh creation, using the dirt of the ground (cf. Gen. 2:7). Jesus then anointed the man's eyes with the mud mix and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam (which means sent). The washing may allude to Elisha's healing of Naaman by having him wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5:10-13) and the name of the pool "Sent" is consistent with the theme of Jesus as the sent one from God the Father.

The reaction to the healing comes from those who have known him only as a neighbour or a beggar. They recognise him as the blind beggar but some think that it was someone like him - such was the impact of the miraculous healing. The man confesses that he is the one and explains that Jesus healed him - he recounts the details but could not tell where Jesus has gone. The crowd takes the man to the Pharisees and he narrates the details again but the discussion that follows centres on the fact that the healing took place on the Sabbath and there are contrasting opinions on whether Jesus is from God. The healed man himself concludes that Jesus is a prophet.

The healing bothers the Jewish leaders and so they question the parents to be certain that the man is their son who was born blind. The potential threat that those who confessed Jesus as the Christ would be put out of the synagogue probably caused the parents to pass the buck and to direct the interrogators to ask the son who is old enough to speak for himself.

The leaders turn to the man and invoke an oath to get him to speak the truth. They insist that God should be given the praise, and that the man should know that the one who healed him and whom he confessed as a prophet is a sinner. The man cleverly responds that he cannot comment on whether Jesus is a sinner, but he can state that he himself is now a man who can see. When the retort comes as to how this was done, the man shoots back that he already has told them, but they do not listen. Then he toys with them, remarking that perhaps they want to hear the story again so that they can become disciples of Jesus. The interrogators reply that they are disciples of Moses and not disciples of Jesus as the man is. Furthermore, they know that God has spoken to Moses, but they do not know where Jesus is from. The man is amazed. How can they question where Jesus is from when he has opened the man's eyes? God does not listen to sinners. However, if someone is a worshipper of God and does God's will, then God hears that person. How else could someone heal one born blind? This never has been done before. The man concludes his logical argument by noting that if Jesus were not from God, he could do nothing. The leaders reject the argument and respond angrily that this man was born in sin, so there is no way he can teach them about such matters. The discourse ends with the man being cast out.

The passage drips with irony as a formerly blind man sees better than the religious leaders do. Here is a matter of seeing with the heart that is open and teachable to God and His revelation rather than with 'head knowledge', hardened heart and proud attitude and demeanour. This is a warning to us too that we ought to know God rather than knowing about God; it is a relationship open to all who will humble themselves in repentance before the almighty transcendent God who has become immanent in the person of Jesus Christ. God has revealed Himself in His Son, Immanuel, God with us, but do we receive Him, bow down before Him and worship Him?

The healed man is sought and found by Jesus. Jesus asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. This probably is an allusion to the One with real authority to judge, a counter to the judgement he just received from the Jewish leaders. The man asks for Jesus's identity so that he can believe in him; he speaks as one who is ready to follow Jesus's lead. Jesus's reply is ironic: "You have seen him." Jesus had given the man sight, and the new ability allows him to know who the Son of Man is. Jesus says "it is he who is speaking to you. The man responds, "Lord, I believe" and he worshiped Him.

Jesus's statement is rather telling: "For judgement I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." The language here has Old Testament roots: "And He said, 'Go, and say to this people: Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing, but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed'" (Isaiah 6:9-10). What a sad pronouncement! Let us take heed lest we become a people who keep on hearing and do not understand, who keep seeing but do not perceive!

The Pharisees listening to Jesus ask if they too are blind, sensing the implications of Jesus's remarks. Jesus's reply allows no room. If they really were blind, they might have reason to

claim innocence; but they claim to see when actually they do not. So the guilt "abides". They claim to see when they do not, or more specifically, they would not. Do we understand with our hearts? More specifically, are we willing to surrender to him and commit to Him with our hearts? How often we may claim that we understand and we can see the truth; but how much more we need to confess that we do not uphold this understanding and truth in our hearts and lives. Only the Holy Spirit can illuminate the Word of God to us; only He alone can give us a discerning heart but our posture must be one of humility and teachability, willing to sit at His feet, with eager 'ears' and contrite 'hearts', not with 'pride', 'arrogance' and 'puffed up knowledge' like those of the Pharisees who claim to be teachers of the Law but cannot see what a healed blind man can see in all clarity.

John 10

In this chapter, Jesus compared Himself both to the gate of entrance into the sheep pen and to the good or ideal shepherd, who truly cares for the sheep. He contrasts Himself both to the thieves and to hired shepherds - Jesus's claim is that He genuinely cares for the sheep, in contrast to the Jewish leaders, who, when faced with the healing of the man born blind, tear into him because they wrongfully allege that the law was not being followed. The scene draws lessons from the previous event during the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as setting up the next scene at the Feast of Dedication.

The background of the scene is sheep herding. Sheep could be gathered into a common pen, shared by many families who combined their flocks. These enclosures had a gate and were surrounded by a wall or fence. The shepherd entered by the gate, while thieves, seeking not to be discovered and to harm the sheep, climbed over the walls.

Jesus argues that He is the shepherd who cares for and protects His sheep; they, in turn, recognise and follow Him. In contrast, the leaders are like thieves and robbers, whose actions serve only to damage the sheep. The thief's goal is not to lead the sheep but to entrap and ensnare them. The one who enters by the door is the shepherd, who cares for the sheep. The gatekeeper, who guards the door, recognises him and opens the pen to him. The shepherd calls the sheep, which hear him as he calls them by their names and leads them out. The note of intimate knowledge and guidance is the point here because he is a shepherd who goes before them and leads the way in front of him. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. The picture here is of recognition and obedience (Num. 27:15-17).

To underscore the image of the way, Jesus switches from the picture of Himself as the shepherd to one of Him as the door. He is the entry way to salvation and as such gives access to and from God's presence as expressed in the image of the pasture (Ps. 23). There is only one door through which to pass to get to the Father, and that is what God's shepherd represents. Whereas the thief comes to steal, kill, or destroy, the shepherd comes to give life and give it in fullness. Jesus's teaching highlights the division within the nation that is formed by His coming, since some come to Him while the leadership rejects Him. Jesus is what a real shepherd ought to be; He shows His commitment to the sheep in willingly laying down His life for them. The relationship is similar to the way the Father and the Son know each other, so that the Son lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus goes on to mention other sheep not of this fold. This surely is an allusion to the gentiles, who also are brought in by His death. They belong to another fold, but when the work is done, they too will be led by the shepherd because they too will heed his voice. So in the end there will be one flock led by one shepherd (cf. Eph. 2:11-22).

John 10:22-42: At the Feast of Dedication

The Feast of Dedication is also known as Hanukkah - it celebrates the repurification of the temple after it had been desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC. Jesus was on the eastern

side of the temple when the Jews encircled Him and asked for a plain statement about whether or not Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus's initial reply is that He already had answered the question. His actions and remarks served as replies; the signs are the reply. However, despite the clarity of what Jesus had done and said, they did not believe. The reason for their disbelief was that they were not among Jesus's sheep, an allusion back to Jesus's discussion in John 10. Jesus's sheep hear Him, know Him, and follow Him. In return, Jesus gives them eternal life, and they will not perish. In fact, no one can, even by attempted violence, snatch them out of His hands. God, who is greater than any opposing force, will use His power to keep the sheep safe. Thus, no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. Note the oneness of the Father and the Son. Jesus is not saying that they are one in terms of person but that they work indivisibly together and in concert. What the Son does, the Father has willed and shared in. It is this intimacy of united action that the Jewish leaders object to as they take up stones as an expression of their view that Jesus has blasphemed. Leviticus 24 stipulates that stoning would be required for one who blasphemes.

God's attestation supports Jesus's right to make the claim of sonship, to call God His Father, and to claim oneness of mission with God. Jesus's claim, if it stood alone, without His ability to do the Father's works, would be disqualified. Without such works, He gives people no evidence for believing. However, the fact that Jesus can bring healing to the blind, for example, speaks for His claim. For even if they do not believe Jesus's words, the leaders must acknowledge the works that He has performed. Then they would come to know the union between Father and Son. The Jews still are not happy and seek to arrest Him, but He escapes. It ends with Him not only affirming His messiahship but also highlighting that His sonship really is union with the Father. Jesus is not only the Messiah; He is the Son to the Father.

