

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

General Observations:

The Gospel according to John and the Synoptic Gospels:

The fourth book of the New Testament is in most Greek manuscript simply known as "According to John." This links this gospel to the three preceding ones. But it is obvious that John's Gospel is distinct from what is known as "The Synoptic Gospels."

If we would leave John's Gospel out of our Bible, we would deprive ourselves of a large part of truth that is indispensable to our understanding of the person of Jesus Christ and of the way of salvation. John teaches us lessons that are not found in the other Gospels. *The Pulpit Commentary*, in its extensive introduction to the Gospel of John, highlights the following points that are representative of John's teaching, none of which are emphasized in a similar fashion in the other Gospels:

- God is Spirit
- God is called "the Father"
- The teaching about "The Father and the Son"
- The teaching about God and the Logos
- The Word made flesh
- The Son of God, the Christ, the Son of Man
- The Spirit and the Trinity
- The world as the creature of God
- The world of men
- The prince of this world
- Salvation of the world

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Exploring the Book*, introduces the Gospel of John as follows: "A whole volume might be filled with the encomiums which scholars and saints have written on this 'Gospel according to John.' Is there anywhere a more exquisite compound of infinite profundity and lingual simplicity? Was there ever a sublimer subject more ingenuously interpreted? But its priceless preciousness, of course, lies in its Divine revealings and spiritual values. Gleaming over its portal is the inscription: 'No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.' The Greek verb-form here translated as 'declared' is *exegesato*, from which comes our English word 'exegesis.' It means that in the visible Jesus the invisible God is *brought forth* to view. The incomprehensible concept, 'God' is objectively elucidated before us. The very *heart* of the Eternal is livingly 'exegeted,' for the only begotten Son comes even from 'the bosom of the Father.' ... John's *raison d'être*, also, flashes like a torch all the way through his Gospel and finds final expression at the end: 'That ye might *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name' (xx. 31). The three synoptists simply set forth the facts, and leave them to make their own impression on the reader. Not so John: all is statedly selected and directed to the securing of a verdict. He is concerned not only with the facts but with the *issues*."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia observes the following regarding the relationship between the Gospel of John and the Synoptics: "In relation to the Synoptics, the differences are great, but more surprising is the fact that the points of contact between these Gospels and the Fourth Gospel are so few. The critics... are unanimous that the writer or the school who compiled the Johannine writings was indebted to the Synoptics for almost all the facts embodied in the Fourth Gospel. Apart, however, from the Passion Week, only two points of contact are found so obvious that they cannot be doubted, namely, the feeding of the 5,000, and the walking on the sea (John 6:4-21). The healing of the child of the royal officer (4:46-53) can scarcely be identified with the healing of the centurion's servant (Mt, Lk); but even if the identification were allowed, this is all we have in the Fourth Gospel of the events of the ministry in Galilee. There is a ministry in Galilee, but the earlier ministry in Judea and in Galilee began before John was cast into prison (3:24), and it has no parallel in the Synoptics. In fact, the Fourth Gospel assumes the existence of the other three, and does not anew convey the knowledge which can be gathered from them. It takes its own way, makes its own selections, and sets these forth from its own point of view. It has its own principle of selection: that plainly indicated in the passage already quoted. The scenes depicted, the works done, the words spoken, and the reflections made by the writer, are all directed toward the aim of enabling the readers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In the writer's view this would issue in their obtaining life in His name."

The Author of the Gospel:

None of the Gospel writers identify themselves by name. The Apostle John, however, introduces himself in a way that, at the same time, reveals and hides his identity. Five times in this Gospel we find the expression “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”¹ The Gospel itself is very clear that this is the Apostle John the writer of the book. We read: “This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down.”²

The peculiar wording indicates, first of all, that Jesus was the source of the love John experienced. It also makes clear that John felt himself loved by Christ in a particular way. The question is whether this means that John was, in fact, Jesus’ favorite disciple or whether it was John’s subjective conviction that Christ loved him more than the other disciples. Although it is true that, in human relations there seems to be a chemistry that bonds some people immediately and others more slowly or never, I doubt that Jesus had favorites among His disciples and that He would bestow His particular love upon one of them to the neglect of the others. I believe that John singled himself out because he had opened his heart for the love of Christ in a way that set him apart from the other disciples. John testified himself, at the occasion of the foot washing that Jesus demonstrated His love for all the disciples without any distinction. We read: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”³ *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* allows for the translation of “to the utmost degree,” instead of “the full extent” in connection with Christ’s act of love towards His disciples.

It is this knowing of being loved that makes John’s Gospel the deep and wonderful document of God’s love for the world. John’s experience of Jesus’ love as an exclusive relationship allowed him to reach deeper than any of the other Gospel writers. It permitted him to write a book that stands as a monument of grace and truth that is unparalleled in the Bible and in any other world literature.

We do not know for sure when John met Jesus for the first time. Most commentators suppose that he was originally a disciple of John the Baptist and that together with Andrew, he was present when Jesus was identified by John as “the Lamb of God.”⁴ *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states about the words “Two of his disciples”: “One of them was Andrew, John 1:40, and it is very likely that John himself was the other; in everything in which he might receive honor he studiously endeavors to conceal his own name.” And *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “Silence regarding the name of the other points to the writer of the Gospel, who withholds his name out of modesty.” If this supposition is correct, John was one of the first disciples to meet Jesus. He became a fulltime follower after the miraculous catch of fish to which Peter reacted so strongly with his confession of being “a sinful man.” In that context John and James are mentioned as Peter’s partners.⁵

The Synoptics tell us that John was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James.⁶ Jesus gave John and James the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder.⁷ *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* writes about the following about this nickname: “[Sons of thunder] A Hebraism for thunderers; probably so named because of their zeal and power in preaching the Gospel. The term Boanerges is neither Hebrew nor Syriac. Calmet and others think that there is reason to believe that the Greek transcribers have not copied it exactly. Bineey... ra’am..., which the ancient Greeks would pronounce Beneregem, and which means sons of thunder, was probably the appellative used by our Lord: or beniy re’es, sons of tempest, which comes nearest to the Boanerges of the evangelist. Jerome, on Dan 1, gives bineey ra’am (which he writes Benereem, softening the sound of the Hebrew letter `ayin) as the more likely reading; and Luther, supposing our Lord spoke in Hebrew, gives the proper Hebrew term above mentioned, which he writes Bnehargem. Some think that the reason why our Lord gave this appellative to the sons of Zebedee was their desire to bring fire down from heaven, i.e. a storm of thunder and lightning, to overturn and consume a certain Samaritan village, the inhabitants of which would not receive their Master. See the account in Luke 9:53-54. It was a very usual thing among the Jews to give surnames, which signified some particular quality or excellence, to their rabbis.” The nickname Jesus gave to John and his brother suggest that they were both very passionate men who easily lost their temper. In the case of John, the Holy Spirit directed this fiery trait into an unparalleled passion of love.

The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary writes the following about the Apostle John: “John, with his brother James, Simon, and Andrew, were called at the same time to be ‘fishers of men’ (Mark 1:17-20; Luke 5:10). John, with Peter and James, was distinguished above the other apostles, entering more fully into the Master’s feelings and

¹ John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20

² John 21:24

³ John 13:1

⁴ See John 1:35,36

⁵ See Luke 5:8-11

⁶ Matt. 4:21

⁷ Mark 3:17

plans, and receiving in return His confidence and love. Mention is made of John at the restoration of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31); at the ordination of the twelve apostles (3:17), where he and his brother received the surname Boanerges ('sons of thunder') from Jesus; at the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:35-37; 8:51); at the transfiguration (Matt 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28); rebuking one who cast out devils in the Lord's name because he was not one of their company (9:49); seeking to call down fire from heaven upon a village of the Samaritans (9:54); joining with his mother and James in asking for the highest places in the kingdom of the Master (Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45); with Jesus upon the Mount of Olives when He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem (13:3); sent by the Master to prepare, with Peter, the Passover (Luke 22:8); asking Jesus, at the Last Supper, who would betray Him (John 13:23-26); with Peter and James in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-33). When the betrayal occurred, Peter and John followed from a distance and, through the personal acquaintance between the latter and Caiaphas, gained admittance into the palace (John 18:15-16). John was the only disciple present at the crucifixion and was appointed by Jesus to care for Mary (19:26-27)."

John was obviously a member of the inner circle of disciples. King David had a group of three heroes who had distinguished themselves above everyone else. Their names are given as Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, and Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. The Bible tells us about them: "These are the names of David's mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered [at Pas Dammim] for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead. Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory."⁸ About the other members of David's bodyguard we read that none of them measured up to the stature of "the three."⁹ Our Lord may have had the paradigm of David's men in mind when He chose Peter, John, and James to be His most intimate companions.

The Date John's Gospel was written:

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary writes about the date: "The date of the fourth gospel is to be assigned between A.D. 85 and 95. A papyrus bit containing two verses of the gospel of John has been discovered; it belongs to the Papyrus Rylands and is dated c. A.D. 140. This bit of evidence suggests that the fourth gospel was in existence as early as the first half of the second century and at that time was already in wide use."

The Language and Style of the Gospel:

We do not know if John knew Greek. He may have written his Gospel in Aramaic. This would mean that the present text is a translation. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states: "The language is pure Greek, but the thought is Hebraic, especially the mode of connecting sentences by conjunctions, 'and,' 'but,' 'then,' etc. The periodic sentences of the logical Paul, and John's simplicity of style, clothing the profoundest thoughts, answer to their respective characters. His characteristic phrases are testimony or witness, glory, the truth, light, darkness, eternal life, abide, the world, sin, the true (i.e. genuine, alethinous ...) God, the Word, the only-begotten Son, love, to manifest, to be begotten or born of God, pass from death, the Paraclete or Comforter, flesh, spirit, above, beneath, the living water, the bread of life. Authorized Gospel terms were most needed in the matured age of the church when John wrote, and were adopted by John from Jesus Himself. Peculiar to John are 'verily, verily' (Amen, Amen) beginning a sentence (others use it at the end of a sentence, Jesus alone at the beginning), John 1:51; 'little children' (John 13:33), as in 1 John; 'in the name' (John 5:43), i.e. representing the person; 'lay down life' (John 10:11,17)."

The fact that John uses the Hebrew words "Amen, Amen" as an introduction to Jesus' major pronouncements suggests that he may have rendered Jesus' style more precisely than the other Gospel writers. The use of the "amens" elevates Jesus' words to the level of an oath, a divine dictum upon which we can build our trust and security. In most modern translations, the solemnity of the words is lost. The NIV renders every instance with "I tell you the truth." The KJV uses the words "Verily, verily." The NKJV: "Most assuredly." But none of these convey the powerful impact of Jesus' pronouncements. The very fact that Jesus places His "amens" at the beginning of the phrase is significant. An "amen" at the end indicates that the hearer agrees with what is said. Jesus uses His "amens" to establish truth in a world that is lost because it has believed the lie of Satan.

⁸ II Sam. 23:8-12

⁹ See e.g. II Sam. 23:23

One of the most outstanding features of John's Gospel is the rendering of Jesus' "I AM's." They refer to God's revelation of Himself to Moses at the burning bush. We read in Exodus: "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ' 'I AM has sent me to you.' ' " ¹⁰ It is from those words that the name YHWH is derived, the Name which the Jews did not allow themselves to pronounce. Jesus' use of the words "I AM" had the same force as in the theophany in Exodus. There are eight "I AM" statements in this Gospel. They are:

- I am the bread of life (6:35),
- I am the light of the world (8:12),
- ...before Abraham was, I AM (8:58)
- I am the door of the sheep (10:7),
- I am the good shepherd (10:11),
- I am the resurrection and the life (11:25),
- I AM, the way, the truth, and the life (14:6),
- I am the vine (15:5).

Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary states: "In each of these sayings the 'I' is emphatic in Greek."

The Text:

From *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* we copy the following outline of John's Gospel:

Part One: The Incarnation of the Son of God	(1:1-18)
I. The Deity of Christ	1:1-2
II. The Preincarnate Work of Christ	1:3-5
III. The Forerunner of Christ	1:6-8
IV. The Rejection of Christ	1:9-11
V. The Acceptance of Christ	1:12-13
VI. The Incarnation of Christ	1:14-18
Part Two: The Presentation of the Son of God	(1:19--4:54)
I. The Presentation of Christ by John the Baptist	1:19-34
II. The Presentation of Christ to John's Disciples	1:35-51
III. The Presentation of Christ in Galilee	2:1-12
IV. The Presentation of Christ in Judea	2:13--3:36
V. The Presentation of Christ in Samaria	4:1-42
VI. The Presentation of Christ in Galilee	4:43-54
Part Three: The Opposition to the Son of God	(5:1--12:50)
I. The Opposition at the Feast in Jerusalem	5
II. The Opposition during Passover Time in Galilee	6
III. The Opposition at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem	7:1--10:21
IV. The Opposition at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem	10:22-42
V. The Opposition at Bethany	11:1--12:11
VI. The Opposition at Jerusalem	12:12-50
Part Four: The Preparation of the Disciples	(13:1--17:26)
I. The Preparation in the Upper Room	13:1--14:31
II. The Preparation on the Way to the Garden	15:1--17:26
Part Five: The Crucifixion and Resurrection	(18:1--21:25)
I. The Rejection of Christ	18:1--19:16

¹⁰ Ex. 3:14

II.	The Crucifixion of Christ	19:17-37
III.	The Burial of Christ	19:38-42
IV.	The Resurrection of Christ	20:1-10
V.	The Appearances of Christ	20:11--21:25

Part One: The Incarnation of the Son of God (1:1-18)

I. The Deity of Christ 1:1-2

The Prologue

We are familiar with Paul's mention of "the last trumpet." In connection with the resurrection of the dead, he speaks about "the trumpet call of God," and "the last trumpet."¹¹ If there is going to be a "last trumpet," it means that there was a first trumpet also. We could say that in this Prologue to John's Gospel, John sounds the sound of the first trumpet. It takes us back to the deepest depths of eternity. It touches the essence of the mystery: Jesus, the Son of God the Father. Unlike Luke's Gospel in which Jesus is called "the son of Adam, the son of God,"¹² John does not speak of son-ship in the sense of physical descent from Adam but of the oneness of being of the two Person of the Deity. The Word was God!

The wonder of John's Prologue is that his conclusions about the deity of Christ are based upon his observations of Christ as a human being. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."¹³

The name "Prologue" in itself is misleading. The first eighteen verses of John's Gospel are not an introduction to what he is going to say; they are his main statement. The rest of the book is an illustration of the truth expounded here.

John refers to the moment of creation with the words "in the beginning." In contrast to this enormous process of creation in which all that exists finds its origin, John places the word "was" as referring to the Word. "Was" points to the condition of the Word as not being subject to the universal birth of all else that exists. This "was" points to the eternal existence of the Word on either side of the "beginning."

"The Word," the *Logos*, which is the word used to refer to the Second Person of the Deity, is not a term John invented himself. The Word of God, as well as the wisdom of God, is personified poetically in the Old Testament. We read: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth."¹⁴ And the Book of Proverbs speaks about God's wisdom as a person: "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?"¹⁵ The *Logos* in John's Gospel is not the same concept as the Jewish philosophical term used by Philo of Alexandria. *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament* states about Logos: "John's standpoint is that of the Old Testament and not that of the Stoics nor even of Philo who uses the term Logos ..., but not John's conception of personal pre-existence."

The word *Logos* speaks both of the thought that is expressed as of the form in which this is done. It refers to God's being as well as to His revelation of Himself. The very fact that the Word is eternal means that God's being never was a closed entity that existed without self-revelation. Revelation has always been part of God's being, otherwise the Word could not be called eternal.

The concept of "Word" is a mystery to us. We use words as vehicles to express thoughts and emotions. For us, the word is a thought or a feeling translated into sound. We even use letters to give form to the word in writing. Words and meaning, however, are not always synonymous. As a matter of fact, we use more words that are devoid of meaning than words that express meaning or that come close to expressing it. Shakespeare captured the problem beautifully when, in *Hamlet*, Hamlet answers Polonius' question: "What are thou reading my lord?" with "words, words, words." The image the term "word" evokes in us, is almost as far removed from the original *logos* as the original image of God in man is removed from the present character of sinful man.

In the phrase "the Word was with God," the Greek word translated "with" is *pros*. *Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary* tells us that *pros* is "a preposition of direction." It suggests forward movement toward some object or

¹¹ I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:52

¹² Luke 3:38

¹³ vs. 14

¹⁴ Ps. 33:6

¹⁵ See Prov. ch. 8 and 9

person and it defines the destination of the relation.” It speaks of the intimacy and unity of being between the Father and the Son.

The repetition of the words “He was with God in the beginning” gives this prologue its solemn and magnificent character. Before John retells the creation story, he shows us how complete and perfect the situation was even before anything was created. It is as if he wants to suggest that the creation contributed essentially nothing to the revelation of God but that it was a mere blossoming of this revelation as it had always existed throughout eternity.