The next chapter, chapter 11, highlights the seventh sign: Jesus shows His power over life in the raising of Lazarus.

Introduction to the second half of the gospel of John

We have covered John 1 to John 10 previously. We are now studying the second half of the gospel of John, beginning with Chapter 11.

It may be helpful to recapitulate: the gospel of John is distinct from the other three gospels (collectively known as the synoptic gospels). John wrote so that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in His name (John 20:30,31).

Compared to the synoptic gospels, there are no narrative parables in John, no account of the transfiguration, no record of the institution of the Lord’s supper. John’s accounts of the miracle of the changing of the water into wine, the conversation with Nicodemus and His ministry in Samaria are not mentioned in the other three gospels. In fact, what is highlighted in chapter 11 on the raising of Lazarus from the dead is only found in the gospel of John.

John is customarily divided into two parts: chapters 1-10 and chapters 11-21. Part 1 describes Jesus as the Christ and the Son who has come from the Father in heaven to reveal His Father. Part 1 (chapters 1-10) is sometimes called the ‘book of signs’; here John deliberately selects a number of key ‘signs’ and ‘miracles’ to make clear who Jesus really is. Part 2 (chapters 11-21) focuses on the Son returning to His Father in heaven to open the way to His Father.

John 11:1-54

The chapter opens with the news that Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, from the village of Bethany was sick. Jesus disclosed that the sickness will not end up in death but is for God's glory so that the Son may be glorified. Sickness glorifies God in its end result, not in its ordeal. God receives glory when sickness is 'conquered' literally in healing or figuratively in the case of those who transcend their physical sufferings and continue to trust God and to honour Him in the midst of the sickness. Jesus waited two days on hearing the news before deciding to go to see Lazarus. When He arrived in Bethany, Lazarus was already dead for four days. The general understanding of the Jews is that if a person is dead for four days, there is no longer any hope of resuscitation. Jesus' delay seems odd at first reading but it is probably to demonstrate that His subsequent raising of Lazarus from the dead is truly a miracle and it certainly helped many to believe in Him, including those of His disciples who also saw Jesus in a new light with awe and worship.

The disciples were aware that the Jews were seeking to kill Jesus and they were wondering why He would go to Bethany near Jerusalem despite the danger. It is interesting that doubting Thomas displayed courage and loyalty in this instance when he declared his willingness to go and die with Jesus. Jesus' mention of the fixed hours of daylight and darkness seemed to point to the impending ending of His earthly ministry.

Jesus' encounter with Martha and Mary brings out some important truths. Both sisters felt that if Jesus were to come earlier, their brother would not have died. When Jesus told Martha that Lazarus will rise again, Martha thought He was referring to the collective resurrection at the end of time.

Jesus declared that He is the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in Him will live, even though he dies and whosoever lives by believing in Him will never die. He then asked whether Martha believed this. Although Martha believed in Jesus as the Messiah, she has not been shown the connection between an abstract belief in the resurrection and a personal belief in Jesus. Jesus, God's Rescuer, does not simply procure or promise the resurrection – He is the resurrection and He is the life. Those who come to Him in belief now have found life forever and they have found it now! They will never die the fullest sense even though they will die physically, because Jesus is God's Rescuer who overthrows death. He is God's answer to the greatest problem faced by humanity and mankind. Verses 33-36 shows Jesus expressing indignation at the sadness, pain and suffering caused by death. Death was never intended for man and it is the final enemy in the fallen world. But Jesus is the only one who can do something about this.

Jesus proceeded to raise Lazarus by just calling him to come forth. We see the power of His words. Ironically, the very miracle that reveals God's glory and His glory also precipitates a violent reaction among His enemies and drives the plot towards His death.

Notice that the priests and the Pharisees were more concerned about their positions and the possibility of losing them if the Romans were to interpret that there was a rebellion brewing. They were not concerned for the truth and they could not believe in Jesus because they were not willing to believe. We see the hardness of the hearts of men, particularly those who were supposed to know the Scriptures and the Law.

The 'prophecy' of Caiaphas the high priest was simply a politically motivated remark but it served as a prophecy of Jesus' substitutionary death. Jesus will die for His people and nation; He will die on our behalf for our sin. He really is the one who can deal with death and reverse the effects of sin in a fallen world. He brings life now; He does so through His substitutionary death.

Jesus' asking Martha whether she believes that He is the resurrection and the life was directed at one who was already a disciple. It is a question to all of us who claim to be believers. Are we experiencing the life of Jesus now? Do we live as those without God and without hope? Is our belief in Him only an abstract idea or a mental acceptance, or is it a belief which rejoices in Him and abides in Him? This will determine how we go through life here on earth and how we maintain an eternal perspective in our pilgrimage in this fallen world.

John 11:55-12:11

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Jesus' asking Martha whether she believes that He is the resurrection and the life was directed at one who was already a disciple. It is a question to all of us who claim to be believers. Are we experiencing the life of Jesus now? Do we live as those without God and without hope? Is our belief in Him only an abstract idea or a mental acceptance, or is it a belief which rejoices in Him and abides in Him? This will determine how we go through life here on earth and how we maintain an eternal perspective in our pilgrimage in this fallen world.

John 12:12-50

A great crowd gathered, waving palm branches, and hailing Him as the rescuing Messiah and the long-awaited 'king of Israel' as Jesus made His way to Jerusalem on a donkey. Psalm 118 was used to welcome Him and the shout of Hosanna (meaning 'Give salvation now') was an expression of praise and welcome for an important figure. While the people saw Him as the Messiah, they failed to see that in coming on a donkey instead of a war-horse, Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (Zechariah 9:9-13); they failed to see what kind of Messiah He was – He came as a gentle king to bring an end of war and to proclaim peace to the nations and not as a warring king to overthrow the nation which was subduing the people of God. He came to release the 'prisoners' and to extend His reign to the ends of the world by obeying His father to rescue and die for His people. Even His disciples did not quite understand Jesus' impending mission and the 'hour' that was to come.

The exclamation of the Pharisees “..Look how the whole world has gone after Him’ is rather ironical, for indeed Jesus was coming to rescue the world and those who would respond to Him in faith. Although here the crowd was hailing Him, yet in a few days, the crowd would cry “Crucify Him”.

Is our response to Jesus based on what we expect Him to be and what we desire Him to do? Do we worship Him as who He really is and allow Him to be Lord and king of our lives? Will we let Jesus to be God and to do all that He pleases with us, knowing that He is perfectly good, loving and holy?

Some Greeks requested to see Jesus and this symbolises the ingathering of all the nations by God's Messiah. This stands as a contrast to the subsequent rejection of the Messiah by the Jews.

Jesus then declared that the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified and He depicted it as a kernel of wheat that is sown in the ground, dying to bring forth a large and rich harvest. His glorification is tied to His refusal to seek His own glory, to His commitment to always please the Father, culminating in His obedience of self-sacrifice at the impending death. His death would bring about a great harvest of saved souls and a new people of God.

Death is the necessary condition to generate life; it is specifically applicable to Jesus but slightly different as applied to His followers. For them, to deny themselves and an idolatrous focus on self ('death' to self) and the evil world is the path to life, eternal life. As Jesus' death is the path to His glorification, the believer's 'death' is the path to vindication and honour from God. In other words, the only way to have life in eternity is to hate life and lose life now; this is the way of discipleship that all must follow – discipleship therefore entails great cost and great reward. Life lived in rebellion against God in this world stands under judgment, and is what took Jesus to His death. Jesus' death should become the continuing focus of our faith and discipleship as we learn to hate all our rebellious attitudes and actions that led to His death.

Verses 27-30 make it clear that Jesus did not somehow escape from all the physical and emotional agony involved in crucifixion. His death was not a mistake, and He did not draw on supernatural powers to avoid the pain and the agony of suffering His Father's wrath. His death, which conquers death itself and brings life to the world, really is the supreme moment when God's glory is revealed. The voice from heaven confirms this.