II. The Preincarnate Work of Christ

1:3-5

Verse 3 elaborates the deep mystery of what is said in the Genesis account of creation: “And God said...”¹⁶ This mystery that caused the universe to thicken into atoms out of which all that is observable is constructed, finds its origin in the Word of God, in the Son, Jesus Christ. No material or spiritual thing exists without Him.

In verse 3 John speaks about creation and in verse 4 about “life” and “light.” We may conclude from this that verse 3 speaks particularly about the creation of matter and verse 4 about a spiritual creation. As human beings, we not only owe the existence of our bodies to Him, but our very life consists *in* Him. It is the fact that we come from Him and exist in Him that makes us into beings who have the gift of reasoning.

“Light” has a moral connotation in John’s Prologue. It is the light that shines upon the path we follow through life. This light provides both sight and insight. It contains the whole complex of moral choices, of choosing good and rejecting evil. It means that even our choice of good, our following of the right path, our insight in this life is connected with our life in God, with Jesus Christ.

Verse 5 states: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.” The second part of this verse has been rendered differently in various versions. The NKJV translates it with: “the darkness did not comprehend it.” TLB reads: “the darkness can never extinguish it.” The RSV renders it: “the darkness has not overcome it.” The Greek uses the words *ou katelaben*. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this with: “Prevented it not-hindered it not, says Mr. Wakefield, who adds the following judicious note:—‘Even in the midst of that darkness of ignorance and idolatry which overspread the world, this light of divine wisdom was not totally eclipsed: the Jewish nation was a lamp perpetually shining to the surrounding nations; and many bright luminaries, among the pagan, were never wanting in just and worthy notions of the attributes and providence of God’s wisdom; which enabled them to shine in some degree, though but as lights in a dark place, 2 Peter 1:19. Compare Acts 14:17; 17:28-29.’”

In *Barnes’ Notes*, we read: “This word means ‘admitted’ it not, or ‘received’ it not. The word ‘comprehend,’ with us, means to ‘understand.’ This is not the meaning of the original. The darkness did not ‘receive’ or ‘admit’ the rays of light; the shades were so thick that the light could not penetrate them; or, to drop the figure, men were so ignorant, so guilty, so debased, that they did not appreciate the value of his instructions; they despised and rejected him. And so it is still. The great mass of men, sunk in sin, will not receive his teachings, and be enlightened and saved by him. Sin always blinds the mind to the beauty and excellency of the character of the Lord Jesus. It indisposes the mind to receive his instructions, just as ‘darkness’ has no affinity for ‘light;’ and if the one exists, the other must be displaced.” The problem with Mr. Barnes reasoning is that light always penetrates darkness. There is no darkness too thick for light to shine through it.

The word “received” or “comprehend” should be interpreted in the context of the rejection of the Word by the world that was created by it, as John states in the following verses. It is amazing how John, in four short verses depicts the whole complex of eternity, creation, the fall into sin, salvation, and the testimony of redemption.

The light is not the direct result of the Word itself. The Word produces life and the transformation of life into light takes place in the life of man. We deduct from the following verses that John speaks particularly about one individual: the incarnated Word Himself. As it reads here, however, it deals with people who have received life from God in Jesus Christ, which makes them a testimony to those who lack this life. It is clear that darkness cannot receive light without annihilating itself. In whatever way we interpret the word *katalambao*, it cannot refer to a lack of understanding in the sense of a misunderstanding. There is no misunderstanding between God and Satan, between light and darkness. There is absolute antagonism. If darkness is unable to extinguish light it ceases itself to exist. In saying: “the darkness has not understood it” John proclaims the victory of the light.

III. The Forerunner of Christ

1:6-8

¹⁶ Gen. 1:3

In the context of the testimony, John proceeds to introduce John the Baptist. “There came a man who was sent from God.” Those words are the greatest evaluations that can be given to a person. As a man among mankind, John the Baptist was one of the least important of all human beings. The qualification given to him here places him clearly on God’s side. John did not take the middle of the road. The Greek form of the name “John” is *Ioannes* which is derived from the Hebrew *Yohanan*, meaning, “Jehovah is gracious.”¹⁷ John gave testimony to the light as it was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

John’s introduction of John the Baptist strengthens the argument that the Apostle John had been one of John the Baptist’s disciples.

As we said above, the transformation of life into light takes place within man but not in a person who possesses a sinful nature. The only human being in whom this transformation could take place perfectly was the perfect man Jesus Christ. The main theme of John’s Gospel is that faith in the person of Jesus makes a man partaker of the divine nature. This marvelous process of transformation takes place, first of all, in Jesus, but then also in those who are in Jesus Christ.

The fact that John says: “He himself was not the light” indicates that John the Baptist lived under the dispensation of the Old Testament. He himself was not “in Christ.”

Subsequently, the word “light” is used as a name for Jesus Christ, just as “the Word” was earlier. *Logos*, “the Word,” speaks of the divinity of Christ, “light” speaks of His humanity.

“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” In as much as “the light” is a human being, all of humanity is related to Him. Nobody who is confronted with the Person of Jesus can deny this relationship. We know intuitively that in Him there is true life. The Bible gives us several illustrations of people who, without any apparent reasonable ground, left what they were doing, turned around, and followed Jesus. We think of Matthew. In the Gospel that bears his name, we read: “As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.”¹⁸ Philip and Nathanael followed Jesus spontaneously.¹⁹

Such seems to be the essence of all conversions. It is the gut feeling of recognizing truth and life that draws people to Christ. I know of no man who has decided on the basis of reasonable argumentation alone to follow Christ. It is only when this light shines on people and they understand that they come to Jesus.

This is, of course, not an automatic process. The light gives life, but there are cases on which the light shines on what is already dead. Then there is no reaction. We read the story in Mark’s Gospel about Jesus’ healing of the man with the shriveled hand. Jesus addresses the scribes and Pharisees who are the onlookers and He asks: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.²⁰ This incident is rather representative of the unnatural reaction of the world to the coming of Jesus.

IV. The Rejection of Christ

1:9-11

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.” The fact that mankind did not recognize Jesus Christ is an indication that it no longer recognized its own origin and that it had abandoned its own nature. Sin goes against the very nature of man. Sin has caused mankind to forget where it comes from and where it belongs. This accounts for the tragedy of the rejection of Jesus by the people of Israel. His relationship with Israel was crystal clear. He came not only as a man among men but as Jew among Jews and He exemplified to them what they believed they already possessed themselves. Receiving Him, therefore, means simply acknowledging the truth that is in Jesus Christ. This involves, at the same time, denying the lie within ourselves. Acknowledgment of the truth gives us the key to conquer the lie.

V. The Acceptance of Christ

1:12-13

The following verse focuses on the individual as opposed to “the world” and to the nation of Israel. John says: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” The Greek word translated “right” is *exousia*, which is derived from *exestin*, “it is right.” It carries with it the sense of ability, privilege, force, capacity, competency, freedom. The KJV renders it variously with: “authority,

¹⁷ See *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*

¹⁸ Matt. 9:9

¹⁹ See John 1:44-52

²⁰ Mark 3:4

jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, strength.” *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments on this verse with: “He who is made a child of God enjoys the greatest privilege which the Divine Being can confer on this side of eternity. Those who accept Jesus Christ, as he is offered to them in the Gospel, have, through his blood, a right to this sonship; for by that sacrifice this blessing was purchased; and the fullest promises of God confirm it to all who believe. And those who are engrafted in the heavenly family have the highest honor and dignity to which it is possible for a human soul to arrive. What an astonishing thought is this! The sinner, who was an heir to all God’s curses, has, through the sacrifice of Jesus, a claim on the mercy of the Most High, and a right to be saved! Even justice itself, on the ground of its holy and eternal nature, gives salvation to the vilest who take refuge in this atonement; for justice has nothing to grant, or Heaven to give, which the blood of the Son of God has not merited.”

This verse, apparently, not only speaks of the new birth in Christ; otherwise we would read: “All who received Him *are* children of God.” The fact that God gives the *exousia*, the power, to *become* children of God indicates that God puts a certain authority in the hands of man. John speaks about more than what we become positionally. God not only gives us the right to the benefits of atonement and salvation, He gives us a key to becoming what we are meant to be. It is true that those who accept Jesus Christ receive life and, consequently, become partakers of the divine nature. But John does not speak here about this “once for all” experience. When we place “gave the right” and “become” next to “children of God,” we understand that he refers to an acquired position, not a given one. In Leo Tolstoy’s book *War and Peace*, the author describes how some members of the higher class of society in Russia were given government positions, not as a function but as a title. They were not expected to do any work but just to put their name to the post. To be a child of God is not merely a title; it is not positional but it is meant to be a revelation of the position. All the riches of a holy, healthy life that gives us, in the eyes of men the testimony of being a child of God are included in this verse.

Receiving Jesus Christ and believing on His name are parallel phrases. Believing is receiving. John speaks in Old Testament terms. The Name of Jesus stands for His character and His position. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments on this: “First, To be a Christian indeed is to believe on Christ’s name; it is to assent to the gospel discovery, and consent to the gospel proposal, concerning him. His name is the Word of God; the King of kings, the Lord our righteousness; Jesus a Savior. Now to believe on his name is to acknowledge that he is what these great names bespeak him to be, and to acquiesce in it, that he may be so to us. Secondly, Believing in Christ’s name is receiving him as a gift from God. We must receive his doctrine as true and good; receive his law as just and holy; receive his offers as kind and advantageous; and we must receive the image of his grace, and impressions of his love, as the governing principle of our affections and actions.”

The next verse, however, does speak of the new birth. “Born of God,” or procreated by God. The Greek text reads literally: “Which not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God were born.” The Greek word used is *egenneétheesan*, which means, “to beget.” The new birth is the basis, the beginning of the sonship of God. The two relate to each other as the bud of a tree to its ripe fruit.

VI. The Incarnation of Christ

1:14-18

“The Word became flesh.” No greater statement was ever made in human language. The Apostle Paul calls this “the mystery of godliness.” Writing to Timothy, he says: “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.”²¹ It means more than that God revealed Himself in a human body. God *became* man, totally and perfectly. The word “flesh” comprises the whole complex of the human being.

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words says about the Greek word *sarx*: “sarx has a wider range of meaning in the NT than in the OT. Its uses in the NT may be analyzed as follows: (a) The substance of the body, whether of beasts or of men, 1 Cor 15:39; (b) the human body, 2 Cor. 10:3a; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:22; (c) by synecdoche, of mankind in the totality of all that is essential to manhood, i. e., spirit, soul, and body.”

We will never be able to fully comprehend this. Carl Barth sees here a paradox of God who is faithful to Himself and who denies Himself at the same time. We have to remind ourselves of the fact that, apart from the corruption sin brought into the picture, man in himself is no unsuitable vehicle for God’s revelation of Himself. Man was obviously created for this purpose. What is so amazing is that God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”²² The fact that, in doing so, God remained faithful to Himself means the salvation of the world.

“The Word ... made his dwelling among us.” The Greek word translated with “made his dwelling” is *eskeénoosen*. It is a form of the verb *skenoo* which means “to tent or encamp.” The word is only found in John’s

²¹ 1 Tim. 3:16

²² Rom. 8:3 (NKJV)

Gospel and in Revelation. It is used in aorist which means that it is a “once-for-all” act. The suggestion of living in a tent does not, primarily, refer to the temporal character of Jesus’ life in this world as to His identification with our transitory stay. As God identified Himself in glorious fashion with the nomadic tribes of Israel who journeyed through the desert by living in a tent Himself, so the “Word-become-flesh” demonstrates His perfect unity with us.

The Incarnation was, in itself, no transitory matter. The Son of God is man eternally. He journeys with us as long as we journey.

“We have seen his glory.” We are mistaken if we see here a contradiction between the Incarnation and the demonstration of His glory, as Barth does. It was never God’s intention to hide His glory in man but for man to reveal His glory. “The glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father” was not revealed *in spite of* His humanity but *in* His humanity. And we should not only think, as Peter did, of some specific moments like the transfiguration. God’s glory was nowhere demonstrated so clearly as in the daily life of Jesus Christ; as much in the foot washing as in the transfiguration. Peter referred to the transfiguration to make his point. We read: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.”²³ Those extraordinary moments are, of course, not to be disregarded. They speak more clearly to us because our minds have been dulled by sin. John, however, penetrates to the core of the matter when, referring to every day experiences, he says: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life....”²⁴ Man, with all of creation, only needs deliverance from sin in order to reflect the glory of God. If God can pack so much glory in a dewdrop, how much more will He be able to do so in His masterpiece: man! God’s glory in Jesus Christ was clearly visible to all. The fact that so few saw it can only be explained by the blindness of all the others. The only thing we need in order to see the fullness of God’s glory is the light of our eyes.

“Full of grace and truth.” This is an amazing characteristic John gives to describe Jesus’ glory. Grace builds the bridge between sinful man and the glory of God. It is associated with forgiveness and love. God’s glory revealed itself in Jesus Christ, primarily, in those facets of His life that proclaimed God’s grace.

Different people in the Bible have put different accents on the meaning of grace. All of these accents are clearly manifested in the life of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul emphasizes particularly the meaning of grace as an unmerited favor which God offers to man. It is God’s offer of peace to His enemies. It means His payment of their debts and the cleansing of the filth of their lives. The atoning facet of grace is clearly manifested in Christ’s life. We find Paul’s definition of grace in Romans: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”²⁵ And to the Corinthians he wrote: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”²⁶ God’s grace reached its summit at the cross where “having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”²⁷

Peter, on the other hand, shows what grace means when it is tested by fire. It is God’s secret hidden in man’s heart that causes him not to retaliate. We read in Peter’s first epistle: “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”²⁸ The Greek word rendered here with “commendable” is *cháris*, which is usually translated with “grace.” No person on earth has expressed that side of grace as clearly as Jesus Christ.

²³ II Peter 1:16-18

²⁴ I John 1:1

²⁵ Rom. 5:6-10

²⁶ II Cor. 5:21

²⁷ Col. 2:14

²⁸ I Peter 2:19-23

Although James used the word “grace” sparingly, the concept is found in his epistle. James uses “grace” in the sense of the honor God shows to man. God honors man because of the royal dignity He imparted to him. We read: “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”²⁹ This “grace” God bestowed, first of all, on His Son but also on all who follow Him. Jesus testified in John’s Gospel: “I honor my Father and you dishonor me. I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.” And “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.” And also: “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.”³⁰

Full of ... truth.” Ever since Lucifer was thrown out of heaven, the image of truth has become murky. Like Pilate of old, nobody knows anymore what truth is exactly. Truth can no longer be defined. Every concept of truth we have is acquired by comparing it with a lie. Yet, there is within us all an intuitive knowledge of truth. We may be fallen creatures, we still have the ability to recognize truth when we see it. In as much as we know truth by comparing it to a lie, we also know that the lie distorts the image and that truth gives us the right image. The lie is unreal, truth is real. The lie hides, truth reveals. The lie goes together with death, truth is related to life. The lie comes from the devil, the truth is in God. Thus Jesus Christ represents the reality of Life in this world of unreality amidst the deception of death and corruption. John recognized in Jesus Christ the personification of truth. He recognizes that he has met a real person in a world of fakes that call themselves human. Even if man is not what he is meant to be, he knows what man ought to be. Pilate knew this when he lied to Jesus and he did as if he did not know what truth was. The very proof of this is the fact that Jesus testified to him and appealed to that trace of truth that was still hidden in the depth of his soul.

In Jesus, we do not find traces of truth like in the souls of other human beings, but the fullness of truth. That is the reason Jesus called Himself “the truth.” He said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This statement is either the greatest lie that was ever told, or it is truth in all its fullness.

John the Baptist testified about Jesus: “He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.” This is the only verse in the Bible that indicates that the doctrine of Christ’s preexistence was first introduced by John the Baptist. Although John the Gospel writer elaborates on this theme in his prologue, he had learned it earlier from his first teacher, John the Baptist. It is not John’s spiritual insight as the fruit of his intimate fellowship with Jesus that had brought him to this conclusion. This shows us what a spiritual giant John the Baptist was to the able to make such a statement. No human reasoning could ever have led to such conclusions. It was the result of a direct revelation by the Holy Spirit. The fellowship John the Baptist knew with God while he dwelt in the desert of Judea was unique. Jesus’ own testimony bears this out when He said: “I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.”³¹

Vs. 16, however, is obviously a continuation of vs. 14 and not part of a statement made by John the Baptist. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “This verse should be put in place of the fifteenth, and the 15th inserted between the 18th and 19th, which appears to be its proper place: thus John’s testimony is properly connected.”

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.” The NKJV follows the Greek text word for word with “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” The keyword in this verse is “received.” On the one hand, Jesus would not be God if He did not give. On the other hand, grace would not be full if no one received it. God is not a closed entity but an open unity. His characteristic is a cycle of giving and receiving in order to increase the measure of giving. We saw earlier that the fact that the Word is eternal means that revelation, which is in essence giving, is a divine attribute. “Grace for grace” or “one blessing after another.” Grace is the basis upon which grace is given. Our life begins spiritually when grace comes to us in the form of atonement, forgiveness, and renewal. On this basis God builds up our life with a gift of grace that is renewed daily. Jeremiah expressed this in Lamentations: “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”³² The context in which Jeremiah exclaimed this indicates that grace does not necessarily provide us with smooth sailing. The grace we receive is the ray of light that leads us through the dark, that pulls us through starvation, imprisonment, and bereavement.

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words states that the Greek word *charis* has various uses as an “objective, that which bestows or occasions pleasure, delight, or causes favorable regard; it is applied, e. g., to

²⁹ James 4:6

³⁰ John 8:49,50, 54; 12:26

³¹ Matt. 11:11^a

³² Lam. 3:22,23

beauty, or gracefulness of person, Luke 2:40; act, 2 Cor 8:6, or speech, Luke 4:22, RV, 'words of grace' (KJV, 'gracious words'); Col 4:6." God's grace to us is the beauty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sentence structure "grace for grace" is not easy to unravel. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on this: "Of the plenitude of his grace and mercy, by which he made an atonement for sin, and of the plenitude of his wisdom and truth, by which the mysteries of heaven have been revealed, and the science of eternal truth taught, we have all received: all we apostles have received grace or mercy to pardon our sins, and truth to enable us so to write and speak, concerning these things, that those who attend to our testimony shall be unerringly directed in the way of salvation, and with us continue to receive grace upon grace, one blessing after another, until they are filled with all the fullness of God. I believe the above to be the meaning of the evangelist, and think it improper to distract the mind of the reader with the various translations and definitions which have been given of the phrase, grace for grace. It is only necessary to add, that John seems here to refer to the Gospel as succeeding the law: the law was certainly a dispensation both of grace and truth; for it pointed out the gracious design of God to save men by Christ Jesus; and it was at least a most expressive and well-defined shadow of good things to come: but the Gospel, which had now taken place, introduced that plenitude of grace and truth to the whole world, which the law had only shadowed forth to the Jewish people, and which they imagined should have been restrained to themselves alone."

Matthew Henry's Commentary observes that: "The Old Testament had grace in type, the New Testament has grace in truth. There was a grace under the Old Testament, the gospel was preached then (Gal 3:8); but that grace is superseded, and we have gospel grace instead of it, a glory which excelleth, 2 Cor 3:10. Discoveries of grace are now more clear, distributions of grace far more plentiful; this is grace instead of grace." The same Commentary continues with: "It is the substance of all the Old-Testament types and shadows. Something of grace there was both in the ordinances that were instituted for Israel and the providences that occurred concerning Israel; but they were only shadows of good things to come, even of the grace that is to be brought to us by the revelation of Jesus Christ. He is the true paschal lamb, the true scapegoat, the true manna. They had grace in the picture; we have grace in the person, that is, grace and truth. Grace and truth came, ... was made; the same word that was used (v. 3) concerning Christ's making all things. The law was only made known by Moses, but the being of this grace and truth, as well as the discovery of them, is owing to Jesus Christ; this was made by him, as the world at first was; and by him this grace and truth do consist."

When the law is put in opposition to grace, we should understand that it is the moral law that is singled out. The ceremonial law certainly contained an abundance of grace. Although it dealt with death as a punishment for sin, the death was suffered substitutionally. We always tend to see the law and grace as opposites, mainly because of the function Paul ascribes to either in the process of our justification. Since the law and grace both emanate from God, we cannot believe that one opposes the other. There is no contradiction. The contradiction is within us, not in the character of law and grace. The law is the external expression of God's will *for* us; grace is the expression of God's will *in* us. Ultimately, grace is nothing else but the law of God written in our hearts. The transition from outside us to in us is the greatest miracle the world has ever seen. It is the difference between Moses and Christ, between the servant and the Son.

The secret is contained in the word "truth." The problem of the law, that which made God's will for us bounce back from the outside of our lives is the fact that the lie is in us. All the tensions related to this matter can be traced back to our inner duplicity. Because Jesus Christ has redeemed us by His truth, God's will can now be expressed in our lives.

"No one has ever seen God..." In the Old Testament there are moments recorded at which people have received glimpses of God, or even seen a rather complete image of God. There is a difference between seeing and seeing. John speaks here about the kind of seeing that gives knowledge. Among those in the Old Testament who have seen God in His supernatural glory, Moses and Isaiah, probably take the first place. Moses saw the backside of God's glory. God said to him: "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."³³ That Moses' vision of God's glory was only partial is also obvious from the fact that, in calling out the Name of the Lord, God only speaks of forgiveness and punishment. Moses heard God proclaiming: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."³⁴

³³ Ex. 33:21-23

³⁴ Ex. 34:6,7

In a sense, Isaiah received a more complete revelation of God's glory. We read: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."³⁵ John gives an explanation, elsewhere in his Gospel about this more complete revelation. Quoting from the same chapter in which Isaiah's vision is recorded, he writes: "For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: 'He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn-and I would heal them.' *Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.*"³⁶ The glory Isaiah saw was the glory of the Father as expressed through the Son.

Wherever there is a vision of God in the Old Testament it is always a temporal experience, the impression of which is related to the problem the one who received the vision was facing. For Moses, it was the sin of the people. For Isaiah it was his own sinful lips. The making known of the Father by the Son, however, is no fleeting encounter that lets its light shine upon one facet of our lives. It is a continuous observing, a complete involvement with Him in whom "we live and move and have our being."³⁷ In the words of the Apostle Paul: "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."³⁸

There is a discrepancy in the way various translations render verse 18. The most common version is: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." This is shared by the NKJV, the KJV, the RSV, and the ASV. The NIV has the reading: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." The NASU concurs with this, as does the NAS. The difference is obviously in the letter (Theta-Sigma) for (Upsilon-Sigma) changing the word Son (huios) into God (theos). *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* condemns this reading and states: "The extraordinary and extremely harsh reading which Tregelles here adopts, in deference to three of the oldest MSS., and some other authorities-the only begotten God'-reading OC (Theta-Sigma) for UC (Upsilon-Sigma)-is met by such a weight of counter-authority in favor of the received reading, so thoroughly Joannean, that Tischendorf abides by it, and all but every critic approves it." The words "the only begotten Son", obviously, fit much better in John's Gospel than the rather inexplicable "the only begotten God."

The revelation of the Father by the Son is what is recorded in John's Gospel. As we said earlier, it is the glory of God as revealed in the man Jesus Christ, rather than the few moments of supernatural manifestations that form the core of this revelation. When questioned by Philip, Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."³⁹ The "such a long time" refers to the three-and-a-half years of Jesus' public ministry of which Philip had been a witness.

³⁵ Isa. 6:1-4

³⁶ John 12:39-41

³⁷ See Acts 17:28

³⁸ II Cor. 3:18

³⁹ ch. 14:9

Part Two: The Presentation of the Son of God

(1:19--4:54)

I. The Presentation of Christ by John the Baptist 1:19-34

The introduction of John the Baptist is an important part of the message of this Gospel. The Apostle John even reserved a place for John the Baptist in the Prologue. We can only conclude from this that John the Baptist still enjoyed an immense popularity at the time this Gospel was written, some 70 years later. John, the Gospel writer used John the Baptist's authority to back up his message. How widespread the influence of John the Baptist was, we gather from the fact that the Apostle Paul found disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus, some 20 or 30 years after John's death.⁴⁰ John's martyrdom, undoubtedly, enhanced his popularity. Martyrs usually strengthen their cause by their own blood. Jesus' discussion with the chief priests and elders of the temple in Jerusalem about John's authority also throws an interesting light on John's popularity.⁴¹

When we compare the record of the ministry of John the Baptist as given in the synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John, we note that the synoptic Gospel mostly give a condensation of the negative part of John's message. Luke's version is more detailed than the other two. But they all concentrate on John's call for repentance and his words of condemnation of the religious leaders of his time. The Gospel of John does not refer to this condemnatory message. The emphasis is rather on the fact that John the Baptist was the herald of Christ's coming. John's Gospel refers only briefly to the message of repentance, putting the greater stress on John's testimony about Christ. From the words: "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire,"⁴² this Gospel only uses the words: "I baptize with water... but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." It appears that when John introduces John the Baptist in his Gospel, the baptism of Jesus had already occurred. It is clear from the way John treats his subject that he supposes that his readers are familiar with the record of the synoptics.

Jesus' baptism had great significance for John the Baptist himself. For him it was the sign God had promised him. We read John's testimony: "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.... I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."⁴³ G. Campbell Morgan, in his commentary *The Gospel of John*, stresses the difference between John's way of preaching before Jesus' baptism and after. The message changes from a harsh announcement of judgment to come to a message of atonement. Before this baptism, John saw Jesus as coming with "His winnowing fork ... in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, [and ready to] burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."⁴⁴ After the baptism, he presents Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus' baptism enriched John the Baptist with a deep insight into the mystery of God's grace.

This baptism and John's testimony about Christ, as well as his conversation with the Pharisees, also must have meant a turning point in the life of the Apostle John. John's words brought him to the point where he could separate himself from John and follow Jesus.

The synoptic Gospels do not mention the interview of John by a delegation of priests and Levites, although they record the essence of John's answers. John's ministry was one of the most remarkable in all of Scripture, not only because he came to announce the coming of the Messiah but because he broke all the rules of popular evangelism. John did not go to the centers of civilization to proclaim his message. He withdrew from the crowds into the desert in order to be alone with God. That is how the crowd discovered him. Who first discovered him, we do not know. But as soon as the word was out, the masses stampeded to the place where he was hiding. The nineteenth century poet/philosopher Ralph Emerson is credited saying: "If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap, than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door." John was like the man who built the perfect mousetrap.

John's conversation with the Pharisees took place the day before Jesus appeared. The day John presents Jesus as "the Lamb of God" is called "the next day." Since Jesus disappeared in the wilderness for his forty-day-long fast and the temptation by Satan, we may assume that "the next day" occurred at least six weeks after Jesus'

⁴⁰ See Acts 19:1-4

⁴¹ See Matt. 21:23-27

⁴² Luke 3:16

⁴³ verses 31-34

⁴⁴ Luke 3:17

baptism. It is at this point that the Apostle John commences his own story as an eyewitness. The third day, which is mentioned in vs. 35, is the first day of John's life with his Lord Jesus Christ.

The questions the delegation from Jerusalem asked John the Baptist refer to Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. "Are you Elijah?" pertains to Malachi's prophecy: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."⁴⁵ The question "Are you the Prophet?" is a reference to Moses' prophecy in Deuteronomy: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.... The LORD said to me: 'I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.'"⁴⁶

We understand this prophecy to refer to the coming of the Messiah. Some of the Jews, however, believed that "the Prophet" was not identical with the promised Messiah. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* explains that "The Jews had a tradition that Jeremiah was to return to life, and restore the pot of manna, the ark of the covenant, etc., which he had hidden that the Babylonians might not get them. Besides this, they had a general expectation that all the prophets should come to life in the days of the Messiah." John's denial of being "the Prophet" can easily be understood. His refusal to identify himself with the promised Elijah causes more of a problem. John must have been familiar with the announcement the angel Gabriel had made to his father Zechariah before his birth, even quoting part of Malachi's prophecy: "And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."⁴⁷ We can only deduct that John wanted the spotlight to fall fully on the message and not on the messenger. It was the message: "Make straight the way for the Lord" that was important, not the voice that rang out.

This brings us to the most important statement John the Baptist ever made: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" This spiritual insight in the meaning of the whole Old Testament ceremonial law singles John out among men and makes him the greatest in the Old Testament dispensation. In Jesus' words: "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist."⁴⁸

What John says about Jesus refers not only to the fact of forgiveness of sin but also to the "how" and "who" of it. The phrase "The Lamb of God" connects Jesus' ministry to the sacrifices of the Old Testament. It refers to His dying in the place of others and to the shedding out of blood for atonement of sin. It is amazing that the Apostle John was drawn to Christ through these words. He may not have fully understood that meaning of it in the early stages of his life with Jesus but his relationship with the Lord was governed by the realization that Jesus would atone for his sins. It was on this soil that grew the deep awareness of Jesus' love for him. This must have given him the courage to stay at the cross while the other disciples fled. As far as we know, John was the only one of the disciples who came to know Jesus in this way.

For us who stand on the other side of the cross, it is hard to imagine the position of a person who cannot see any connection between the life of the man Jesus and the atonement of his sins. Our vision of Christ is, after all, determined by the words of John the Baptist "the Lamb of God." Without an understanding of those words, we have no basis on which the personal friendship and love of Jesus with us can rest and on which we can return His love. For us, who know the historical facts, this is relatively easy but for John it involved an act of blind faith.

To whom does the atonement refer? John says that Jesus carried the sins of the world. This opens up for us a wide perspective. Atonement for sin is for all who have sinned. Not only the sins of some of the elect are atoned for but the sins of the whole world. The fact that some, or maybe even many, never come to benefit from this does not mean that God made the basis too small. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..."⁴⁹ "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."⁵⁰ The fact that the Apostle John returns to this theme in his epistle leaves not place for doubt.

The words "Lamb of God" also say something about the character of the Lord. Isaiah prophesied about Him: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers⁵¹ is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

⁴⁵ Mal. 4:5,6

⁴⁶ Deut. 18:15-18

⁴⁷ Luke 1:17

⁴⁸ Matt. 11:11

⁴⁹ ch. 3:16

⁵⁰ I John 2:2

⁵¹ Isa. 53:7

Regarding the question of John's acquaintance with Jesus, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* writes: "Much discussion has arisen concerning the apparent contradiction between Matt 3:13-14 and John 1:31-33. In the former John evidently knew Jesus, while in the latter he says, 'I did not recognize Him.' The truth seems to be that John knew Jesus but was not certain of His messiahship. It was necessary for him, before asserting positively that Jesus was the Christ, to have undoubted testimony of the fact. This was given him in the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, as John himself declared (John 1:33)."

II. The Presentation of Christ to John's Disciples 1:35-51

The third day.... This is the first day of Jesus' public ministry in this world. What an inconspicuous beginning! Outwardly, there is nothing revolutionary in this beginning. The revolutionary element is on the inside. The revolution began in the heart of John the Baptist. From there, the spark flies to his two disciples, Andrew and John. This marks the beginning of the Kingdom of God on earth. John's exclamation: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" kindles a fire in the heart of these two that would, eventually, burn them up.

God created the heart of man in such a way that only fellowship with God can satisfy him completely. The words of John the Baptist kindled this kind of spiritual hunger in the hearts of those two young men. Although the feeling may have been too weak to put in words, they must have sensed that the stilling of their hunger was somehow related to the atonement of their sin. Their questions were too deep to be dealt with on the public highway. When Jesus turns around and asks them what they want, they request to talk with Him in private. We are not told what the conversation between the four walls of Jesus' living room was about. We see the results of their talk with Jesus in Andrew's words to Peter: "We have found the Messiah." The whole Gospel of John testifies to the fact that John had reached the same conclusion.

Andrew told his brother Peter. The Gospel fire often follows the line of our natural human relationships. There is, of course, nothing wrong in handing out Gospel tracts on the street but if this is all we do, it may be an indication that we flee from reality. If, in giving our testimony, we try to stay away from people who know us intimately, it is possible that the flag of our ship does not cover the cargo. On the other hand, spiritual contact with family members is often the most difficult to establish. There is, therefore, great joy in the words: "The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon." Some people see in these words a suggestion that, secondly, John found his brother James. That would be the triumphal counterpart of the cry of the rich man in Jesus' story about Lazarus: "I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."⁵²

It is not clear whether John followed the Roman or the Jewish way of telling time in the words "It was about the tenth hour." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes about the tenth hour: "Generally supposed to be about what we call four o'clock in the afternoon. According to John 11:9, the Jews reckoned twelve hours in the day; and of course each hour of the day, thus reckoned, must have been something longer or shorter, according to the different times of the year in that climate. The sixth hour with them answered to our twelve o'clock, as appears from what Josephus says ... that on the Sabbath day it was the rule for the Jews to go to dinner at the sixth hour ... The Romans had the same way of reckoning twelve hours in each of their days. Hence, what we meet with in ... *ante secundam* signifies, as we should express it, before eight o'clock. And when ... he says, *ad quartam jaceo*, he means that he lay in bed until ten o'clock. ... Dr. Macknight, however, is of opinion that the evangelist is to be understood as speaking of the Roman hour, which was ten o'clock in the morning; and, as the evangelist remarks, they abode with him that day, it implies that there was a considerable portion of time spent with our Lord, in which, by his conversation, he removed all their scruples, and convinced them that he was the Messiah. But, had it been the Jewish tenth hour, it would have been useless to remark their abiding with him that day, as there were only two hours of it still remaining." We do not know how long the conversation with Jesus lasted but, evidently Peter joined the company before the end of the day.

Jesus demonstrates in these verses several times His prophetic insight in the character of the people He meets. First, when meeting Peter, He says: " 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)." We do not know for certain whether Jesus had heard the name Simon mentioned. It could be that, in calling him by his name, Jesus gave evidence of His prophetic gift. One thing is clear though, when Jesus meets Peter, He indicates that He knows him through and through. He knows his name, his character, and his future.