The exchange between Jesus and the crowd subsequently revealed the hardness of hearts of the latter; although Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in Him. Although the 'light' was present with them, they would not see and they preferred to walk in the 'dark'. The Jews' unbelief has been foretold, and in one sense is not unexpected; God allows the hearts of those who do not believe to be hardened. There were however some Jews, even leaders, who believed, but they remained secret believers for fear of being put out of the synagogue, for they loved human glory more than the glory of God. This is a scathing remark; it continues to apply to us believers today. Do we love human glory more than the glory of God? Are we afraid to be identified with Jesus and to speak up for the truth because we love the approval of man more than the approval of God? Will we be prepared to be 'persecuted' and misunderstood for the sake of loyal devotion to the Lord, even by those who claim to represent God and are so-called religious leaders? It is indeed not easy and we can understand why the leaders among the Jews were afraid to stand up for what they believe.

Jesus' comments that the words He spoke would condemn the very ones who heard them and yet refused to believe is very sobering. The reason why the Son's words are so final is that they are the words of the Father, God Himself. The law of Moses, as gracious a gift of God as it was, is being replaced, or, better, fulfilled, by new grace bound up with the person and words of Jesus, the Word, God's self-expression. Jesus speaks what has been commanded by the Father and to reject them is to reject God and to incur judgment from God.

This is a serious warning; to those who heard the words of Jesus in the gospel and the Word, and to those who claim to be believers and are apparently listening to His words every Sunday, do not take this warning lightly. These very words would judge us, if we listen with our ears and not with our hearts!

John 13:1-20

John 13:1-17 covers the farewell discourse of Jesus and His final prayer. It probably took place in the upper room and here Jesus was interacting with the inner circle, His disciples. He was preparing His disciples for His return to the Father, for He knew that the hour had come for Him to leave the world and to go back to the Father through the cross.

We focus now on John 13:1-20. Jesus had set His love on His disciples in a special way and here in the ministry in the upper room, His love for them was manifested in words and action, loving them fully and to the end. We are reminded of His love for His people and it is indeed a great privilege and blessing to know that He loves us to the point of death on the cross.

Jesus knew that the Father had given Him the position of supreme power, and He knew that Satan had prompted Judas, yet He proceeded with God's plan of action because He knew that this was the way for Satan to be driven out and giving up His life would accomplish God's supreme purpose.

Jesus then did something most unexpected and stunning; He dressed Himself like a household servant and performed a servant's task – He proceeded to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel which was tied round Him. The form of God was not exchanged for the form of a servant; it was revealed in the form of a servant. We would remember Him saying, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-27). His act of humility is simultaneously a display of love, a symbol of saving cleansing, and a model of Christian conduct. And the matchless self-emptying of the eternal Son, the eternal Word reaches its climax on the cross.

The disciples were probably embarrassed to have their Master washing their feet; Peter however was the one who objected to Jesus washing his feet. Jesus' reply that unless He washed him, Peter would have no part with Him and this caused Peter to request the washing of his whole body instead of his feet only. Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you".

The theme of cleansing pointed to the spiritual cleansing based on Christ's death; the foot washing and the crucifixion are truly of a piece and the foot washing pointed so effectively to the cross. The foot washing symbolises the cleansing that is the result of Christ's impending cross-work; the initial and fundamental cleansing that Christ provides it a once-for-all act. Individuals who have been cleansed by Christ's atoning work will doubtless need to have subsequent sins washed away, but the fundamental cleansing can never be repeated.

When Jesus washed the disciples' feet, He included the feet of Judas Iscariot. It shows the love and forbearance of the Master; although Judas may have been washed, he was not cleansed. No rite can ensure spiritual cleansing if the heart has not responded to the

cleansing effected through Jesus' revelatory word and the atoning sacrifice to which the foot washing pointed. Hence, the keeping of the foot washing as a sacrament should be rejected.

After He had finished washing their feet, Jesus said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.." Jesus has set an example and pattern for His disciples and us. If the Lord had not thought it beneath His dignity to perform a menial task for them, why should they think it beneath theirs to do the like for one another. He is so great, yet He stoops so low. His disciples should humbly follow His example and lower themselves in order to serve others. If Jesus has lowered Himself to the point of death on a cross, His disciples must follow His example, however hard they may find it to love their brother or sister. One of the ways human pride manifests itself is the refusal to take a lower role. We do not mind being addressed as servants of God but it is a different thing when we are asked to serve as a servant and treated as such. The words of D. A. Carson ring a relevant warning:

Christian zeal divorced from transparent humility sounds hollow, even pathetic.

John 13:21-38

Verse 21 begins with Jesus troubled in spirit as He testified that one of the twelve disciples will betray Him. We see this expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 41: “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9) – this psalm can certainly be labelled as messianic and a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus as the psalmist, David became a ‘type’ of ‘great David’s greater Son’, the Messiah.

One wonders how Judas Iscariot, who was present with Jesus when He performed the miracles and healing, and was there in the many discourses and teaching sessions by the Master, could end up as a treacherous betrayer. Could it be because of his love for money, as evidenced by his pilfering from the money bag; could it be because Jesus was not what he expected a messiah to be and he wanted to share the position and prestige that a conquering messiah would bring? The passage does reveal that Satan was involved and he worked upon the weakness and shortcomings of Judas to cause him to collaborate with him to betray the Master. Somehow, Judas, despite his privileges, did not enter into a believing relationship with the Lord Jesus. Even though Jesus washed his feet and subsequently offered him a piece of bread as a mark of friendship and probably as a final gentle expression of His love, Judas was impervious to this love and Satan entered into him, and it was a decisive movement of judgment and separation from the Master and fellow disciples.

Ponder upon the sober remarks of J.C. Ryle:

A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books, and make fine speeches, and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is serious.

We have to believe that hearing from God and knowing God is our good portion and be convicted that to sit at the feet of Jesus daily is our one and best priority. We cannot afford to be like Martha, always busy with activities, in the bid to serve God and forget to be like Mary, who has chosen the one thing that is essential and needful, as the Lord Jesus revealed. By sitting at the feet of Jesus, we will grow more like Him – more patient, more loving, more thoughtful and more godly; we will grow to know Him, to love Him and to be faithful to Him no matter what the circumstances. As someone rightly said: the only thing more important than ministry is being ministered to by God. We are mindful of the dangers of legalism; when we talk about what we should do every day, we are clear that Christ has already done for us. Instead, we are focusing on devotion to Christ more than making time with Him as a priority each day. Without knowing Him and nurturing devotion to Him, all our activities, even spiritual activities, and our opportunities to be in the midst of His ministry, would avail to nothing, and all will not last for eternity; worse still, we might end up like Judas Iscariot.

The Lord Jesus had made it clear to the rest of the disciples of His fore-knowledge of one among them becoming a betrayer and this was to help them later on to know that He was and is indeed whom He claimed to be. When Peter asked John (the disciple whom Jesus loved) to ask who the betrayer was, the Lord indicated the one to whom He was offering the piece of bread. Obviously, Jesus' communication to John was in a soft tone such that the rest of the disciples did not hear and were not aware of Judas being the one. Nonetheless, it showed not only Jesus' foreknowledge, it also showed Him to be divine and all-knowing. Even though the Lord Jesus knew all along that Judas Iscariot was the one, He did not disclose it to His disciples, for He knew that the Father was sovereign and He would be going to the cross.

Jesus then spoke to the rest of the disciples in endearing terms, calling them "My children", and indicating His impending departure and that they could not come along with Him. He then gave the command,

A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

The term "new" does not mean "more recent" but rather more superior and better in quality. It is new because of a new relationship; we belong to Christ's new community and family with God as our Father. There is also a new standard: we are to love the way Jesus loves -in a sacrificial manner, putting the welfare of our brethren above our own. It is new because such a love becomes a powerful expression of the relationship we have with the Lord and with one another and a compelling proof to a lost world that Jesus is real and among us.

This is perhaps the most significant factor in evangelism and sharing the gospel -for Christ's followers to bear the unmistakable stamp of His love. So Tertullian (a historian) reports the pagans of his day (a century after the gospel of John was published) as saying of Christians, 'See how they love one another!' And it was no merely superficial love that they spoke of, for they went on: "How ready they are to die for one another!" How far we are from these early followers of Jesus! We are bickering over the smallest of things; we allow envy and jealousy to rear their heads and we are ready to 'kill' our brethren with our anger and bitterness. And yet we still talk about the love of Jesus and seek to share the gospel with unbelievers; let us not believe in the least that the lost world is oblivious of the lack of love among us. How it must be grieving the heart of Jesus to see His people ignoring His new command and seeking to be first among those who yearn for self-glory and recognition.

Peter then asked where the Lord was going and declared that he was ready to follow the Master, even to death. Peter spoke better than he knew. He could not lay down his life for Jesus then; he would lay it down three decades later. Peter's boast at this point displays not only gross ignorance of human weakness but a certain independent impulsive pride that is the seed of his denial of Jesus later on. Peter's self- assessment and

intention were far above his understanding of his strength and he had to hear the pronouncement of the Lord Jesus: 'I tell you the truth, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!'

Let us soberly take stock of our commitment to the Lord Jesus. Let us not be presumptuous and confidently declare that we will never be unfaithful to Him. Jesus was going to the cross and as His followers, we too have a cross to carry. It is a cross that kills our sins, smashes our idols, and teaches us the foolishness of self-reliance. Only total dependence on Him and the Spirit can deliver us from our self-centredness and self-confidence and the Lord would then be pleased to bring us through the adverse circumstances and the spiritual battles that await us.

John 14:1-14

The passage begins with the Lord Jesus comforting the disciples and telling them not to be discouraged. The disciples at this point probably knew that Jesus was departing from them soon, and they were perhaps confused and feeling down. Although Jesus was deeply troubled in heart and spirit, with the knowledge that one of His disciples would betray Him and with the prospect of going to the cross, He took upon Himself to comfort and encourage His disciples, when He Himself should receive emotional and spiritual support. Such was the love and sacrificial heart of the Master!

He exhorted the disciples to trust in God and to trust in Him. If He speaks the words of God and does the works and acts of God, surely He should be trusted like God! He then revealed that His departure is for their good and that He is going away to prepare a place for them and would come again to fetch them to be where He is. The Father's house here refers to heaven and in heaven, there is more than enough room and space for everyone of Jesus' disciples. The true Christian and believer has an inheritance that shall not be taken away from him. Rich men must one day leave their wealth and property; kings must one day leave their palaces and grandeur, but the poorest believer on earth has an inheritance and treasure which he will never be deprived of. The believer will arise with Him in the resurrection morning and claim his inheritance and home for all eternity.

This is the assurance given by the Lord Jesus Himself and it is indeed our eternal hope and glory. If we live with this eternal perspective and this certain hope, nothing can take away our confidence in Him, for we know that this world and her lusts will all pass away, but God's Word and promise remains.

Thomas, when told that he and his fellow disciples know the way to the place Jesus was going, expressed that they did not know the way. Jesus replied,

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.

Jesus is the way to God because He is the truth of God and He is the life. He is the truth precisely because He embodies the supreme revelation of God – He is the self-disclosure of God, in Him we see God Himself in the flesh; He is the Word, the communication and revelation of God Himself; He is God incarnate. He is the life, the one who has 'life in Himself', 'the resurrection and the life'; in Him is eternal life, the life of God. The answer to Thomas' question is: Jesus is the way to come to God because He is the truth and the life and therefore no one comes to God the Father except through Him. Ponder over what Thomas Kempis, an old saint, expressed in his meditation:

Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life

for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth, the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth, life true, life blessed, life uncreated.

Philip then requested, "Show us the Father and that will be enough for us". Jesus answered with sadness, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'show us the Father'? Although Philip knew Jesus to an extent, he did not grasp that in Jesus, God the Father has made Himself known. The disciples ought to believe that Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Not only everything Jesus does is what the Father gives Him to do, but He does everything the Father does. He was no mere envoy from God; He is the Son and whoever has seen Him has seen the Father; this affirms mutual indwelling between Himself and the Father. If the disciples find it difficult to accept this truth, at the very least, they should believe on the evidence of the miracles performed by Him, for the miracles are signs that the saving kingdom of God is at work in the ministry of Jesus and this in ways tied to His very person.

Jesus has been appealing for faith, and Jesus disclosed that the works the disciples will perform after the resurrection are greater than those done by Jesus before His death. The contrast is essentially not between the works of Jesus and the works of the disciples but between the works of Jesus that He performed during the days of His flesh, and the works that He performs through His disciples after His death and exaltation. After His exaltation, the Son is no longer limited by His pre-death humanness; the gift of the Holy Spirit which will be introduced later on would result in a far-reaching ministry which will embrace and reach the world. The prayers offered by His disciples to the Father or to Jesus will see their requests granted, resulting in the greater works that will be seen after His exaltation.

John 14:15-31

Jesus, knowing that His time to depart was drawing near, had demonstrated His love to His disciples in the washing of their feet and in His assurance of their place in the Father's home. He encouraged them to trust in Him and the Father, and told them He would come back for them. He also commanded them to love one another just as He had loved them.

The Master then focused on their love for Him and expressed that if they love Him, they will obey His commands. Their obedience would be the expression of their love for Him and He will ask the Father to send them another Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, to live with them and to be in them. They will not be left as 'orphans'.

We need to pause here to examine in a deeper manner the implications of what the Master communicated, for herein lies some of the most important principles of Christian living and discipleship. The commands Jesus referred to are not simply just Jesus' ethical commands but the entire revelation from the Father as a whole. This will explain how the Master phrased the Great Commission when He, after expressing His supreme authority, told the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations....and teaching them to obey everything He have commanded them. Notice the instruction to teach them to obey everything or to observe everything He has commanded which would encompass the whole revelation from the Father to Him. If we realise what this means, it would imply that making disciples is not simply "collecting decisions" from evangelistic outreach; it must include teaching and nurturing the believers to obey all that Jesus has taught and commanded. It means that they only are to be counted as true Christians who live in a practical obedience to His word, and strive to do the things He has commanded. As a godly Christian once said, "obedience is the only proof of the reality of our Christian faith.

Faith and obedience are the leading marks of real followers of Christ, and will always be seen in true believing Christians. It is no wonder that the Master urged the disciples to trust Him and to love Him by their obedience to His commands. "If you hold to my teaching (Word), you are really my disciples" (John 8:31). Nothing pleases God more than to have His children loving Him completely and this love invariably is expressed in their obedience to His teachings and commands. Let us be clear that mere duty will not generate obedience to Christ; only love for Him can do that, and love for Him may at times cause the faithful believer to obey Him in a manner which seems contrary to the expectations of the average believers.

But we may object and feel that we are not capable and able to obey all His commands. The disciples also were probably despondent at the thought of their Master leaving; this is where Jesus told them that the Father, at His request, would send another advocate or counsellor to help them and to be with them for ever. He is the Spirit of truth. When the Master told them that they will see Him and He will come to them, it is in the context of telling them that the Holy Spirit will come to them and live in them. It implies that although the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Godhead, in essence, He is the Spirit

of Christ, for He is exactly like Christ. Then Jesus made the astounding statement that when that happens, they will realise that He is in the Father and that they are in Him and He is in them. He elaborated that for those who love Him and obey Him, God the Father will love them and He Himself will love them and the Father and He will come to them and dwell with them.

Presumably, the manifestation of the Father and the Son in the life of the believer is through the Holy Spirit. Earlier on, in answering Philip's request to see the Father, the Master had explained that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father, and that the Father is in Him and He is in the Father. The Master also expressed earlier that the Son always does what the Father commands and He not only speaks what the Father instructed Him, He also speaks what the Father spoke. The Holy Spirit, who is in the believer, will remind the believer of all that Jesus taught, and will reveal the person of the Lord Jesus.

In other words, when Jesus departed and the Holy Spirit comes, an intimate union with the Father and the Son will be achieved for the disciples through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Also, the Holy Spirit will guarantee the accurate recalling of Jesus' words by the apostles, and this will ensure for us today the accuracy and the authority of the Scriptures.

Just as Jesus obeyed the Father in all things, the disciples will be enabled by the Spirit not only to know all things taught by the Lord Jesus but also to obey all the teachings of the Lord, in increasing measures. This is the wonderful privilege we have as disciples of the Lord Jesus; we are not alone, for the Holy Spirit is our teacher, our comforter, our guide and He not only was responsible for our regeneration, He is the one who effected our union with our Lord Jesus in His death, His burial, His resurrection and also seated us with Him in the heavenly places. Our union with the Lord Jesus means that we are one with Him in one body and all that belongs to Him also belongs to His people. What a tremendous calling we have in Him!