John's sense of being known seems to have been keener than Peter's. It is one of the inexplicable mysteries of life that two individuals can go through the same experience and react in totally different ways. Peter's outburst at

⁵² Luke 16:28

the miraculous catch of fish: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁵³ as well as the fact that he denied knowing Jesus, are indications that it took longer for Peter to know who Jesus was than for John.

The events described in the verses 35-43 all took place in the vicinity of "Bethany on the other side of the Jordan."⁵⁴ From there the little company traveled to Bethsaida which is at the same east side of the river, about 70 miles away from Bethany. John doesn't mention Bethsaida here but only that Jesus left for Galilee. Considering the rather long distance between the two places, we may assume that Jesus did not meet Philip in Bethsaida but somewhere on the road between Bethsaida and Cana where the company turned out to be "on the third day." It is an unanswered question what all these people from Galilee (particularly Andrew, Peter, and Philip, and maybe Nathanael also) were doing in the vicinity of Bethany. They may have been drawn to the preaching of John the Baptist. This was certainly the case with Andrew.

If we take "the third day" in chapter 2:1 to be the third day of Jesus' first encounter with His disciples, we are faced with the sheer impossibility that Jesus and His disciples had covered a distance of approximately 70 miles on foot in one day. We may assume, therefore, that this third day was not the day Jesus and the disciples arrived in Cana but that this was the day the wedding feast started. The wedding, which lasted several days, may have been in full swing when Jesus arrived in Cana. We suppose that Jesus arrived on the third or fourth day after His departure from Bethany, which may have been the second or the third day of the wedding feast.

When Jesus is just about to leave for Galilee, or shortly after leaving, He meets Philip. No details are given about the meeting. There was no third person involved. Every conversion consists of a personal encounter with the Lord. It is difficult to analyze a conversion. It is the most intimate thing that can happen in a human life. It is nobody else's business but often a fellowman serves as a bridge. Sometimes, however, only the Lord Himself is involved, as was the case here with Philip and later would be with Paul. Philip is the only one who hears the words "follow Me!"

Philip then finds Nathanael. Jesus' exchange with Nathanael is full of Old Testament symbolism. This suggests that Nathanael had strong bonds with the Old Testament Scriptures. It becomes immediately evident when Philip tells Nathanael about Jesus. Nathanael must have been one of those who, like Simeon in the temple, "was waiting for the consolation of Israel."⁵⁵ Nathanael's retort "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" has become proverbial in the English language. It does not necessarily imply a chauvinistic opinion of one village about another. Nathanael expected the Christ to come from Bethlehem. His first reaction was the same as the Pharisees' who believed that "a prophet does not come out of Galilee."⁵⁶ It is commendable that he compared Philip's testimony with the Scriptures he knew. We cannot condemn him for what he could not have known, namely that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Philip's answer: "Come and see!" is stronger than any theological argument. If Nathanael had clung to his understanding of the Scriptures, it would not have been the first or the last time someone was kept from a personal encounter with God because of a theological prejudice. A life that is filled with knowledge of the Bible has to come to life through a personal experience with the Lord.

Jesus begins His conversation with Nathaniel with a profound play on words: "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false." He could have said: "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no Jacob." As Jesus prophetically saw who Peter would be, and called him "the rock," so He has searched and known Nathaniel's heart. He was a son of Israel, a man who had wrestled with God and who had been victorious because he had asked for God's grace. That had been the end of Jacob as a deceiver. The deception had been unmasked. Nathaniel had, evidently, gone through Jacob's experience. This is what Jesus pointed to. Jesus' mention of "the fig tree" breaks whatever resistance still remained in Nathaniel's heart. The Lord knows our experiences, whether at Peniel or under the fig tree. He knows because He was there!

Nathaniel's reaction is "you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." He is the second person in John's Gospel who confesses Jesus to be the Son of God. In the context of this chapter, the confession "King of Israel" is sensational. Nathaniel meets his King. The one who wrestled with God and won the victory surrenders before his King.

Then Jesus traces Jacob's steps back from Peniel to Bethel. Actually, this chronological reversal is not a step back but a step forward. The spiritual order is Peniel first and then Bethel. First is the surrender of self and then the open heavens. But on whom are the angels descending here? Not on Jacob or on Nathaniel but on Jesus! There is no longer any Jacob who, on seeing the heavens opened, wanted to make a deal with God. We read that he said: "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." And, "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that

⁵³ Luke 5:8

⁵⁴ See vs. 28

⁵⁵ See Luke 2:25

⁵⁶ See ch. 7:52

I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.' ⁵⁷ We can paraphrase this with: "O, sorry, I didn't know you were here. If you promise to bless me from now on, you may be my God. Don't be afraid. I'll pay you for it!" Jesus has taken Jacob's place, as Israel took Jacob's place at Peniel. Jesus is the true "Israel," the true victorious Prince of God. He is also the true "Bethel," the House of God.

When we compare the record of this chapter with the Synoptics, we understand that, at this point, the disciples did not make a firm commitment to follow Jesus. This was their first encounter with the Lord.

III. The Presentation of Christ in Galilee The Wedding Feast in Cana

2:1-12

We saw above that it would have been impossible for Jesus to be in Cana on the third day because the day before He was still about 70 miles away from there. John's intent must be to say that the wedding began on that third day, that Mary was there, and that Jesus and the disciples were invited as soon as they arrived. The people in Cana could not have known that Jesus had disciples before He arrived there. The invitation for Jesus to come with all who were with Him must have been extended via Mary. It may be that Jesus' arrival coincided with the wine shortage. If that was the case, Mary's suggestion that Jesus could do something about the situation took place at the beginning, shortly after Jesus' arrival.

Jesus' reply to His mother: "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" sounds even rougher in the KJV: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" The Greek simply reads cryptically: "What to Me, what to you, woman?" This is probably an idiom for "leave me alone." If it is true that Jesus had just arrived, those words sound more natural. It would be strange for Jesus to perform a miracle a few minutes after His arrival. The words "My time has not yet come" come over less caustic than seems at first glance. Mary doesn't seem to be hurt by those words. To the contrary, she fully expects her Son to perform a miracle and, in faith, she prepares the servants.

In the list of miracles Jesus performed while on earth, this act of changing water into wine stands by itself. Most of the other miracles are related to the more serious side of life: resurrection of the dead, healing of incurable diseases, feeding of the hungry. In most of those cases it was a matter of life and death. But that can hardly be said about the wedding in Cana. The worst would have been that the feast ended prematurely, in which case the bridegroom would have cut a poor figure. In this miracle, Jesus demonstrates that the details of life, that which makes a difference between happiness and unhappiness, are important to Him.

The fact that Jesus' public ministry begins with a feast is also important, as well as the fact that the feast is not for Him but for someone else. This wedding is, in a sense, the official beginning of Jesus' work on earth. But for Jesus, it was a borrowed feast. He was not the object of the festivities. It was part of His making Himself nothing and taking the very nature of a servant that made Him borrow someone else's celebration. In the same manner, He would later borrow the donkey for His triumphal entry in Jerusalem.⁵⁸

The great lesson of this event is that it is, obviously, God's will that there be joy at the core of a life that is lived according to the will of God. David's words are applicable here: "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."⁵⁹ The beginning and the end of Jesus' ministry on earth are marked by this joy. Only a few hours before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His disciples: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."⁶⁰ And in His last prayer for them, He said to the Father: "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them."⁶¹

As mentioned above, the miracle Jesus performed in Cana is fundamentally different from all His other miracles. Most of Jesus' miracles are reversals of the effects of sin in this world. This one goes back to a condition of human life before the fall. In the Genesis record of the creation of man we read: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'"⁶² The miracle of Cana is based on this first blessing in the Bible. It is a demonstration of God's blessing on love, life, and sexuality.

⁵⁷ Gen. 28:16,20-22

⁵⁸ See Matt. 21:1-3

⁵⁹ Ps. 4:7

⁶⁰ ch. 15:11

⁶¹ ch. 17:13

⁶² Gen. 1:27,28

This miracle is also the closest to what we would call “magic.” All the other miracles are, in a sense, related to the laws of nature. They either obey those laws or reverse them. In the miracles of healing, the body restores itself to the condition God intended it to have. In the resurrection of Lazarus and of others, the spirit returns to the body it left. In Jesus’ walking on the water, the law of gravity is superseded by a stronger one. But in this miracle of the changing of water into wine, the water molecules go haywire. This wine may be synthetic, but it tasted better than anything mother nature had ever produced. Yet, God is not a magician.

John states that “This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “This statement refutes the apocryphal Gospels which report boyhood miracles by Jesus. The word for miracle, which John uses throughout, means sign, indicating that the outward act is intended to reveal the purpose behind it, throwing light on the person of Christ or his work. Glory in this case is a term calling attention to the potency of Jesus to accomplish a spiritual transformation, as suggested by the changing of water into wine (cf. John 11:40). His disciples believed on him. In contrast to the ruler of the feast, who was characterized by ignorance (v. 9) and to the servants, who had knowledge of the miracle (v. 9), the disciples were moved to faith. They alone truly profited by the sign.”

The Greek word translated with “miraculous sign” is *semeion*, which, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* defines with: “a sign, mark, indication, token.” The *Dictionary* states that the word “is used ... of that which distinguished a person or thing from others, e. g., Matt 26:48; Luke 2:12; Rom 4:11; 2 Cor 12:12 (1st part); 2 Thess 3:17, ‘token,’ i. e., his autograph attesting the authenticity of his letters.” This miracle is, in a sense, Jesus’ “autograph.” It points to Him, not to the wedding feast, or the wine, or the joy. For the first disciples it was proof that the man they had followed was indeed the promised Messiah.

At this point we should go briefly back to Jesus’ words to His mother: “My time has not yet come.” Evidently, much more was said there than meets the eye. Those words are repeated several times throughout this Gospel, both positively and in a negative way.⁶³ They always refer to a demonstration of Jesus’ divine glory. The implication of Jesus’ answer to His mother was that this was not yet the time to fully demonstrate this glory. Jesus must have known that Mary expected such a demonstration. When John, therefore, says that Jesus revealed His glory, he speaks of a preliminary demonstration of the full glory to come. This glory would be seen in His death on the cross, His resurrection and ascension. The revelation of this glory begins here at the wedding feast at Cana with the changing of water into the best wine ever tasted by the human tongue. This explains how Jesus could say that His time had not come and yet perform this miracle only minutes later. There is no contradiction between word and deed.

IV. The Presentation of Christ in Judea

2:13--3:36

1. The Cleansing of the Temple 2:13-25

John’s mention of this Passover has helped scholars to determine the length of Jesus ministry. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “This was the first Passover after Christ’s baptism. The second is mentioned, Luke 6:1. The third, John 6:4. And the fourth, which was that at which he was crucified, John 11:55. From which it appears, 1. That our blessed Lord continued his public ministry about three years and a half, according to the prophecy of Daniel, Dan 9:27. And, 2. That, having been baptized about the beginning of his thirtieth year, he was crucified precisely in the middle of his thirty-third.”

It also answers the question as to whether this cleansing of the temple is the same as the one recorded by the synoptic Gospels.⁶⁴ There were, evidently, two separate incidents that were quite similar but not identical, one at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry and one at the end. The question has divided the scholars throughout the ages. But John is so meticulous in stating the chronology of the events, that placing at the beginning of his Gospel an incident that took place during the last week of Jesus’ life on earth, would be highly uncharacteristic. He states specifically that the events that took place in the first three chapters of his book happened “before John was put in prison.”⁶⁵ The fact that we find the same merchants of sheep and cattle with the moneychangers who were chased out of the temple back in their place after three-and-a-half year, should not amaze us. That is certainly not contrary to human nature. A second cleaning of the temple was not superfluous.

⁶³ See ch. 7:6, (30); 12:23; 13:1; 17:1

⁶⁴ See Matt.21; Mark 11; Luke 19

⁶⁵ ch. 3:24

The event takes place in the outer court of the temple, in the Court of the Gentiles. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* clarifies that: "The Sanhedrin was permitting, and probably controlling for its own financial interest, a traffic in sacrificial animals and money changing. This traffic, carried on in the large area known as the Court of the Gentiles, was to the advantage of the pilgrim, since he could acquire his sacrifice here rather than bring it with him. Presumably there was a guarantee that the animal was 'without blemish.' Various kinds of coinage could be changed at the tables for the Palestinian half shekel required for the annual temple tax. This traffic turned the Temple into a mart of trade." John uses the generic word for temple, *hieron*, which designates the entire precincts. It is quite likely that the priests only accepted sacrificial animals that were bought in those courts because they received a percentage of the sales. For monetary payments the temple coin had to be used. Roman money was not acceptable for temple use.

The place chosen for those transactions was significant: the Court of the Gentiles. It would never have crossed the mind of the Jews to desecrate the court of the Jewish believers with that kind of traffic. This, not only, demonstrated their contempt of the non-Jewish believers but also a complete denial of the task God had given the nation of Israel to be a kingdom of priests. There was no sense of responsibility for bringing those who were outside into contact with the living God. The real basis of this mentality was their contempt of God and an absolute lack of awareness of reality.

The whole temple service had developed into an efficiently organized routine from which man profited and in which man served himself rather than God. Man had placed himself at the center of the sanctuary.

The attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ is remarkable. How is it possible to perform an act such as Jesus pulled off single-handedly? The surprise element worked, of course, in Jesus' favor but also the guilty conscience of the merchants who must have known, deep in their hearts, that what they did was not right. Man knows what is right and what is not. Yet, Jesus' authority cannot be explained from a merely human standpoint. What Jesus did was not contrary to the royal dignity with which God had endowed man at creation. It is this original majesty and glory of the Son of Man which Jesus demonstrates here. Sinful man is no match for such an authority of holiness.

The event marks Jesus' first public appearance in Jerusalem. The sweeping clean of the temple court can be called His first miracle performed there. There is quite a contrast between the wine of Cana and the whip of Jerusalem. But behind those two opposing forms of revelation is hidden the same kind of compassion for the need of man. If our relationship with God has become like a cattle market, the only means of healing is the whip. Only when the tables with coins are kicked over and all the animals have been driven out, the dwelling place of the LORD Almighty becomes lovely again and man can again yearn, even faint for the courts of the LORD, and the heart and the flesh cry out for the living God.⁶⁶

Jesus called the temple "My Father's House." Already at a very early age, Jesus was aware of the fact that God was His Father. As a twelve-year-old boy, he told His parents: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's [house]?"⁶⁷ (The word "house" or "business," as the KJV has it, is not in the Greek). The origin of this knowledge lay, obviously, in the secret of Mary's conception which she must have communicated to her Son. The Name "Father" for God thus became the source of a wonderful revelation. This becomes even more glorious when we see that Jesus bases God's fatherhood, not upon His own divinity, but upon His humanity. When He addresses other people, He uses expressions such as "the Father" and "Our Father." We have to understand that these are New Testament expressions. Nowhere in the Old Testament is God called "Father." Some passages come close to it, like "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him"⁶⁸ but the relationship is there used by way of comparison. God's fatherhood is not an image of fatherhood on earth but fatherhood on earth is an image of God's fatherhood. The earthly relationships of a father to his child are expressions of a heavenly reality.

This story shows the difference between religion and serving God. The two are not identical. One can be religious without leaving any room for God. Religious people can be disobedient to God, going their own way, and not know any fellowship with God. God's Name thus become an empty phrase and His presence a pretext for gross egoism. This was the case with the religion of the people in this story. Everyone makes a profit from this religion.

The zeal for God's house that would consume Jesus stands in sharp contrast with the general attitude of the people. He saw God so clearly present that the condition of the house fills Him with holy indignation and makes Him grab a whip. This made Him earn the hostility of the people in charge, which would ultimately lead Him to His death. As the priests and the merchants cursed God with their attitude, so they will have cursed His Son with their

⁶⁶ See Ps. 84:1-2

⁶⁷ Luke 2:49

⁶⁸ Ps. 103:13

words. God has left man a dangerous latitude of freedom which allows him to work himself into a deep quagmire of sin and hardness.

What a testimony for the gentiles who had come to Jerusalem in answer to the call of the living God! Some of those gentiles had more light than the Jewish religious people. For some of them the smoldering hope in their hearts may have been put out as they entered the court of the gentiles and saw the marketplace. In His zeal for His Father's honor, Jesus demonstrates the Father's love that seeks those who are lost.

The Jews never questioned Jesus' act. Deep inside they knew that what He did was right. But to confess this openly, would be too much to ask. They try to draw Jesus into their sinful conspiracy. Behind the question about Jesus' authority to do this lies the suggestion that, in exposing their sin, Jesus tried to cover up His own. The basis for their question is the suggestion that they are all in the same boat. They suggest that Jesus pretends that He never slipped in His life. In doubting Jesus' authority, they deny His sinless nature. For a moment they show their own self-righteousness in their effort to draw Jesus into their sinful business. But that moment does not last long. Jesus' act is, in fact, a demonstration of His own sinless nature. The Apostle Paul says: "who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God."⁶⁹

From the viewpoint of a human dialogue, Jesus' answer is brilliant, although, at the moment, it must have sounded incomprehensible to His audience. The answer is typical for all His answers in the Gospels. It was the only reply that could be given and, at the same time, it is more than an answer. It is a proclamation of the Gospel. As we said before, behind the use of the whip is God's deep compassion. Jesus demonstrates zeal for the Father as well as for the people who insulted and dishonored Him. His answer also contains the truth that what the people do with the shadow of reality, that is the temple King Herod built, they will do with the real temple, the body of Jesus. All egoism and search for gain, ultimately, result in the breaking down of the temple.