Jesus ended chapter 14 by telling the disciples to be glad that He is returning to the Father and He exhorted them not to be discouraged but to receive His peace and not be afraid or troubled. His departure will ensure that He will take them to be with Him for ever and this alone should be a reason for joy. If the disciples truly loved Him, they would be glad that He is returning to His Father, to the sphere where He belongs, to the glory He had with the Father before the world began, to the place where the Father is unquestionably greater than the Son in His incarnate state, to His own 'home'. The disciples were undoubtedly more preoccupied with their own griefs than with the joy of the Master. Today, we believers are also preoccupied with our own sorrows and pain than with what bring joy to the Master.

Jesus leaves His peace (shalom) with the disciples. It is the transcendent peace He displays throughout the difficult hour of suffering and death. By that death He absorbs in Himself all the malice of others, the sin of the world and introduces the promised messianic peace

that none others can give. He effected for all His followers peace with God, the peace of God which transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the peace and love of God bequeathed by Jesus and the Father – all these provide all that is necessary for His disciples to overcome their fears. Our hearts need not be troubled, neither shall they be afraid; all that we need have been provided and all that we will go through is temporary. In this world, we will have trouble, but take heart, He has overcome the world. In Him, we can have the peace that passes all understanding.

John 15:1-17

The passage begins with an imagery or metaphor when Jesus declares Himself to be the true vine and His Father the gardener, and His disciples the branches.

In the Old Testament, the vine was a picture of Israel. God brought a vine out of Egypt, and planted it in the promised land (Psalm 80:1-18). The vineyard of Israel, said Isaiah in Chapter 5, has borne wild grapes instead of proper ones. Jesus, in saying that He is the true vine, is declaring Himself as the true Israel. He is the one on whom God's purposes are now resting and His followers are members of God's true people. Israel of old has failed to be the vine God desires; Jesus is now the true vine.

Continuing the imagery, the heavenly Father is the gardener. He prunes or trims every branch that does bear fruit; His purpose is loving so that every branch will be even more fruitful, but the pruning process may be painful. The Father cuts off every branch that bears no fruit.

What is clear is that there are no true Christians without some measure of fruit. Fruitfulness is an unmistakable mark of true Christianity; dead branches have no life in them and they do not bear fruit and they are cut off by the Father.

For the branch to bear fruit, it must remain in the vine or abide in the vine. It depicts a picture of continuous dependence on the vine for its life and vitality. The Christian or Christian organisation or church that expands by merely imitating Christian conduct and witness without the life of Jesus within, brings forth only 'dead wood' and no true spiritual fruit. What is clear and simply striking is: remain in the vine and be a fruit-bearing branch or be thrown away and burned as dead wood.

The next few verses reveal the fruit is the consequence of effective prayer in Jesus' name, including obedience to Jesus' commands, resulting in the Father's glory. The fruitfulness of believers brings glory to the Father through the Son. Fruitlessness robs God of the glory that rightly belongs to Him.

Remaining in the vine has already been tied up with obedience to Jesus' words; now the exhortation is to remain in Jesus' love. Jesus points out that remaining in His love is by keeping His commands just as He has kept the Father's commands and remains in His Father's love. We see how remaining in Him (the vine) is related to remaining in His love and both are effected by obeying His commands. Our love for Jesus is the wellspring of our obedience to Him, as our obedience is the demonstration of the reality of that love and both contribute to remaining and abiding in Him.

There is more; Jesus shares that His own obedience to the Father is the ground of His joy and He promises that those who obey Him will share the same joy. The Son does not give His disciples His joy as a discrete package; He shares His joy insofar as they share His obedience, the obedience that willingly puts death to self-interest. Genuine love for the Son would mean love for fellow believers, that is, loving each other just as Jesus has

loved us. Love for the Son ensures obedience to Him and that obedience is particularly tested by obedience to the new commandment, the command to love one another.

Jesus then calls His disciples ‘friends’ if they do what He commands. This obedience is not what makes them friends, it is what characterizes His friends. The friends of Jesus then are the object of His love and are obedient to Him. As His friends, the disciples will be more informed, more privileged and more comprehending than any believers who came before them. Lest they become proud, Jesus reminds them that it is He who has chosen them and appointed them to bear fruit that will last; it is not because they are better or wiser.

And what is this fruit that will last? Some refer to it as “likeness to Christ” as seen in the fruit of the Spirit. Others link the fruit with the focus on evangelism and mission; the fruit refers to others brought in and incorporated into the vine. Perhaps it refers to both; for only those who resemble Jesus in His likeness and life would be most effective in being His messengers in proclaiming the gospel. We have noted earlier that genuine Christian discipleship characterised by true sacrificial love and service, and this is one of the most potent forms of evangelism. In that sense, the messenger truly reflects the true essence of the message.

Jesus closes the passage by reminding the believers that the means of the fruitfulness for which they have been chosen is prayer in His name. Prayer after all expresses our need to depend entirely on Him for our life and our work.

John 15:18-16:4

This passage continues from the imagery of the true vine and the branches, with the Father as the vine dresser.

Jesus has shared with the disciples the need to remain or abide in the vine, in Him, in order to be fruitful. One may wonder why almost immediately, the Lord refers to being prepared for persecution and hate from the world.

It seems certain that the Lord seeks to communicate to His followers that to remain as fruitful branches in the vine, they must be prepared to experience the hatred of the world. This is so because the world is hostile to Jesus and His teachings; being united with the vines, the believers no longer belong to the world but they belong to Jesus. If the world hates Jesus (and the heavenly Father as well), it is inevitable that they will hate the followers of Jesus. And if they persecuted the Lord Jesus, they will persecute the believers as well.

The world loves its own; through His words and works, Jesus exposes the sin and guilt of the world and also reveals the Father and His coming judgement on those who refuse to repent. This hatred of the world may come from even religious establishment.

D.A. Carson writes:

The most dangerous oppression comes not from careless pagans but from zealous adherents to religious faith and from other ideologies. A sermon was preached when Crammer was burned at the stake...Today we should not be surprised when so-called Christian leaders vilify those of us who stand up for the orthodox teaching of the apostles on doctrinal and ethical issues, Nonetheless, we must not withdraw into religious ghettos. We too belong not to the world but to Jesus. We too have a task to do – to bear fruit. And we too must keep at it.

It is obvious that to be fruitful, we must persevere as disciples of Jesus. We must continue to abide in His Word, in His love and remain faithful to Him in the midst of persecution and hatred from those who hate our Lord. The Lord Jesus has warned the disciples of the hatred and persecution of the world so that they will not caught by surprise when it happens.

Another servant of God, J.C. Ryle writes:

...wherever there have been disciples of Christ, there has always been more or less persecution. They will yet receive a more full accomplishment before the end comes: the last tribulation will probably be marked by special violence and bitterness; it will be a great tribulation (Rev. 714)...no consistency of conduct, however faultless, no kindness and amiability of character,

however striking, will exempt a believer from the world's dislike, so long as he lives. It is foolish to be surprised at this; it is a mere waste of time to murmur at it: it is part of the cross, and we must bear it patiently...To serve Christ in name and form is easy work, and satisfies most people, but to follow Him in faith and life demands more trouble than the generality of men will take about their souls...Mere churchmanship and outward profession are a cheap religion, of course, and cost a man nothing. But real vital Christianity will always bring with it a cross.

What is clear is that following Jesus costs something and may cost life itself. But not following Him means siding with a lost and hateful world. We must always bear this in mind when sharing the gospel; we must warn prospective disciples of these unchanging realities to prevent superficial and spurious conversions and to promote true ones and stability in those who respond positively. Otherwise, we may not be sharing the whole gospel; we may be guilty of just promoting "gospel minus" or even distorted "gospel plus" without giving weight to what Jesus shared in the parable of the sower. We have noted that to remain or abide in Christ is to persevere as His disciples and to remain in His Word. The parable warns of those who listen to the Word of God without hearing it with faith. Faith and perseverance are never separated. To receive the Word of God only with joy is a common sign of someone who may well never really persevere. We truly respond to the message of the gospel only when our hearts experience both joy and sorrow. Rejoicing in the prospect of forgiveness of sins without sorrow for what we are and have been as sinners and rebels to God would imply that the true message of the gospel (which includes the conviction of sin) has not been communicated. Such ones have grasped only half a gospel and half a foundation is no security to us when the winds of persecution begin to howl. If we think that Christian living is all joy and happiness, we are heading for a rude awakening. Finally, the parable warns of the "thorns". We are all familiar with the worries of this life, the feeling that the 'grass is greener on the other side'. These 'thorns' are fatal to the influence of God's Word and the human heart, and will choke it.

But Scriptures remind us that God will honour those who serve Him in perseverance. They will share His glory. God will complete the work He has begun in us, and we will both manifest and enjoy the fullness of fellowship and family life with Him. We will worship Him in love without any hampering from sin nor bodily weakness nor the mind of the flesh. This is the glorious prospect that await all those who abide in Him and persevere in Him until the end.

John 16:5-33

In this final discourse in the upper room, Jesus shared with His disciples much of the work of the Holy Spirit. Our deep appreciation and understanding of this would help us in our outworking as individual believers as well as the Church of God.

Jesus in the previous chapter has explained how He is the true fruit-bearing vine and how His disciples will face the world's hatred and hostility as they persevere in Him. The disciples would be understandably disturbed, knowing that Jesus is about to leave. Jesus now returns to the issue of His departure.

Jesus expressed concerns that the disciples were more self-absorbed in their own loss that they have not asked more thoughtful questions about His going and what it will mean to them. Jesus went on to reiterate that His departure is for their own good and this led on to disclosure of the coming of the Holy Spirit and His work and ministry.

Jesus then revealed the work of the Holy Spirit in the world and His ministry to His disciples. When the Spirit comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgement. With regard to sin, it is the sin of unbelief; a refusal to accept the merits of a divine Redeemer (Jesus) and a rejection of the proposals of reconciliation with God and the remedy offered by Him. He shall convince the world of righteousness, for by His departure, that is, by His death and sufferings, a valid righteousness has been procured for all true believers, an imputed righteousness. The third object of which the world is convinced by the Spirit is judgement. The work of the Son, satisfying every claim of law and justice, terminated Satan's right and reversed his authority acquired by conquest. The prince of the world has been judged and has no more right to retain the world. Believers are thus convinced that they are no more subjects of the tempter and no more bound to obey him. Men in this world can be convinced by the Spirit of this reality if they believe in the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit will lead the disciples into "all truth" and so bring glory to Jesus. In essence, the Holy Spirit will make Jesus known through convincing the world and non-believers of sin, righteousness and judgement and in leading the apostles into all truth; we the believers are to persevere in that truth in a hostile world and thereby bear fruits in the vine. The ministry of the Spirit will ensure true lasting joy and peace for the genuine believers in the face of deep hostility and opposition from the world and the evil one. This experience is always rooted in what the cross has achieved through the departure and sufferings of Jesus and grounded in a new relationship with the Father. With the advent of the Holy Spirit, there will be direct access to the Father in prayer, and direct access to the truth about the Father. The Spirit will show us Christ and glorify Him; Christ reveals the Father to us, for those who have seen Him have seen the Father, and glorifies the Father. We the believers have Christ living in us through the Spirit and also have access to the Father through Christ.

When Jesus shared that the disciples' grief will soon turn to joy; there are those who point to the resurrection of Jesus which will turn their sadness to joy when they see Him.

Others indicate that this may refer to the second coming of Christ; there are convincing suggestions to conclude that it might refer to the coming of the comforter, the Holy Spirit when the disciples will have the joy of 'seeing' Jesus and having Him always in the Spirit even though He may be absent as the man Jesus.

It may be helpful to ponder the implications of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of the believer and the Church at this juncture. The Spirit's work was specially intended to form a MYSTIC UNION with Christ for the application of redemption, and for the INHABITATION of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2). The inmost soul of the redeemed is reserved for Christ's inhabitation by the Spirit, who thus becomes the life of their life, the soul of their soul, in a sense to which any other known union makes no comparison. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit' (1 Cor. 6:17) and the result is so powerful that Christ's Spirit becomes theirs, His holiness their holiness, His joy their joy. By His Spirit our whole person is united to His whole Person. Realise the wonderful implications: when we are united to the Lord Jesus by one Spirit, we obtain a true and actual participation in all that He achieved by His obedience unto death. If Christ satisfied divine justice, we who are united with Him by faith have also satisfied it. When Christ overcame, we overcame; when Christ received perfect acceptance as the Surety, we received the same acceptance in and with Him. Also, as Christ obtained a resurrection life, a life of holiness and joy at God's right hand for ever, we too, who are found in Him have an incipient life of the same nature, a life hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

What about being led by the Spirit? When God promises (Ezek. 36:27): 'I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgements, and do them', we are taught that the Spirit so far anticipates the first tendency or inclination of man as to make him act according to the divine precepts. Take note: God's free grace, and not man's free will, originates the actions and makes all effectual. In like manner, the apostle Paul describes the occurrence of man's activity and God's effectual operation, when He gives absolute priority to the divine power (Phil. 2:13). 'It is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure'. The language proves beyond all doubt that before man either wills or acts in the ways of God, there is in the recesses of the heart a divine operation anticipating our will, and giving effect to our action. The Holy Spirit does not move the hearts of regenerate men by mere power; He moves them by those spiritual powers or graces with which they are now provided. The Spirit who is in Christ without measure is in believers by measure as a Spirit of life; not moving the mind as a stone, or as a wheel, by mere power, but according to the new nature which has been created and formed in it. To lose sight of this is to ignore the fact that Christ is the source of the Spirit of life, and the Christian has to add to his faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and all the various excellences which are perfect in Christ Jesus (2 Peter 1:5). Hence, they who are renewed after the Lord's image have, according to their measure, a certain spiritual power, a certain law of their mind, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which enables them to overcome and triumph in their Lord (Rom. 8:2).

John 17

John 17 has been described as the High Priestly prayer. This is perhaps the longest prayer of the Lord Jesus recorded for us and it reveals what is upon His heart. In that sense, we are 'standing on holy ground' as we examine this prayer that shows us what truly matters to Him and His Father.

Jesus' main priority as He goes towards His death, is that His Father should accomplish His eternal plan, reversing the effects of the Fall and calling together a people who will belong to Him forever.

In verses 1-5, He prays for the completion of His ministry. In verses 6-19, He prays for the completion of His apostles' ministry. In verses 20-26, He prays for the impact of the ministry of all the believers who come to believe in Him through the ministry of the apostles. This would include the ministry of the Church. In particular, He prays for the unity of the apostles and the believers and He asks for all the believers to be with Him and to see His glory, the glory He has before the creation of the world.

In verses 1-5, Jesus asks the Father to glory Him, that He may glorify the Father. He prays that the Father should acknowledge His work by returning Him to His position of heavenly glory. We know that the glorification of the Son would be through the cross; in this prayer, Jesus speaks as if the events of the cross are already accomplished. This reveals His utter confidence in the Father and the Spirit to see Him through His greatest hour in triumph. Jesus seeks in His glorification nothing less than the glory of His Father. When Jesus petitions His Father to glorify the Son, He does so on the basis of the Father's plan to give all authority to the Son as a function of the Son's triumphant cross-work and exaltation. Jesus asks that He might be glorified in order that He might in turn glorify the Father – the Father is glorified before human beings as they are brought to faith in the Son and in the One who sent Him, and gain eternal life. Notice that knowing God is eternal life – it is not the way to eternal life. Just as being shut out from a relationship with God is central to the Fall, so entering back into a relationship with God is central to the experience of eternal life now. Jesus' prayer is that God's glory should be manifest through the achieving of His eternal plan to reverse the effects of the Fall by calling together a people who know Him through His Son.

Jesus then prays that His Father would accomplish His plan through the completion of His apostles' ministry. Essentially, He prays for His apostles, affirming them as being authentic and reliable (although he was aware of their weaknesses), and He prays that the apostles may be protected and set apart for the Father's use. The apostles belong to God, they have been given to Jesus by God and God has been fully revealed to them by Jesus. They are now God's people who know the only true God and Jesus Christ; because they no longer belong to the world, the world hates them, and yet they need to persevere in the world. So far Jesus has kept them and protected them on earth (with the exception of Judas Iscariot); now that He is going away, He asks the Father to protect them in accordance with His name.