Jesus bases His authority to cleanse this temple on His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In doing this, the Lord offers us forgiveness for all our sacrileges, egoism, and lack of love for the lost. All the destruction man brings about is annulled in the construction of the resurrected body. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, this kind of destruction will not find any soil to grow on in our lives. Over against question like these that are born from unbelief and hardening of heart, the Lord, over and over again, puts the sign of His death and resurrection. He calls this elsewhere "the sign of Jonah."⁷⁰

It is obvious that the Jews did not understand anything about Jesus' reply to them. They could not possibly know anything because Jesus' death and resurrection lay still in the future. To them, there was nothing higher than the temple in Jerusalem. They completely ignored the fact that the importance of the temple was derived from the presence of God and that it did not consist in the stones of the building. The Greek word for "temple" [courts], used in vs. 14 is *hieron*. This is not the same word used in vs. 19, translated with "temple" *naos*. This word refers to the temple as a sanctuary, that is the Holy of Holies, the place of God's presence. This is the word Jesus uses for His own body. This is consistent with the statement of the Prologue: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (pitched His tent) among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."⁷¹ As the Shekinah of the cloud and pillar of fire descended on the tabernacle in the desert and later on Solomon's temple, so the fullness of God dwelt bodily in the heart of the Man Jesus Christ. I don't know which is the greater of the two miracles, that God can dwell in the heart of man, or that God can create a human heart in which He can live.

Three years later, Jesus' very words were twisted around to be used against Him.⁷² By making the subtle change from "destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" into "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days..." the devil wanted to insinuate that Jesus actually destroyed Himself, instead of being crucified by men.

John describes the events in this chapter in the light of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. After the resurrection had taken place, Jesus' Words here became very clear and everything fell into place. Twice, John repeats in this chapter that the disciples believed in Jesus.⁷³ The first time, in connection with the changing of water into wine they spontaneously accepted what happened. In the latter case there, evidently was an acceptance that a miracle had taken place at the moment of the occurrence without a full spiritual understanding and without seeing the relationship between Jesus' Words and the Scriptures that forms the essential element of faith. John's mention of the Scriptures in this context is of importance. It was the knowledge of Jesus' resurrection from the dead that throws

⁶⁹ Rom. 1:4

⁷⁰ See Matt. 12:39,40

⁷¹ ch. 1:14

⁷² See Matt. 26:61; 27:40

⁷³ Verses 11 and 22

light upon the relationship between His Words and the whole of the Old Testament. John makes us understand that it could not be otherwise, but that the whole stream of the Old Testament would empty out into the immeasurable ocean whom we call Jesus Christ. It is the same water!

It is obvious that the faith of the disciples, mentioned in vs. 22, is not the same kind of faith as of the “many people who saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name” in the following verse; even though the same word is used. We do not read what other kind of miracles the crowd saw but their faith was nothing more than an utter amazement which focused on the person of Jesus. This kind of sublimated wonder, however, never produces a change of heart so that it becomes the dwelling place of the living God. Only experiential faith in the resurrection of Christ, that is participation in His resurrection life, will bring about this kind of change within us. The faith of the crowd had nothing to do with putting their trust in Christ. It is a feeling of sensation that merely speaks to the imagination. The faith of the disciples was akin to commitment.

From Jesus’ negative reaction to the way people respond to His miracles, we can deduct what it would be like if we did entrust ourselves to Him. Jesus did not entrust Himself to them because He knew their faith was little more than superficial enthusiasm. He did not believe in them, as they did not really believe in Him. But if a person really puts his trust in Christ with a faith that is based on an understanding of the written Word of God, then Jesus Christ will entrust Himself to that person. Jesus says so specifically to His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion. We read: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”⁷⁴ And: “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”⁷⁵

It ought to be a comfort to us that Jesus knows what is in a man, because we ourselves know little what is in us. We deceive ourselves by holding for faith certain emotions, that have nothing to do with faith. Where could we go if we did not have this great psychiatrist who, not only, can analyze us but who can also heal our emotions. One of the most liberating verses in the Bible is David’s cry: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”⁷⁶

2. Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus 3:1-21

In order not to lose sight of the depth of this portion, we have to remember what John said in the previous chapter about the faith of the crowd and the faith of the disciples. Nicodemus was, obviously, one of those who fell in the first category of people who merely stood in awe of the miracles Jesus performed. The fact that he came to Jesus at night does not, necessarily, imply that he was afraid. In this early stage of Jesus’ ministry there was, probably, not yet this atmosphere of suspicion that would justify fear. Nicodemus’ going by night may speak of some prudence which becomes an intellectual. His statement of faith, also, is a very cautious one. He admits what he can admit without compromising himself. Jesus, immediately, breaks through all reservations with His first reply: “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” More is involved for Nicodemus than throwing caution to the wind.

Yet, there is something very intriguing in Nicodemus’ wish to speak with Jesus in private. This man must have had a deep spiritual hunger, which he felt could be satisfied by this Rabbi, Jesus. Jesus recognized the need and, without beating about the bush, addresses it an immediate way. Jesus understood Nicodemus’ hunger better than he did himself.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary introduces this chapter with the following comment: “The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the nation. Nicodemus not only belonged to this group, but was a ruler of the Jews, a member of the Sanhedrin. He came to see Jesus by night, probably out of expediency. The official attitude toward the Nazarene, after the cleansing of the Temple, must have been one of strong opposition. John may be suggesting also the blindness of this man concerning divine things. Nicodemus was ready to concede that Jesus was a **teacher** sent of God, the miracles being witness. This could mean that he was a prophet of greater power than John, who did no miracle. “We know” suggests that others were thinking along similar lines. Whether there is any intended hint that Jesus might be the Messiah is not clear. ... In the mind of Nicodemus the miracles may well have been

⁷⁴ ch. 14:21,23

⁷⁵ ch. 17:20-23

⁷⁶ Ps. 139:23,24

indications of the speedy coming of the kingdom of God in a political sense. But Jesus introduced an entirely different concept of the kingdom, with the signs pointing to a spiritual reign of God. To be **born again** is to be born anew, from above. Nicodemus was nonplused. He knew that a man can not be born over again in a physical sense. Perhaps Jesus meant that it is just as impossible for one who is **old** to change his outlook and his ways.”

I wished I had never heard the term “born again” before, so I could sense some of the shock Nicodemus must have felt at these words.

Jesus clarifies that our seeing of the kingdom of God depends on this new birth. There is no explanation as to what is meant by “the kingdom of God.” That would not have been necessary. After Nicodemus had shown what insight he believed he had, Jesus shows him that he had never understood anything yet. A new heart is the prerequisite for all spiritual insight. A sinful heart shuts out insight. That is the tragic condition of mankind which Paul describes in his Epistle to the Romans: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.”⁷⁷ Sin is identical with foolishness and wisdom is related to fellowship with God.

The Greek word for “again” in “born again” is *anōthen* which, literally means “from above.” Most versions translated the term with “born again.” The RSV reads: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The new birth is an act of God. Ezekiel describes in God’s own Words: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”⁷⁸

The fact that Jesus compares this experience with a birth teaches us some precious lessons:

- It is, first of all, a unique experience. Like the natural birth it is not something that can be repeated, so this spiritual heart-transplant is a one-time only event.
- The experience is innate to the human nature. A human being is conceived and grows in the mother’s womb and is finally born into the world. It is also part of human nature that a divine conception, resulting in a being born of God, would take place. As the female body is created in such a way that it can bring a child into the world and a child is formed in such a manner that it can be born, so man is organically constructed in such a way that he can be born again.
- It is the beginning of all else. In the natural, life exists before birth occurs. Before the new birth there are also traces of spiritual life, such as conviction of sin, spiritual hunger, or, as in the case of Nicodemus, just curiosity. Birth marks a transition to independence. Before a baby is born he cannot breathe on his own or feed himself. All oxygen and nourishment enters the embryo via the umbilical cord. Birth does not give instantaneous independence, but it brings about changes that accentuate the individuality of the person who is born. In the same way, the spiritual birth brings about a transition from a vegetating existence, a benefiting from “common grace”, to a personal relationship with God in which our will and initiative will play an important role.

Adam Clarke’s Commentary indicates that the Jews were familiar with the concept of the new birth. But, the commentary states that Jesus’ presentation was “different to that new birth which the Jews supposed every baptized proselyte enjoyed; for they held that the Gentile, who became a proselyte, was like a child new born. This birth was of water from below: the birth for which Christ contends is *anōthen*⁷⁹ ..., from above-by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Every man must have two births, one from heaven, the other from earth-one of his body, the other of his soul: without the first he cannot see nor enjoy this world, without the last he can not see nor enjoy the kingdom of God. As there is an absolute necessity that a child should be born into the world, that he may see its light, contemplate its glories, and enjoy its good, so there is an absolute necessity that the soul should be brought out of its state of darkness and sin, through the light and power of the grace of Christ, that it may be able to see, *idein* ..., or, to discern, the glories and excellencies of the kingdom of Christ here, and be prepared for the enjoyment of the kingdom of glory hereafter. The Jews had some general notion of the new birth; but, like many among Christians, they put the acts of proselytism, baptism, etc., in the place of the Holy Spirit and his influence: they acknowledged that a man must be born again; but they made that new birth to consist in profession, confession, and external washing.”

If Adam Clarke’s observation is correct, Jesus’ words must have come as an insult to Nicodemus. Jesus compared him, a Jew, a spiritual leader of his people, to a gentile. He reacts to Jesus’ words by taking them literally. This demonstrates that he was a good Pharisee, because the Pharisees adhered to a literal interpretation of the law

⁷⁷ Rom. 1:21-23

⁷⁸ Ezek. 36:26-27

⁷⁹ Italics are mine

but it also shows his prejudice. Nicodemus must have been a man of more than average intelligence. Yet, while simple fishermen, like the disciples, after a brief conversation with Jesus, had come to the fundamental recognition that Jesus was the Messiah, this intellectual meets with serious obstacles. The very insight he believed to possess proved to be a hindrance to find the truth. The older one becomes, the harder it is to remain a child.

In vs. 3, Jesus formulated the “why” of the new birth, in vs. 5 He explains the “how.” He calls it being “born of water and the Spirit.” As far as problems of interpretation are concerned, the phrase “born of the Spirit” gives us the least difficulty. But what is the meaning of “water” in this context? We have only two options of interpretation: figuratively or literally. Those who choose the figurative interpretation see in Jesus’ words the same image Paul uses when he says: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,”⁸⁰ and “to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.”⁸¹ Water there is an image of the cleansing power of the Word of God.

The most literal interpretation of being “born of water” would be that “water” stands for the natural birth in which a baby is born from the water in the mother’s womb.

The most logical interpretation seems to me that Jesus refers here to the baptism of John the Baptist. There is always a danger that our interpretation of the Bible is influenced by theological conceptions and debates that were nonexistent in Jesus’ days. If we fear that these words could be used to make the ritual of baptism a decisive factor in the new birth and, because of that fear, we deny all connections between baptism and regeneration, we may find ourselves on thin ice. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance. It was an outward sign of an inward decision. I understand Jesus to say here that our decision to make a complete turnabout is fecundated by the Holy Spirit and results in a new birth. The question as to what is the most important factor in this process is as unimportant as the question what is more important in a natural birth, the female egg or the male sperm. If one of the two parts is missing there will be no new life. If we understand the importance of Jesus’ statement, we see that the image contains a promise that, if we do our part, which is to repent of our sins, God will do His part in giving us new life. God promises to answer our repentance with His gift of the Holy Spirit and the renewal of our heart.

As we said above, Jesus explains in these words the “how” of the new birth. Yet, at the end of the verse, the “why” returns in full force. The goal of the new birth is entering the kingdom of God. This verse makes clear that regeneration and entering the kingdom are not identical. One is first born again and then enters the kingdom.

Our question is then, “what is the kingdom of God?” The kingdom of God is one of the main themes in the Bible. As soon as man fell into sin, and the devil tried to take away from God the rule of this world, God opened the perspective of His kingdom. “The kingdom” stands for the fulfillment of God’s goal to bring back under His rule everything that had fallen away. The Apostle Paul clarifies that the kingdom of God is universal in its scope. Writing to the Corinthians, he explains the role Jesus plays in this and he says: “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”⁸² In his Epistle to the Philippians, he states: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”⁸³ And in Colossians we read: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”⁸⁴

Entering the kingdom of God, therefore, means, in the first place, the acknowledgment of God’s rule over all, but particularly over ourselves, and it means our surrender to this rule.

It is important to note that Jesus makes a distinction between the new birth and our surrender to God’s control. The two, again, are not identical. God gives us a new heart so that, with our own free will, we can surrender to Him. This act of complete surrender is not the same as our initial yielding to the gentle pressure of the Holy Spirit that changes the direction of our lives. In that stage, we are still too much under the influence of sin and our perspective is too distorted for us to understand the scope of our decision. What God wants is a complete surrender of our will, our heart, our mind, and our body, as a conscious and voluntary sacrifice. This, I believe, is the meaning of entering into the kingdom of God.

The statement: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” sounds so simple, it must be true. “Flesh” here means human nature in the sense of human nature corrupted by sin. No distinction is made here

⁸⁰ Titus 3:5

⁸¹ Eph. 5:26,27

⁸² I Cor 15:24-26

⁸³ Phil. 2:9-11

⁸⁴ Col. 1:19,20

between the physical and the spiritual side but between the spirit and the life of a person who has detached himself from God and from the Spirit of God. Jesus puts here in the simplest words what Paul elaborates on in his epistles in a much more complicated fashion.

The children of the man who rebelled against God are themselves born as rebels. Everything that evolves from our lives is, by nature, rebellious. Even Nicodemus' seemingly warm enthusiasm for Jesus and His ministry, clearly falls under the category of "the flesh." Jesus' words are rather insulting as a reply to this man's human politeness. Only that which is engendered by the Spirit of God in man is acceptable to God.

In stating: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again' " Jesus appeals to Nicodemus' intelligence. The word "surprised" or "marvel" could be seen as a euphemism for doubt. Jesus speaks about things unseen and it could be that Nicodemus had come to the conclusion that the line between the invisible and the non-existent was a very thin one. This is probably the reason Jesus clarifies that there are things that are invisible and that can yet be verified by our senses. We cannot see the wind but our senses cannot therefore deny its existence. Jesus uses this example to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit. As there are, in the realm of the physical, invisible realities, so there are, in the realm of the spiritual, realities that become evident in the new birth.

There is, in the Greek, a play on words that is lost in every translation. The Greek word for "wind" is *pneuma* which means "a current of air, a breath or a breeze, or figuratively, a spirit, even the Holy Spirit." Whether this play on words also existed in the Aramaic Jesus used, I do not know. But in the version John gives of this conversation it gives to Jesus' words the dynamics that are so typical of His style of speaking.

The resemblance between the behavior of the wind and the working of the Holy Spirit is so striking that it should not amaze us that our text uses the same word for both. It seems that the wind blows arbitrarily without a fixed pattern. Yet we know that it follows a complicated system of established laws. The wind may demonstrate its presence in a soft breeze, in a playful twirl of dead leaves, or in a devastating hurricane, or a deadly twister. The Holy Spirit seems to follow the same pattern.

"So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." Jesus does not say: "So it is with the new birth" or "So it is with the Holy Spirit." The comparison is not applied to the beginning of the new life of the believer or to a certain part of it but to the whole of the person who is renewed by the Holy Spirit of God. Our criticism of the behavior of those who are filled with the Holy Spirit is sometimes as pertinent as our criticism of the wind. One difference between the wind and a human being is that the human spirit has the ability to control the spirit within him. This does not mean that we should accept all the passes for utterances of the Holy Spirit as real demonstrations of the Spirit of God.

Nicodemus' next question is honest and uninhibited: "How can this be?" Nicodemus position as "Israel's teacher" and that of his fellow-Pharisees, was far removed from the authority with which the Old Testament prophets spoke. The Pharisees were bogged down in their meticulous interpretations of the law. There was nothing in their teaching that came close to the "Thus says the Lord" of prophets like Amos or Jeremiah. In our time also many people who don't know what they are talking about teach spiritual lessons. This makes some teaching of theology (though not all) a ridiculous messing around by puny humans with things that are too great for them to understand. We can only speak of what we know, if we testify to what we have seen. This "seeing" is seeing things invisible, or rather seeing Him who is invisible. This is what the author of Hebrews testified about Moses: "By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."⁸⁵

Jesus' reproach to Nicodemus is sharp but necessary. This kind of reproach is directed to all those who want to be teachers without understanding "these things." The reproof is not given because of a lack of knowledge but of faith, of willingness to accept. Nicodemus's sin consisted in the fact that he had not accepted what he knew, in his heart, to be true. This was his real reason for coming to Jesus. He knew much more about Jesus than he was willing to admit but he did not want to go beyond the admission: "We know you are a teacher who has come from God." To use the image of C. S. Lewis in his book *Till We have Faces*, his face could not reflect the truth of Christ because he did not have a face.

Jesus spoke of earthly things but they did not believe. He had expressed the reality of spiritual things in images of this earth. In this chapter we see this in the comparison between the new birth and the wind. Not accepting these images demonstrates a lack of understanding that conditions and relationships on earth are created to give expression to what goes on in heaven and in the heart of God. Heaven is the reality of which the earth is the image. We live here in things that are shadows of the heavenly reality. We will not be able to understand the heavenly reality if we cannot understand the meaning of its earthly expressions. In the same way, we will not be able to interpret life on earth if we cannot see it in the light of God's Spirit. All things God created bear God's mark. We

⁸⁵ Heb. 11:27

have to understand, though, that sin has distorted most of the picture. The clearest definition of sin is, probably, that it is that which does not reflect the heavenly reality.

It is in this light that we should look at verses such as those where God said to Moses: "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" and "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain."⁸⁶ And references in Hebrews such as: "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."⁸⁷

When Jesus speaks of earthly things and heavenly things, He does not deal with two different subjects but with two interpretations of the same reality. The subject of the earthly things that are spoken of is the same as of the heavenly things. With "How then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" Jesus, probably, means speaking about heaven without using earthly figures of speech. Jesus promised a same change in instruction to His disciple the night before His death. We read: "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father."⁸⁸ In the context in which those words were spoken, we may conclude that the difference is in the way the truth would be revealed to us. If we understand Jesus' words in His last discourse correctly, there is a way of knowing the truth that is much more direct and immediate than by means of words that reach the ear.⁸⁹ Everything that is put in words is, in a way, figurative. The instruction of the Holy Spirit directly in our hearts is the purest form of teaching. It is a wireless projection of truth on the screen of our consciousness.

There is also, obviously, an imitation of this ministry of the Spirit which results in vain contemplation. And we do not always receive correctly the pure truth the Holy Spirit brings us. The influence of the flesh can play a part in this. All this, however, does in no way diminish the fact there is this form of communication of the Lord with us about heavenly things by which our lives can be filled and blessed. There is indeed a striking similarity between the text here and Jesus conversation with His disciple on the eve of His crucifixion. Compare, for instance: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-the Son of Man" with "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."⁹⁰

We could ask ourselves why Jesus says all those things to a man who is, obviously, still outside the kingdom. Nicodemus could hardly have understood even the very beginning of these truths. It seems as if this does not bother Jesus in the least. It seems that understanding or not understanding at this stage is not important. Jesus, systematically, plants truths in Nicodemus' heart, knowing that the day will come when the Holy Spirit will moisten the soil and that which is not understood will come into full bloom. Almost everything Jesus said during His life on earth was an investment in the work the Holy Spirit would do at a later time.

It is also noteworthy that Jesus, initially, answers Nicodemus' question "How can this be?" with a reproof. It may have been the Lord's intention to bring Nicodemus down to size. Without any trace of conviction of sin there would be not ground in which faith could grow.

Jesus answers the actual question in the following section, beginning with vs. 14. Although the story of the bronze serpent in the desert was well known, the meaning of Jesus' words must have escaped Nicodemus at this point. The basis for the new birth is the lifting up of the Son of Man in His death on the cross. In comparing His own death with the story of Moses' lifting up of the snake in the Book of Numbers,⁹¹ Jesus presents all the elements that are required for the bringing forth of new life. There is the venom of sin that has to be recognized and dealt with. There is the identification with sin in the form of the serpent. Jesus possessed a body that was in no way different from the bodies of sinful men. There is the looking up in faith to the symbol of sin, judgment, and salvation, which allows man to live.

⁸⁶ Ex. 25:40; 26:30

⁸⁷ Heb. 8:5; 9:11,12,23

⁸⁸ ch. 16:25

⁸⁹ See ch. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15

⁹⁰ ch. 3:13; 16:7

⁹¹ See Num. 21:4-9

The word “lifted up,” evidently, has a double meaning in this context. The Greek word *hupsoo* simply means “to elevate, literally or figuratively.” The word seems to have an honorable connotation both in Greek and in English. If we try to picture ourselves at the scene of the crucifixion with its nauseating cruelty and inhuman torture, the word “elevate” seems completely out of place. Yet, this is the word Jesus used consistently for the most horrible thing man ever did to Him. He announced to the Greeks who came to visit Him: “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”⁹² Jesus speaks about His crucifixion in the same way Paul spoke about His coronation: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place.”⁹³

In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus uses the term “lifted up” as a symbol of identification with sin. In that sense also, Jesus sticks out head and shoulder above all other human beings. As Paul says: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.”⁹⁴ Jesus personified the serpent! How little Nicodemus must have understood of this awful and glorious paradox! How little do we understand it! Because Jesus was lifted up like the serpent, nobody is lifted up higher. But there is also the sense Jesus gives to the same word in the context that we mentioned above: “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”⁹⁵ We see Jesus there in the same position on the cross but, instead of an overload of repulsion and horror which we should feel for so much sin and suffering, we feel drawn to Him in an irresistible way. No greater object lesson of love can ever match the crucifixion of Christ. It is this love that neutralizes the venom of sin in our lives. Without some measure of understanding of what our Lord did for us at the cross, it is impossible for us to receive new life. There is no other basis.

The Pulpit Commentary has a lengthy comment on the transition from the verses 15 to 16 which is worth copying: “Many commentators, beginning with Erasmus, and followed by Neander, Tholuck, Lücke, Westcott, and Moulton, have supposed that our Lord’s discourse with Nicodemus ended with ver. 15, and that thenceforward we have the reflections in after-times made by the evangelist, in harmony with the teachings which he had received from the Lord. This is urged on the ground that in ch. i.18, and at the close of the present chapter (vers. 31-36), when reciting the testimony of the Baptist, it appears to the commentators that John has blended his own reflections with the words of the Baptist, adding them without break to the sentences which he does record. ... I am not prepared to admit the analogy; there is nothing in these words, if attributed to the Baptist, incompatible with the purely Old Testament position and transition-standpoint to which he adhered. The argument drawn from the past tenses, *egapesen*⁹⁶ and *edoken*,⁹⁷ is not incompatible with the large view of the whole transaction which the Son of God adopted, as though in the fullness of its infinite love it had already been consummated. We are told that there are certain phrases which nowhere else are ascribed to Jesus himself, such as ‘only begotten Son’ –a term which is found in the prologue (ch. i. 14,18) and First Epist. (iv. 9), *i.e.* in John’s own composition. The reply is that John used this great word on the specified occasion because he had heard it on the lips of Jesus; that he would not have dared to use it if he had not had the justification of such use, the like to which he here recounts. The believing *eis tò onomá* –‘on the name of’ –does not occur, it is said in the recorded words of Jesus, though it is found in the discourse of the evangelist himself in ch. i.12; ii.23; and 1 John v.13. The same criticism applies. John used it because he had heard our Lord thus deign to express himself. Moreover, the commencement of the paragraph, by the use of the particle *gār*, shows that no break has occurred, that a richer and fuller and more triumphant reason is to be given for the obtaining of life eternal than that which had already been advanced. He passes from the Son of man (who is in heaven, and came from heaven and God) to the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father. He speaks in more practical and explanatory form of the Object of faith, and the Divine source of the arrangement and its issues. A flood of new thoughts and some terms occur here for the first time; but they are no more startling than other words of Jesus, whose awful weight of meaning and rich originality gave to the evangelist all his power to teach. It is quite unnecessary to find fault with the abruptness of the close of this discourse, or the sudden cessation of the dialogue, or the disappearance of Nicodemus, or of any lack of affectionateness in the style of address. Christ is often abrupt, and in numerous replies which he gave to his interlocutors he prolongs the remarks as though they were addressed to the concealed mind of the speakers rather than to their uttered words. If there had been any hint or indication that these were John’s reflections, we can only say that he who by the Holy Spirit penned the prologue was no incapable of these splendid and heart-searching generalizations of love, faith, judgment, and eternal life. But there does not appear to be any sufficient reason for such an hypothesis. Still, it must be admitted that we have not the whole of the former or the latter part of this wondrous discourse. Much has, without any doubt, been omitted.

⁹² ch. 12:32

⁹³ Phil. 2:9

⁹⁴ II Cor. 5:21

⁹⁵ ch. 12:32

⁹⁶ past tense of *agapao* (to love)

⁹⁷ past tense of *didomi* (to give)

John has seized upon the most salient points and the loftiest thoughts. These stand out like mountain-peaks above the glittering seas, indicating where the inner and hidden connections of their basis lie, but not unveiling them. We do not doubt that John's mind, by long pondering on the thoughts of Jesus and his words of profound significance, had acquired to some extent the method of his speech, and do not doubt that a certain subjective coloring affects his condensation of the discourse of Jesus. He was not a shorthand reporter, photographically or telephonically reproducing all that passed. He was a beloved disciple, who knew his Lord and lost himself in his Master. He seized with inspired and intuitive accuracy the root-ideas of the Son of man, and reproduced them with the power of the true artist. It is incredible, even if we regard the entire paragraph (vers. 16-21) as the language of our Lord, that we have the whole of the discourse, or conversation, of the memorable night. Still less satisfactory is it to suppose that we have in it nothing more than an imaginary scene, an idealization of the bearing of Christian truth on Jewish prejudice. So vast a thought, though it be the burden of the New Testament, and because it is so, issued from the heart of Jesus."

There is a difference in emphasis in the use of the words "in Him" in the verses 15 and 16. In vs. 15, we read "that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." The Greek words used here for "in Him" are *en auto*. In vs. 16, we read "that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." There the "in Him" is *eis auto* in the Greek. Some translations add the words "should not perish but...", which are not in the Greek. It seems that the "in Him" in vs. 15 refers to having life. The phrase should read "that everyone who believes, in him may have eternal life." The "in Him" in vs. 16 is then the focus of the faith. This makes vs. 15 the first place in Scripture that indicates that eternal life is not a private possession that can be enjoyed apart from fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. If the result of Adam's breaking the bond with God was death then life cannot be seen without the restoration of this bond. Eternal life is in Christ. Eternal life is in Jesus Christ. Even as He suffered death in our behalf, so also is the life that is in Him for our benefit. Only inasmuch as we identify ourselves with His death, as He identified Himself with our lives, will His resurrection life flow through us.

John 3:16 is generally considered to be the greatest verse in the whole Bible. It is the Gospel in a nutshell. It reveals all the facets of what we experience as salvation. It demonstrates that God takes the initiative in the giving of His Son. It also shows the basis for this initiative, which is His love for the world. This love appears to be measureless; it spans the whole world. And why? It is the love that makes us say that "blood is thicker than water." God created this world. It is His. The price He paid, however, seems out of proportion. "His one and only Son" is, in fact, Himself. We do not say "My body is sick" but we say "I am sick." So God cannot say "I do not give Myself, I give My one and only Son." God gave Himself in Jesus Christ. That price is too high! It is a foolish act! Even more foolish is it to refuse the offer!

We read these words of prophecy two thousand years after they were fulfilled, which makes it difficult for us to understand how loaded they must have sounded when they were first spoken. Because this *was* a prophecy. The words were spoken by Him who was Himself the gift. At the moment of this conversation with Nicodemus, the fulfillment had already started but the measure of fulfillment was not yet full. The work was begun but it was not yet finished.

What did Nicodemus feel when he heard Jesus speak these words? He must have been touched by the direct and self-conscious way in which Jesus said this. Who would ever dare to say such things about himself? Yet, the general atmosphere of the conversation must have been such that blasphemy was excluded. Since Jesus, obviously, did not say this to elevate Himself, it means that salvation and eternal life were in fact backing up this pronouncement.

To believe in Him means to put one's trust in Him. The word "trust" has the deeply human meaning of leaning upon someone and experiencing inner peace in the process. *Strong's Concordance* defines the Greek word *pisteuo* as "to entrust one's spiritual well-being to Christ."

The words "shall not perish" demonstrate God's deep compassion with man's lot in this world. It was the knowledge of the terrible alternative to this salvation that made the Almighty decide to go to this extreme of giving up His Son. God is more alarmed over the condition of mankind than any human being can be. Even as God's love is measureless so also is His sorrow. Eternal life should always be seen against the background of man's lost condition. If we think we can enter eternal life with an unworried happy smile, without understanding from what we have been saved, we haven't tasted the real thing yet.

Perishing does not come from God. The doctrine that teaches that God elected some to be saved and others to be lost is not found in the Bible. God took the initiative for man's salvation. That is what the Bible teaches about divine election. When God sends His Son into the world, the world condemns itself. Everyone who finds himself standing in the light of God will condemn himself. God's purpose in the sending of the Lord Jesus into this world is for the world to be saved. Condemnation is a byproduct. Without judgment, without self-condemnation, there can be no salvation. God intends to save the world. If it would never come to this that every human being who was ever

born or is yet to be born experienced this salvation, it would not be because God had previously decided to exclude anyone from His plan of salvation.

The law of love can never be separated from the law of choice. God would never force anyone to eat from the Tree of Life. The best He can do is to forbid him to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the present situation, no one is born in this world in a neutral condition, like the condition in which Adam was when God created him. We do not have the option to choose between two extremes. The person who is born in this world is already lost and condemned. The use of the word "perish" can give way to the misleading thought that man would not be lost yet. The only way out is in the fact that Jesus Christ underwent the punishment to which we were condemned. In this verse, Jesus reduces the complicated problem of guilt, judgment, and salvation to its simplest expression. Since there is only one way out, the criterion is either believing in Him or rejecting Him. That is the most important decision in everybody's life.

When Jesus says in vs. 19: "This is the verdict" He speaks about the final judgment. The Greek word is *krisis* from which we get our word crisis. It means decision, or a tribunal. It is God's crisis when man's sin comes to a head. The light has not come into the world to condemn the world. The condemnation, as we have seen, is included in man's wrong choice. It is the heartrending fact that man is able to say: "No, thank you, I rather be lost." A Dutch poet, Marsman, wrote about a dying man who refused the last rites by a priest, saying: "Do not take away my last possession. My sin goes with me in my grave."

The most serious part of sin is, not in the first place, in committing the act but in the cover-up. If Adam, instead of going into hiding and accusing his wife, had immediately confessed his sin, we would now probably live in a different world. Confession pulls the sting out of sin. The danger of all infections is that puss cannot get out of the body. The NKJV stays closer to the Greek present tense with the rendering "For everyone practicing evil..." Jesus speaks not about one single act but about a life of evil practice. He depicts the consequences of a life that is not completely turned around to stand in the light.

Like the person who practices evil shuns the light, so the person in whose life truth has entered will be drawn to the light. The fact that truth entered our life does not automatically place us in the light. Going toward the light requires an effort of the will and a willingness to be exposed. Like sin and darkness go together, so truth and light belong to each other. As it is in the nature of sin to hide, so it is in the nature of truth to reveal. This is the built-in safety valve of truth. Light has a purifying effect upon good deeds. No human act is one hundred percent unselfish and good. But everything that is done out of love to the Lord and that is placed in the light of God will be cleansed of sinful admixtures and thus it becomes acceptable to God. Coming to the light implies a willingness to have our ulterior motives exposed.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. The conversation ends with Jesus' words about acts that belong to the night and that are placed in the light. We are not told how Nicodemus reacted at that moment, but from later mentions of his name, we may deduct that he came to faith in Christ.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ See ch. 7:50; 19:39

3. John the Baptist's Second Testimony about Christ 3:22-36

Verse 24: "This was before John was put in prison" is an important interjection because it clarifies the chronology of the events in Jesus' life. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this with: ">From the first three Evangelists one would naturally conclude that our Lord's public ministry only began after the Baptist's imprisonment. But here, about six months, probably, after our Lord had entered on His public ministry, we find the Baptist still at his work. How much longer this continued cannot be determined with certainty; but probably not very long." Everything John has recorded so far in his Gospel took place before John's imprisonment.

Jesus and His disciples left Jerusalem, but they remained in the province of Judea. This raises the interesting question who Jesus' disciples were at this point and what their relationship with Jesus entailed. We read that they baptized people.⁹⁹ For some of them the definite call had not yet come. In their first meeting with Jesus, recorded in chapter 1, Philip is the only one who is called by name to follow Jesus. A specific call for Peter, Andrew, John, and James took place later in Galilee after John the Baptist had been put in prison.¹⁰⁰ According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus later still "appointed twelve-designating them apostles-that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."¹⁰¹ So we should not think of the disciples here as the group of twelve. The most prominent ones among the disciples had probably not yet been added to the group or had already gone on.

We should also ask the question as to what was involved in the baptism they practiced. This was obviously not the baptism included in the great commission we read about in Matthew, where Jesus commanded: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰² It must have been a baptism of repentance, as a continuation of the baptism of John the Baptist. This means that it was not a baptism as an outward sign of an inward renewal. John had pointed out Jesus as the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. But Jesus began His ministry with a water baptism.