In His prayer, Jesus specifically mentions the evil one besides the world. Lest we forget that spiritual warfare and the evil one are not just imaginary, this should jolt us to be conscious that the evil one relentlessly seeks to destroy God's people and work, and that he operates through the world and through our flesh or "old man". Jesus prays also for the unity of the apostles and this prayer for unity also extends to all those who will believe through their ministry. It is not just a unity with each other; it is primarily a unity with the Father and the Son. The Father and Son's unity is a unity of purpose and intention, guaranteed by the Son's sacrificial and obedient self-giving and the Father's eternal plan to bring about a reversal of the Fall. It is not a sentimental unity that comes about by abandoning the truth of God.

Jesus turns His focus on the impact of all believers' ministry in His prayer. In praying for their unity, Jesus' desire is that the world should see His people's unity in the truth as it is worked out in relationships within the church, and that people in the world would, on account of this, come to believe the message of the gospel for themselves.

He then prays that they may go to dwell with Him in glory for ever. Our understanding of this glory would help us tremendously to persevere on this earth and in our walk with God in His mission. The final return of Christ which will be marked by the resurrection of the dead and the consummation of all things is the event which is marked by His glory. God's purpose is to save men and women – and men and women enjoy bodily, not merely spiritual existence. The work of applying the finished work of Christ is therefore not complete until the day when the resurrection of our bodies has been accomplished by God.

He will come to be glorified in the very world in which He was humiliated. Then every knee shall bow to Him and willingly or unwillingly confess His Lordship. His glory will be seen and He will be glorified. At that very moment Christians will share in His glory, since they cannot ever be separated from Him. This will take place in the experience of the whole Church at the same time. On that day we shall all together share in the glorification of Jesus, and our glorification with Him. We will all be transformed to be like Christ.

The day of the Christian's glorification will also be the day when the universe in which he lives will be transformed. Just as the believer will be changed, so too his environment must be changed to suit his new condition. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:21). God will then complete the work He has begun in us, and we will both manifest and enjoy the fulness of fellowship and family life with Him. Neither sin nor bodily weakness nor the mind of the flesh will hamper us in expressing the totality of our love for Him in worship, or the depths of our loyalty to Him in obedience and service. It is a glorious prospect!

No man can believe he has such a glorious destiny when he will be changed into the perfect likeness of Christ, without living a life that is already changed by that

prospect; it encourages and challenges us to live the Christian life and to persevere through the tribulations in order to enter into that glory.

Our hope is real; our hope is glorious. Let us therefore not lose heart but rejoice that the prayer of our Lord Jesus for us in John 17 will definitely come to pass.

John 18-19:16

We now move on from the upper room discourse to the narrative of events surrounding the plot to put Jesus to death. As we look at the development of this narrative, we need to be conscious of the theological explanations given earlier on in the previous chapters.

John 18:1-27 shows Jesus in full control of the situation; He deliberately hands Himself over to those who came to arrest Him in order to drink the cup of the Father's wrath against the sin of humankind. The drinking of the cup of God's wrath brings out the idea of penal substitution – His death on behalf of the people, taking the penalty for the sin of mankind. The sacrificial substitution, satisfying the wrath of God against the sinner, is known as propitiation.

Notice that Jesus knew what was going to happen and He took the initiative in giving Himself up for His 'sheep' and protecting them from those who came to arrest Him, fulfilling His promise that He shall lose none of them that His Father has given Him, except Judas Iscariot. Jesus' power and authority were displayed when He announced Himself in divine language and the armed soldiers and officials fell to the ground, powerless.

Three times He declared 'I am He' in the narrative, contrasted with Peter's denial of Him three times subsequently. Peter wanted to take physical action on behalf of Jesus and he was told to put away his sword; Peter has not understood what was going on and he obviously also did not understand himself fully despite his declaration of willingness to die for Jesus. The other disciples also declared their willingness to die for the master; but all deserted Him when He was arrested.

The subsequent narrative reveals Him being falsely accused; He appears powerless, standing bound in front of those who will resort to physical abuse in the absence of objective proof. It appears to be a desperate picture but in reality, Jesus is advancing towards His death, in full control, in order to fulfil His mission as the 'Lamb of God'; the divine Son of God is giving Himself up voluntarily (Isaiah 53) and God has chosen to give His Son on behalf of the world.

John 18:28-19:16 reveals two themes throughout the trial of Jesus: firstly the kingship of Jesus, the innocent suffering servant; and secondly the exposure of the motives for rejecting this king.

John focuses on the fact that Jesus' kingdom was not materialistic and earthly in the gospel and here during the trial, Jesus Himself acknowledged His kingship and pointed that His kingdom is from above.

We see the irony of the Jews' situation; in order to eat the earthly Passover, the Jews give up the opportunity of partaking the heavenly Passover. It was Passover time during the trial and the true "Lamb of God" was about to be sacrificed. They were concerned about ritual uncleanness for the Passover; yet the true Passover Lamb was about to be slaughtered by their plotting and engineering and the Passover itself is about to be rendered redundant.

Three times Pilate announced that Jesus is innocent and three times, the Jews demanded that He should die anyway. Here again, we see the irony of the Jews' situation; in giving up the heavenly king, they affirm their loyalty to an earthly king, Caesar in this case. Jesus had already taught His disciples that He would die by crucifixion (12:32-33) and it was only the Romans who could kill Jesus in this way. Notice how the Jews knew this and they clamoured for Jesus to be crucified by Pilate and asked instead to release Barabbas, an insurgent, knowing full well that Jesus was innocent whilst Barabbas was the one who was guilty of insurgency. The Jews were not interested in justice and they will sacrifice all logic to get Jesus killed.

Jesus' kingdom is established by truth and His subjects enter the kingdom by listening to the truth He teaches about God. The Jews' perversion of justice and their insistence that Jesus be killed expose their real position that they were not on the side of truth. Pilate and the Roman officials are also implicated in the rejection of Jesus, since they have heard His claim to be the king of a heavenly kingdom. We must realise that the rejection of Jesus means forfeiting eternal life in heaven and giving allegiance to earthly masters and the evil one. Such a rejection means one is not on the side of truth and not part of His kingdom. Interestingly, Pilate muttered what truth is, and immediately dismissed the desire to find out what truth really is. Instead, for fear that he might get on the right side of Caesar for not 'punishing' Jesus who claimed to be king, he knowingly sent an innocent man to be scourged and crucified. The Jews had accused him of not honouring Caesar who they claimed was their only king.

We must affirm that Jesus is God's king; He is innocent but He is being despised, rejected, oppressed and afflicted by a people intent on rejecting His heavenly rule. The gentiles are also implicated in this guilt; in fact, the whole human race is represented in the rejection of God's Messiah.

Meanwhile, God's heavenly king was led away to be crucified on the morning following the Passover meal. Remember, the trial of Jesus is in fact the trial before Jesus; all of us are on trial before the heavenly king. Will we be declared guilty or innocent?

John 19:17-42

The passage focuses on the crucifixion of Jesus. We should read this not with a sense of failure and tragedy but with a sense of awe and triumph as we see God's eternal purpose of rescuing His people accomplished in history at the cross.

God's purpose was sovereignly accomplished despite the great effort of Satan and the people to thwart it. The crucifixion of Jesus is not an unforeseen disaster; God foreordained it before the beginning of time and revealed it in the Old Testament. Notice how again and again John quoted that "this happened that the scripture might be fulfilled":

verse 24 – 'They divided my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.' (Psalm 22:18)

verse 28 – 'I am thirsty.' (Psalm 22:15)

verse 36 – 'Not one of His bones will be broken'. (Exod. 12:46; Num.9:12)

One of the requirements for the Passover Lamb, whose blood marked out the Israelite people for rescue out of Egypt was that its bones should not be broken.

verse 37 – 'They will look on the one they have pierced'. (Zechariah 12:10)

John is reminding the readers that every detail of the crucifixion is happening according to God's explicit will; this is the means by which He is accomplishing His eternal purpose and solving humanity's greatest problem, which is sin.