The period described in these verses is, obviously, a time of transition. Jesus is becoming greater while John is becoming less. This increase in Jesus' popularity demonstrated itself in the increase of the number of His disciples. In the next chapter we read: "The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John." It is difficult for us, who are used to looking upon Jesus Christ as the greatest to whom all power in heaven and earth is given, to see Him in a period of development, of finding root in solid ground. We interpret "He must become greater; I must become less" usually only as a growing process of Christ in us. But this increase is not merely, and not primarily in our own subjective experience. There is an objective growing. According to the laws of nature, the life of the Son of God in this world developed from a small baby into a boy who "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."¹⁰³ He grew into an adult male who was baptized by John the Baptist. And even in His work as Messiah, He began on the same level as John and increased in popularity and authority. Jesus' life does not show us a divine "prefab" but a natural organic development.

It is strange, however, that we hear nothing more about this baptism after John was thrown in prison. It also appears that Jesus was not particularly enamored by the increase of popularity that accompanied this baptism and that this was the reason that He left Judea. We are not given any details about this. There is also no explanation as to why Jesus remained Himself passive in this ministry of baptism.

There is a facet in the ritual of baptism that easily appeals to the masses. This gives rise to the danger that the outward sign is emphasized without any inner change taking place. This danger is even greater in a baptism that symbolizes repentance rather than regeneration through the Holy Spirit. Man can control the measure of his own repentance but it is impossible to open the door only a crack for the Holy Spirit and then close it again. Once the dike breaks the flood can no longer be controlled. If Jesus, because of this way of baptism, in which there is no genuine hunger for the Kingdom of Heaven, distances Himself more and more, this is not inconsistent with what we read earlier: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."¹⁰⁴

Another problem that surfaces because of this baptism is the seeming rivalry between Jesus and John. As is often the case, the followers fight each other, not the leaders. We don't know who the Jew was who came to argue

⁹⁹ See ch. 4:2

¹⁰⁰ See Matt. 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20, and Luke 5:1-11

¹⁰¹ Mark 3:14-15

¹⁰² Matt. 28:19

¹⁰³ Luke 2:52

¹⁰⁴ ch. 2:24,25

with John's disciples, or what the finer points of the argument were. John, purposely, keeps the argument in the background in order to let the full light shine on the essentials.

John's testimony about Jesus is deeply moving. He expresses what every person who acknowledges Jesus as his Lord experiences in one way or another. Our fellowship with God will demonstrate itself in stepping back and to cede the place that was occupied by our self-will and self-centeredness to Him who is greater and who has to become greater in us. Becoming less is not a negative process but a positive one. The dying off and shrinking of our ego is the result of the growing of Jesus Christ in our hearts. It is accompanied by joy. "The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly!" Some people in Christian circles endeavor to suppress the desires and longings of their heart with a great deal of moaning about their sinfulness. This can be a subtle form of self-deception that does not allow the Lord to increase. All becoming less without the Lord becoming more is a covert form of self-glorification.

Vs. 31 and following verses establish the continuity between this section and the previous one. Compare: "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-the Son of Man"¹⁰⁵ with "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all." This is probably the main reason for John's relating the incident.

John the Baptist's thoughts about Jesus are no merely human opinions of one person about his fellowman. They demonstrate a deep understanding, inspired by the Holy Spirit, into Jesus' divine nature. John uttered insights that, even if someone with previous knowledge of the historical facts had spoken them, testify of great wisdom. There is no denying the prophetic character of these words.

The implication seems to be that Jesus testifies of things that He had seen and heard in heaven, because He came from heaven. This suggests that Jesus would remember things from His preexistence. That, however, is hard to reconcile with the picture Matthew and Luke draw for us of Jesus as a human being who had to go through the process of development and who had no other access to the supernatural than by means of faith. Vs. 34 clarifies that Jesus' speaking of the Word of God is due to the fact that "God gives the Spirit without limit." This explanation fuses the two sides of the picture of Jesus that is drawn for us in the Gospels into one wondrous harmonious unity.

When John states that "no one accepts his testimony," he concludes this, of course, on the basis of his own observations. This is not an absolute and final conclusion that spans the ages. Before the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, no one could, in fact, completely accept Christ's testimony. As we mentioned before, Jesus' words were mainly addressed to the "new man" which did not yet exist before Pentecost.

From a human viewpoint, what God is doing here seems to be a senseless, risky venture. It seems that Jesus plants His seed in barren soil, expecting it to bear fruit. On the other hand (reasoning again from a human perspective), we can call this God's faith in the power of His own Word and in the potential power of the man who has come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We find an excellent illustration of this divine confidence in His own creation in the story of Job. Every human being in whom the Word of God is incarnated under the influence of the Holy Spirit is proof of the fact that God is right. So man becomes a seal of God's truthfulness. It surpasses our understanding that a human being can put a stamp on the character and work of God!

"The one whom God has sent" in vs. 34 is, of course, Jesus Christ. Again, John's insight into the character of Jesus work and into His relationship with the Father cannot possibly be explained as human insight. This must have been revealed to him directly by the Holy Spirit. John recognized that Jesus spoke the Words of God, although he probably heard very few of them himself. He recognized that the source is a limitless filling with the Holy Spirit.

Then also he has insight in the relationship of love between the Father and the Son, on the basis of which Jesus received all authority. No one will ever be able to fully fathom this love. But no one can also love, or know about love, without knowing something of this divine love relationship.

The love of the Father for the Son correlates with His confidence in the Son. "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." This means that God, from His side, has given over all to His Son. This same confidence is demonstrated in His relationship with us. When Jesus says: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you,"¹⁰⁶ He evinces the same trust.

On the other hand, Jesus adopts an attitude of complete dependence on the Father, as is expressed in "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."¹⁰⁷ Paul sees our relationship with the Lord in the same way when he says: "You

¹⁰⁵ vs. 13

¹⁰⁶ ch. 15:15

¹⁰⁷ John 5:19

have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.”¹⁰⁸ Friendship and servitude, divine confidence and human bondage are in no way contradictory.

Receiving eternal life is identical with putting one's trust in Jesus Christ. Although, by very nature, they are not the same, yet we can say that they are identical because they are synchronized. The very moment we put our trust in Christ, eternal life will flood our heart. By way of comparison we can say that turning the key in the ignition is identical with starting the motor of the car. This, however, is not always the way we experience it in daily life. (As far as second hand cars is concerned, that is certainly true). When we say that the two are identical, we speak of reliability: God's reliability. God's faithfulness is a guarantee of the fact that the moment we believe in Him, eternal life enters. A better illustration of the above would be the use of electricity. The power is already there. Eternal life is not generated in us the moment we believe but we begin to partake of it. Our soul is surrounded by eternal life, like everything in creation is surrounded by electricity. Faith is like breaking through the insulation. The only difference between putting our faith in the Son of God and receiving eternal life is that trusting Jesus is our responsibility and giving eternal life is an act of God.

Finally, who can hear the words “*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*” without being touched by the reality of this statement? There must be something in the heart of every man that reacts to this.

The NIV places rejection in opposition to believing. Vs. 36 reads: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life.” Some versions simply use, “he who does not believe.” The RSV states: “he who does not obey the Son shall not see life.” The Greek word is *apeitheo* which *Strongs* defines: “to disbelieve.” The word is rendered “disobey” in other contexts. In Romans, for instance, Paul quotes Isaiah: “But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a *disobedient* and obstinate people.’”¹⁰⁹ And Peter uses it in the same sense about the generation of Noah's time: “Who *disobeyed* long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.”¹¹⁰ *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* concurs with such rendering. We read: “He that believeth not hò... *apeithoo* More correctly, as the English Revised Version (1885): ‘obeyeth not.’ Disbelief is regarded in its active manifestation, disobedience. The verb *peithoo* ... means ‘to persuade, to cause belief, to induce one to do something by persuading,’ and so runs into the meaning of ‘to obey,’ properly as the result of persuasion.”

It seems surprising that disobedience is placed as an opposite to faith. Faith and obedience are not identical in our thinking. To God, however, they are the same. He orders man to believe. It is, therefore, simply an act of disobedience if we do not put our trust in Jesus Christ.

Identifying faith with obedience presupposes also an inborn capacity for faith in each man. As the lungs are created for breathing, so the human spirit has the ability to believe. God does not command to do that which goes against our nature. He wants us to obey the law that is within us. By not putting our trust in Him, we sin against ourselves. A person who believes is in his element. An unbeliever is a person who has lost his bearings. The Bible calls the strong reaction of our own nature against our trespassing of the established law “God's wrath.” The wrath of God is not directed against what we do but against what we are. A person who tries to stop his own breathing experiences God's wrath in turning blue. The stomach that vomits up the food that is unsuitable, the heart that races on and cannot find rest, that is God's wrath.

V. The Presentation of Christ in Samaria 4:1-42

1. The Conversation with the Woman at the Well 4:1-42

When we read the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, we get the impression that Jesus' return to Galilee coincided with John the Baptist's imprisonment.¹¹¹ The writer of John's Gospel corrects this notion. The arrest of John the Baptist was not the reason for Jesus' leaving Judea but the fact that the baptism that was carried out by John's disciples as well as by the disciples of Jesus caused a seeming rivalry between both parties. John was still free when Jesus left Judea. John's detention must have taken place during the events that are described in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel.

John does not give the actual reason for Jesus' departure. We can hardly suppose that Jesus was afraid of the Pharisees. He, evidently, considered it prudent at this point to avoid a conflict with them. His insight in the nature of His opponents warned Him that an increase in popularity would evoke a clash that would be a hindrance

¹⁰⁸ Rom. 6:18

¹⁰⁹ Rom.10:21

¹¹⁰ I Peter 3:20

¹¹¹ See Matt. 4:12; Mark 1:14

for His further ministry. It is not the first time in the history of the Kingdom of Heaven that the Lord left a revival in order to save one single soul.

“Now he had to go through Samaria” conveys the inner moral urgency. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “He **must** go through Samaria. Ordinarily in John this word points to a divine necessity, and it may do so here, indicating the need of dealing with the Samaritans and opening to them the gateway to life. Along with this may be the more evident need of reaching Galilee by the most direct route.” In order to prevent pollution by passing through pagan territory, pious Jews were in the habit of avoiding this shortcut and rather crossed the Jordan River, traveling through Perea to go to Galilee.

The reason Jesus took the shortest route was not only a matter of expedience, it was because there was a human being with a need that had to be met. Jesus Himself was in need also; He was tired and thirsty. There is something deeply moving in Jesus’ identification with the human need for rest and water. His co-suffering, or “compassion,” became a physical experience for Him. For us, such experiences are part of our being human; there is nothing unusual in this. For Him, it was a law to which He voluntarily submitted Himself. Jesus could have appealed to God’s promise as given in Isaiah: “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”¹¹² If this promise related to any human need it would certainly apply to Christ. Nowhere else is Jesus’ identification with human suffering so clearly put in perspective as in this story. The reason becomes clearer when we understand that the fate of one human soul was at stake. What happened to this Samaritan woman is representative of what God had in mind when He sent His Son as a propitiation for the whole world.

Jesus’ condition made Him particularly despicable to this woman. Every other Jew would rather have bitten off his tongue than to admit to a Samaritan that he was thirsty. “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.” This statement does not imply that there were no trade relations between the two groups. After all, the disciples went to town to buy food. The Jews considered the Samaritans to be impure and for that reason they were not allowed to use the same vessel. Jesus transgressed against this regulation. That is what made His request to the woman so incomprehensible to her.

The offer of living water is so true and direct but, in spite of this, the woman doesn’t understand and she talks about things that are quite dissimilar from what Jesus was saying to her. Jesus and the woman both speak about water but they both mean something different. It is intriguing to see that Jesus makes no effort to come down to the woman’s level. A superficial glance would make us conclude that the woman takes Jesus’ words too literally. In reality, she does not take them literal enough! The woman’s mistake consists in the fact that her starting-point is wrong. She considered water to be the ultimate reality. Jesus based His words on another reality, eternal life, of which water is an image. The woman’s inability to distinguish between the image and reality is caused by sin. When Jesus put His finger on this, the woman knew immediately what He was talking about. In her heart she knew much more about spiritual things than she was aware of.

The words “If you knew...” demonstrate that the woman was ignorant on, at least, two points: she did not know the gift of God and she didn’t know who was speaking. Those two things determine the course of every human life. This woman lived like an outcast. She tried to hide what everyone knew about her. She did this because she did not know that there was another kind of life available to her. Many people do not know what life is all about and who is at the center of life. Eternal life cannot be separated from the person of Jesus Christ. No one can ever receive this life without coming in personal contact with Him.

The serpent tempted Eve in Paradise to eat of the forbidden tree and thus death entered this world. In this story, we see a counter temptation taking place; Jesus enticed this woman to eat of the Tree of Life so that eternal life could inundate her life. Drinking living water quenches man’s thirst forever. Yet, once we drink, we keep on thirsting for more. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”¹¹³ Such is the paradox of eternal life. One kind of thirst, the thirst of the restless heart, is quenched forever; the other thirst, the thirst of the heart that has found, can never drink enough.

The secret of full satisfaction is in passing on the blessing. When eternal life enters a person’s soul it “will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” This means that receiving new life produces new life. Jesus saw in this poor woman a new creature who would draw others to the light.

The words “Go, call your husband and come back” are usually seen as an effort by Jesus to put His finger on the woman’s wounds. That makes sense in the context of this story. But Jesus’ words constitute more than the negative aspect of revealing sin. They, first of all, establish God’s order of creation. A family is incomplete if only

¹¹² Isa. 40:29-31

¹¹³ Ps. 42:1,2

the mother comes to faith in God. The first responsibility, especially in spiritual matters, belongs to the husband. Jesus established here an important pattern in counseling. In the salvation of her soul, the woman ought not to be separated from her husband. The important order is that husband and wife hear the Gospel together and that they be saved together. In following the right order in this conversation, Jesus inevitably brought to light what was wrong in the woman's life and what hindered her in receiving eternal life.

We should note Jesus' kindness and gentleness in the way He proceeded. There is not even a tone of reproach in exposing the woman's sin. The Lord even complimented the woman for speaking the truth. Even when she tried to hide behind a theological question, Jesus answered patiently, as if the matter was urgent at this point.

Actually, the question was more urgent than it seems. It pertains to worshipping God, which is the reason for man's creation. Jesus did not deny the existing situation of that time. He even clarified that the Samaritan ritual was based on ignorance. The value of Jesus' words is not in a revolutionary reversal of the existing order but in the announcement of the coming of a new order, which is an organic growing from one state into another. There was nothing untrue or irrelevant in the temple worship in Jerusalem but, in comparison with the new order, it was primitive and incomplete. The woman was right in assuming that true worship of God could not be separated from the coming of the Messiah. Only in Him, it is possible for us to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

Jesus speaks about "the true worshippers." This implies that there are worshippers that are untrue. Not everyone who bows the knee before God does so with the intention to meet God. One can call upon the Name of the Lord and actually call upon himself. Such untrue worshippers are found in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and in the whole world. Being a true worshippers means, first of all, that one seeks God for God's sake. The Bible tells us: "The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."¹¹⁴

The next evidence of true worship is in the fact that the subject of it is "the Father." It is one of the most typical features of Jesus' teaching that He revealed God to us as "the Father." It should amaze us that Jesus used this term with this Samaritan woman. In spite of the fact that she was not a daughter of Abraham¹¹⁵, Jesus counted her in with the fold. The Jews were correct when they said that calling God "our Father" claims equality with God. They opposed Jesus because "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."¹¹⁶

In using the term "the Father," Jesus makes an appeal to the woman's heart. Lifting up of a human being from the pits of sin in which he fell, is not done by rubbing in the fact of sinning, and evoking a sense of guilt, but by reminding him of his origin and the nobility of his descent. A good understanding of what it means that God is our Father, and that, consequently, we are His children is, not only, necessary in order to pull us up from sin but it also forms the basis on which worship is built. Without realization of the kinship between God and man, no true worship is possible. There can be no fellowship without relationship. If there are only points of infinite difference between me and God, I will be crushed by the greatness of the character of God. The essence of true worship, therefore, is grace, this amazing spark that always jumps from the positive pole of my equality with God to the negative pole of my unworthiness.

In the light of the above, it becomes clear that knowing is an important factor in worshipping. The Jews knew what they did, the Samaritans did not, but they did it anyhow. The Jews could approach God on the basis of the revelation of the whole Old Testament. The Samaritans possessed a dubiously mixed heritage of truth and untruth. Theirs was a strange blend tradition and superstition.¹¹⁷ Yet Jesus called what they did "worship." He did not say: "What you are doing is no true worship" but: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know." Jesus did not pass by the pure doctrine but on the Day of Judgment pure doctrine does not weigh heavily. Satan often uses pure doctrine as a very effective weapon. There is sometimes in the heart of those who do not know a spiritual hunger that is not found with those who know. Knowing is no guarantee of eternal life.