John is also reminding us who Jesus really is. Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It reads: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. It was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. Pilate appears to be taunting the Jews by declaring Jesus to be their king. Pilate was trying to get his 'revenge' on the Jews for putting him in a corner and threatening him that he would be reported to Caesar if he did not comply with their wishes. Notice however the sharp irony, for in reality, Pilate was proclaiming Jesus' kingship to all nations; Pilate's words cause him to serve God's purpose unwittingly as he confirms Jesus' kingship.

In verses 25-27, as he hangs dying, Jesus ensures that His mother is cared for as He instructed John the beloved disciple to care for Mary. John wanted the reader to know that he was there to witness the crucifixion. In verse 35, John emphasised that he saw the incidence with the spear and his testimony can be relied upon. He was witness to the fact that Jesus was truly dead and the soldiers therefore did not break His legs but instead pierced His side with a spear. This is most important, for the fact of Jesus' physical death

is central both to His being the true Passover Lamb (the lamb must die) and to the possibility that He should be physically raised from the dead.

The fact that it is Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus who retrieve the body of Jesus gives us hope that at least some of the Jewish establishment will turn to Him even after widespread rejection.

John's testimony as a witness is principally so that we may believe. As we read the account of the crucifixion, do we just read it as a historical event? Do we read it with the recognition of God's eternal sovereign rescue plan for humanity through Jesus' death on the cross; do we see how wonderfully the Old Testament is being fulfilled in every detail; do we realise that His death is not a failure but He was actually dying in the place of God's people as the Passover Lamb, achieving their rescue and opening for them a fountain of forgiveness; as God's people, do we acknowledge this and know this by faith and do we continue to believe with praise, thanksgiving and worship?

John 20

The chapter focuses on the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus.

In this chapter, eye-witnesses dominates the narrative; John shared this so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in His name.

The first witness mentioned here was Mary Magdalene; she saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance of the tomb and she ran to inform Peter and John. In those days, the testimony of women was not admissible in court; yet John recorded this to honour the status of women as the first one noted to testify of the empty tomb was a woman. We are reminded that in Christ, there is neither male or female, but we are all one in Him.

The other two witnesses mentioned here were Peter and John. They saw the strips of linen lying in the tomb and the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head lying in a separate place. Recall the raising of Lazarus and he came out of the tomb with his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth round his face; Jesus told those around to take off the grave clothes. It would be difficult for Lazarus to remove these clothes himself. Here, we are told that the linen and cloth were lying in the tomb but the body of Jesus was absent. Jesus' resurrected body apparently passed through His grave-clothes, spices and all, in much the same way that He later appeared in a locked room where the disciples were. John recorded that when he saw the empty tomb and the grave-clothes, he believed. In Jewish law the witnesses of two men establishes credible evidence (Deut. 19:15) and Peter and John provide such credibility.

This evidence, when taken with the rest of the chapter confirms that the body seen by Mary Magdalene and the disciples was the same physical Jesus who had been dead and buried. The resurrection of Jesus was a physical, bodily resurrection, not just some kind of 'spiritual experience' or 'imagining' that the disciples were caught up with.

The theme of 'witness leading to belief' appears twice in this chapter (verses 8-9 and verses 29-30). Mary Magdalene remained outside the tomb crying after the two disciples left. She saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. In the other gospels, the angels told Mary that Jesus has been resurrected; we have here the divine witness from the angels. The resurrected Jesus revealed Himself to Mary and told her to pass on the message to Jesus' apostles that He is returning to His Father. Jesus' message about returning to the Father would have reminded the disciples of obtaining forgiveness for His people; this was how the gate of heaven was to be opened, this was how a place would be prepared for them in heaven. Jesus promised that the apostles would see 'heaven opened and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man'!

In verses 19 to 23, Jesus greeted His disciples 'Peace be with you'. He promises His disciples of peace in a world that hates Him and them too. Through His death and resurrection He has now obtained forgiveness for them; He has 'overcome the world' and secured their place in heaven. As they remain in Him, they will now experience the peace He has promised them, with His Holy Spirit dwelling within them.

'Receive the Holy Spirit' and His breathing on them are best understood as a kind of acted parable pointing forward to the full endowment still to come on the day of Pentecost and like the foot-washing which anticipated the spiritual washing achieved through the cross, Jesus' action is symbolic.

The response of Thomas in verse 28 provides a model response for the believer to follow. Thomas' doubt turns to belief that Jesus is Lord and God. This is what the believer should make of the resurrection. We are here reminded that real favour with God does not depend upon being able to see Him but on trusting the words of the apostles. Further signs and revelation are unnecessary; for these words alone are sufficient to bring someone to eternal life through the working of the Holy Spirit. For us, faith comes not by sight, but from what is heard (or read), and what is heard comes by the Word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

John 21

The chapter begins with Peter and six other disciples going fishing in the sea of Galilee. They fished all night but caught nothing. Jesus appeared to them on the shore the next morning but they did not recognise Him initially. He instructed them to throw down their net on the right side and almost immediately they caught a large number of fish. John then expressed recognition of the Lord Jesus and Peter got off the boat and jumped into the sea to get to Jesus.

When they all finally reached the shore, they found food (fish and bread) prepared for them by the Lord and He invited them subsequently to have breakfast and also to bring some of the fish they had caught.

Some have queried whether the disciples' going fishing indicates that they have forgotten their role as Jesus' disciples but this is not clear. The common interpretation by many is that their subsequent hauling of a large number of fish points to their initial calling to be fishers of men and that they will henceforth harvest a large number of 'fish'; however, although 'sheep' and 'fruit' on the vine have been used symbolically to refer to disciples, 'fish' is mentioned only at the feeding of the five thousand with bread and fish. It is possible that the incidence of the feeding of the five thousand is a sign John intended to bring back to memory for the readers and this points to Jesus as the bread of life.

But what chapter 21 is emphasising is probably the reinstatement and re-commissioning of the apostles to be His under-shepherds. Peter was particularly singled out as representing the apostles and also because he especially needed the assurance of this re-commissioning by the Lord after his denial of the Lord three times. What is interesting is to note that Jesus first fed the disciples with bread and fish (including those from the miraculous catch) before they were told to feed His people,

Peter was asked three times whether he loves the Lord and after he replied in the positive, the Lord Jesus instructed him to feed His sheep and to care for them. Feeding His sheep means teaching God's people about the words and works of Jesus. Jesus' key priority in the last days (the period between His resurrection and His return) is the feeding of His sheep through the words and works of the apostles. This centres on the teachings of the apostles through the Word of God and Jesus revealed in the Scriptures and the personal teachings of the Lord Jesus. If Jesus' priority is the feeding of His sheep, we must make sure that we feed on His Word ourselves and also help others to feed on His Word. The chief concern of the Lord is that His Word should go out to His people. At the same time, we must remember that the people we teach are His, and not ours to rule over, and that the teachings are accurate and a faithful communication of God's revelation.

In this chapter, Jesus revealed that Peter and John would have different paths to take as His apostles; Peter would glorify God by following Christ and feeding His people to the point where he must die a martyr's death but John would not die in the same way but would remain to feed the sheep by recording for them the words and works of Jesus. Each

will walk the path allocated by the Lord but all must be prepared to follow the Lord even to the point of death. Faithfulness is required for stewards and servants of God.

As we ponder upon the calling of God's people to feed His sheep as under-shepherds, it is helpful to soberly reflect on the seriousness of such a calling.

Reflect on Jeremiah 23:1-2:

Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declared the Lord. "Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: 'Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done,' declares the Lord.

All of God's people have a role to play in the spreading of His Word to those who have not yet heard His voice; each of us have gifts, given by Him, whether it be sharing, teaching or proclaiming His Word. If God has commissioned us to do this, to neglect it is tantamount to failing to care for God's people and is considered as 'evil' and unfaithfulness. We can expect God to look upon this failure as something serious in His sight.

Feeding His sheep involves not just teaching His Word; it also implies caring for His people on His behalf. It reminds us from John 10 that the false shepherd will run away in the face of danger and care only for himself; the genuine shepherd will be willing to protect the sheep, even with his life.

Jesus' priority in these days should also be our priority. Feeding the sheep did not stop with the apostles; it is passed on to subsequent followers and disciples of the Lord Jesus. John 21 explicitly reveals that the motivation to feed the sheep is love for the Lord Jesus. It is not a job which demands a payment; it is not an obligation to please someone above us in the hierarchy of the church or Christian group; it is nothing less than love for the Lord.