The question is why did the Samaritans worship at all? From where comes the hunger in man's heart? Obviously not from what he knows. In most pagan cultures, the lack of knowledge has led to a maze of darkness, or to a rigidity of dead traditions. But sometimes we see isolated cases of genuine spiritual hunger for the source of life. "Blood is thicker than water," also with God, especially with God! The apostle Paul must have had this in mind when he wrote: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them."¹¹⁸ We cannot simply write off a Socrates or a Plato as minds that were darkened by sin.

¹¹⁴ II Chr. 16:9^a

¹¹⁵ See Luke 13:16

¹¹⁶ John 5:18

¹¹⁷ See II Kings 17:24-41

¹¹⁸ Rom. 2:14,15

In approaching the problem of the gentiles, Jesus showed full respect for the positive elements in their understanding of the truth but without watering down that truth. "Salvation is from the Jews." The worship of the Samaritans was, after all, only based upon ignorance. In taking this approach, Jesus built a bridge for this woman and, through her, to all Samaritans. It is only one small, but a very important, step from being worshippers, who do not know, to true worshippers.

Jesus introduced a word of prophecy with "Yet a time is coming and has now come..." The Greek word for "time," which is the rendering of the NIV, is *hora*, which literally or figuratively means "an hour." Most other translations use the word "hour." The word "now" indicates that worship in spirit and in truth was already possible in principle at that moment; it announced a time when the door would be opened wide. That door was opened when Jesus died on the cross. Jesus could say "now" because He had come to earth and, also, because "spirit and truth" had always been the underlying principle of worship.

Everybody knows by intuition that "spirit and truth" are essentials to worship. "Spirit" stands for both the form and the contents of worship, as does the word "truth." Yet both words are not identical. "Spirit" only refers to the form inasmuch as it stands in opposition to "matter." Worship is not a material occupation. This could not be said of the temple worship in Jerusalem. That worship consisted of a building and a whole complex of ritual sacrifices and purifications. Worship in spirit is worship that rises above that and that is not bound by it. "Spirit" refers to the contents because the spirit of man is the organ with which man worships and a man's spirit is his contents. Our kinship with God is in our spirit. With our spirit we worship the Spirit of God. Here ends our ability to describe the process! What follows belongs to the unspeakable. The apostle Paul approached this when he wrote: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."¹¹⁹

The word "truth" also has this twofold meaning, which pertains both to the form and the contents. As far as form is concerned, the contrast is not between the truth and the lie but rather between the shadow and the reality. The temple worship in Jerusalem was not an untruth but a shadow of the reality into which Moses had been given a look. The author of Hebrews states: "They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.'"¹²⁰ The worship in truth is the worship that penetrates into the heavenly reality and functions there. The fact that the contents has to be in accordance with the truth is easiest for us to understand. In that sense "truth" stands in opposition to "lie." No worshipper can hide a lie in his heart. In the words of the psalmist: "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."¹²¹ The lie is the incongruence between things in heaven and things on earth. All that does not measure up to God's glory is sin. The apostle Paul defined sin with the words: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."¹²² All that is not congruent to God's reality is a lie.

"They are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." For a person whose vision is dimmed by a sinful life, by the gray drudgery of daily routine, this is one of the most glorious discoveries that can be made. This kind of truth puts a glow into life and makes a new creature out of us.

"God is spirit." If God seeks worshippers, He seeks that which is related to Him. Spirit and truth are conditions for worship. Without the Holy Spirit and without the truth of Jesus Christ, no man can come to God. Worship is the only possible reaction to the discovery of God's reality. "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."¹²³

Those glorious words of the Lord made the woman think immediately of the Messiah who was to come. She may have asked herself if He was the one, but she was afraid to ask this. In spite of the kind of life she led, there must have been in her heart a desire for the things of God.

There are only a few instances recorded in the New Testament in which the Lord clearly stated who He was. To the man who was born blind, He said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you."¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ I Cor. 2:9-13

¹²⁰ Heb. 8:5

¹²¹ Ps. 66:18

¹²² Rom. 3:23

¹²³ Rev. 1:17

¹²⁴ ch. 9:37

And elsewhere we read: "The Jews gathered around him, saying, 'How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me.'" ¹²⁵ The crowd never took these statements seriously. Jesus' straightforward declaration was for those who were ready to receive it. Those who didn't want to know were not given the knowledge.

When God reveals to us who He is, it overwhelms us. The words: "I am the Lord" claim ownership of our lives. Our happiness lies in our answer "He is the Lord!"

For this woman, this was the only thing she needed. Jesus' confession turned her life around in a decisive way. She went home a new person who testified of what she has heard and seen.

At this point, the conversation with the woman ends. The disciples arrived and the woman went back to her village, probably without bothering to draw water from the well.

It is interesting to compare this conversation with the one in the previous chapter. Jesus discussed deep theological concepts with a woman who lived in sin and who hardly knew the basics of theology. To the theologian, Jesus merely explained that he needed life and how to get it. The needs of both persons were the same but, for the woman, awareness of sin was so close to the surface that it needed no pointing out; for Nicodemus it was tucked away so deeply that he was hardly aware of it.

When the disciples return with food they offer some to Jesus. Jesus' refusal to eat is an example of true fasting. Fasting does not consist in refraining from eating food but in eating something else. What is important in fasting is not what we do not eat but what we do eat. Jesus was so full that He could not eat any more food. In answering His disciples, Jesus also showed of what true fulfillment consists. Many people believe that doing the will of God is the worst and most boring thing that could happen to them in life. Doing the will of God was no forced obligation to Jesus; in doing it He was in His element! It refreshed and satisfied Him so much that He has no more need for other food. Man's tragedy consists in the fact that he knows himself so little that he does not realize "that man... [lives] on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."¹²⁶ The food that fully stills our hunger is to do the will of our heavenly Father and the real quenching of thirst is found in receiving eternal life.

Jesus' words in verses 35-38 apply to a much larger scope than the situation in which the disciples found themselves. The immediate cause was His conversation with the Samaritan woman. The harvest mentioned was, in the first place, the conversion of the Samaritans in Sychar. In speaking these words, Jesus elevated the events described in this chapter to a higher plane. The planting of the seed in the heart of this woman became an image of all sowing that takes place in the Kingdom of Heaven; the bearing of the fruit of faith in the hearts of the people of Sychar is connected to every spiritual harvest that is gathered in. In doing this, Jesus gave to an everyday event, a meeting between two people, a conversation with a woman, the color and the dimensions it acquired in eternity. This demonstrates the greatness of the human life of the Son of God on earth. Most human beings hardly understand what they do. We judge the incidents of which daily life is built up in a false light and with a shortsighted eye. Jesus knew that He was making history. He knew He was sowing and reaping.

One of the principles evinced in Jesus' words is that, in the Kingdom of Heaven, there are no seasons. Our planet, in the temperate climates, knows the seasons of sowing, growing, reaping, and lying fallow. The situation on God's field is more complicated. While one sows, someone else reaps. The sower and reaper receive their wages on the same day. The text does not say that what is sown is reaped on the same day. There are distinct phases in the spiritual life of every human being. Growth varies according to the individual. The ripening process seems to have taken very little time in the life of the Samaritan woman. It seems that the fruit was virtually ripe at the moment she left her jar and went back to town. With most people, the process requires more time.

The separate mention of the sower and the reaper indicates that there is a division of labor, or rather diversity in the body of Christ. The fruit in a new life in the Lord is always the result of a combination of various factors. No one has a monopoly in leading people to the Lord or does it single-handedly. We can conclude from these words of the Lord that the disciples became involved in gathering in the harvest of Sychar; He sowed and they harvested.

The words "that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" are noteworthy. In daily life, cooperation in spiritual matters is not always a cause of joy. There are often quarrels among laborers in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Lord wants working together to produce joy. In cases where there is discord there cannot be any question of sowing and reaping. Joy is also a needed factor because of the fatigue the labor causes. The work in the Kingdom is not seasonal. There are never periods of rest or slackening. God's work can only be accomplished when there is joy. In the words of Nehemiah: "The joy of the LORD is your strength."¹²⁷

¹²⁵ ch. 10:24,25

¹²⁶ See Deut. 8:3

¹²⁷ Neh. 8:10^b

And then, these words were an encouragement to the disciples to “open [their] eyes and look at the fields.” Jesus wanted them to see that which, up to that point, had never caught their attention. We enter into the work of the Lord by sharing His vision of the world.

Verses 39-42 tell us that the Samaritans came to faith in Christ because of the words of the woman who said: “He told me everything I ever did.” It was only partly true that Jesus had told her everything she ever did. We read that Jesus had been aware of her love affairs. But the woman had, rightly, concluded from this that she was known through and through. It seems strange that those words of the woman are decisive in the conversion of the people. They had been aware of the woman’s affairs all the time. Her words were certainly no revelation to them. It was the fact that this woman who previously shunned daylight now openly confessed to have sinned. This made the Samaritans understand that something had happened to her. The fact that drove them to the Lord, however, was that there was the same need in their lives as had been in the woman’s. The woman had confessed her need and this proved to be a deliverance to her. Desire for the same kind of deliverance drove them also to the Lord Jesus.

We do not read that Jesus performed one single miracle in Samaria. The Samaritan believed in the Lord on the basis of His Word alone. In this they were several centuries ahead of the Jews.

VI. The Presentation of Christ in Galilee

4:43-54

Luke also mentions Jesus’ arrival in Galilee. He recorded that Jesus said in Nazareth: “No prophet is accepted in his hometown.”¹²⁸ John refers to these words in vs. 44 – “Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.” A superficial reading of John’s text would make us think that Jesus spoke those words before He left Judea or as He departed. Luke places them clearly at His arrival in Nazareth during the Sabbath service in the synagogue. We assume that John places them here because they give us the actual reason for His departure from Judea. Those words typified the prevailing condition at that moment. According to John’s account given at the beginning of this chapter, Jesus left Judea to flee His growing popularity. He went to His hometown because He could expect to be less popular there. As we said earlier, it was a wise decision to avoid a premature confrontation with the Pharisees so that His ministry could develop naturally. John’s account indicates, however, that the reception in Galilee was more enthusiastic than was expected. The Galileans who had witnessed Jesus’ performance in Jerusalem had taken seen to it that Jesus was expected with tensed curiosity. Luke describes the same atmosphere at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Nazareth.

But Jesus’ visit to Nazareth was not the first event upon His arrival in Galilee. When in Nazareth, Jesus Himself spoke of His work in Capernaum which must have preceded His visit to Nazareth. We read that He said in His sermon: “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”¹²⁹ And John states very clearly that Jesus’ healing of the son of the court official was the second miracle since the changing of the wine in Cana. We read: “This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.” So the first place Jesus arrived in Galilee must have been Cana and from there He went to Capernaum where He performed several miracles, mentioned by Luke. After that He went to Nazareth. After His rejection in Nazareth, He made His home in Capernaum, which is the point at which the Gospels of Matthew and Mark commence their report of Jesus’ ministry.

2. The Healing of the Son of the Royal Officer

4:46-54

The first thing that happened in Galilee is the healing of the official’s son. It is interesting to see how Jesus’ popularity carried over from Jerusalem to Galilee. There were those in Galilee who attended the Passover celebration in Jerusalem and then there was the royal officer. The KJV calls him “a nobleman.” It is quite possible that this officer had also been among the crowd that had celebrated the feast in Jerusalem, but it seems more likely that he had traveled in his official capacity of court officer with King Herod to whose court he belonged. He gives the impression of having witnessed Jesus’ work from close by. We don’t know what the miracles were Jesus had performed in Jerusalem. It could be that He had healed people there also, but we are not told anything about that. This is the first miracle of healing that is recorded for us in the Gospels. Maybe the officer concluded from what he had seen that Jesus would be able to heal. Anyhow, the man believed that Jesus’ power could be applied to his personal need.

¹²⁸ Luke 4:24

¹²⁹ Luke 4:23

The distance from Capernaum to Cana is about 30 miles, as the crow flies. That would be about a ten hour walk. The man evinced faith in Jesus. As soon as the word reached him that Jesus had arrived from Judea, he set out to meet Him.

In the light of this, Jesus' reserved reaction seems incomprehensible. It seems as if Jesus had no eye for the very human need of this man: a dying child. Jesus appeared to be in a world that was infinitely removed from the world of this desperate man. We get closer to the truth if we say that this man was at an infinite distance of Jesus' world. After all, which world is the real one? Which need is the more urgent, that the boy wouldn't die or that the father would come to faith in Christ? With the words: "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" Jesus straightened out the reality that had been distorted by the man's grief. To be or not to be is *not* the question. Faith is more important than life on earth. At the moment, Jesus' words must have sounded irrelevant in the man's ears. Only after he and all his household had come to faith in Christ, the officer understood what the real priorities in life are. At that moment, the imminent death of his son put everything else in the shadow.

The real tragedy in this story was not the need of this man and his son but of God and His Son. God had sent His Son to save the world from a death that was much worse than the physical death of the boy. Up to this point, no one in Israel had come to faith in Christ. The only exception was the inhabitants of Sychar. People were not interested in the salvation of their souls; their only interest was a sensational lust for miracles. This, I believe, was the reason for Jesus' exasperating exclamation "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe." The real need of this court officer was not the physical healing of his son but the salvation of his own soul.

This story demonstrates to us that coming to faith in Christ is not an easy process. The officer wanted Jesus to come with him. This Jesus refused. "You may go. Your son will live" is both a promise and a test of the man's faith. The Greek is more emphatic with "Go! Your son lives." In obeying this command a small grain of faith in the man's heart begins to germinate but it does not bloom and bear fruit until he has checked all the facts to rule out any coincidence. The final act of faith expressed in "So he and all his household believed" represents, obviously, more than a holding for true of certain facts. The fact of the boy's healing at exactly the time Jesus said the word was undeniable proof. But the believing of the officer and his household was an act of surrender. Faith is like the unconditional surrender of a city under siege, like the opening of the gate to let the Lord of glory enter.

The real miracle in this "second miraculous sign" was not the healing of the boy but the conversion of the whole family.

Part Three: The Opposition to the Son of God 5:1--12:50

I. The Opposition at the Feast in Jerusalem 5:1-47

1. The Healing of the Paraplegic 5:1-18

John does not identify the feast Jesus went to celebrate in Jerusalem. Bible critics are hopelessly divided as to what feast is intended here. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Both the time and the place of this miracle have been much disputed. If this feast of the Jews was the Passover, then four such feasts are mentioned in John, making the ministry extend to approximately three and a half to four years, provided John lists them all (the others are John 2:23; 6:4; 11:55). Since the best manuscript authorities lack the definite article, some feast other than the Passover is probably intended. The place of the miracle may now be identified with some confidence, following the excavation in 1888 of such a pool as John describes, located in the northeastern part of Jerusalem, near the Church of St. Anne. The various readings in the manuscripts for the name of the pool are bewildering. Beth-zatha (RSV) is well attested. It probably means 'House of Olives.'" *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "That this feast was a Passover, was certainly the most ancient opinion, and it is the opinion of the great majority of critics.... Those who object to this view all differ among themselves as to what other feast it was, and some of the most acute have given up the hope of determining which it was." But *The Pulpit Commentary* declares: "It must be admitted that the majority of modern critics assume the Feast of Purim to be that intended, and thereby reduce the length of our Lord's ministry from Cana to Calvary to two short years."

I have vivid memories of a visit to Jerusalem in 1968 at which occasion we saw the site of the Pool of Bethesda that was being further excavated.

The NIV omits vs. 4, which in the NKJV reads: "For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had." This verse is evidently not found in the oldest manuscripts. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: While our manuscript tradition is such that the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 cannot be regarded as part of the original text of John, this portion is an early tradition. J. Rendel Harris found evidence in several places throughout the East

of a superstition to the effect that at the New Year an angel was expected to stir the water in certain localities, enabling one person to obtain healing by being the first to get into the water after the disturbance.” There is a possibility that the water in the pool was stirred from time to time by sulfur that bubbled up from an underground vein.

One striking feature in this story is that Jesus picked out one single person in the crowd. This is not so much typical of Jesus’ ministry in general as of John’s organization of material in his Gospel. The Synoptics emphasize the fact that Jesus healed masses of people. We read: “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.”¹³⁰ John’s approach is to carefully choose from an abundance of material in such a way that the individual is placed in the limelight. This does not mean that Jesus paid no attention to the masses but John must have been deeply impressed by the fact that the Lord always had all the time to attend to a personal need. He paid so much attention to one single person that it seemed nobody else existed. This cannot have meant that Jesus spent hours with one single person but rather that He used the time to immediately penetrate with unfailing certainty to the core of the problem in each individual life. We see this evinced in the first encounter with the disciples in chapter one, in the meeting with Nicodemus, with the Samaritan woman, with the court official and now with this paralytic.

Jesus knew exactly what was wrong with this man and He did not beat about the bush in identifying his problem. The Word of God penetrates immediately to the heart of the matter. Jesus’ question: “Do you want to get well?” cuts the abscess right open. A superficial answer would be “Of course I want to!” But it is obvious that such is not always the case with sick people. A person can adjust himself to a long drawn out sickness. He accommodates himself to his condition and ends up leaning upon it in such a way that he cannot imagine himself differently. A person can deceive himself by complaining about things he doesn’t want to miss and by losing himself in wish-dreaming about things, which deep in his heart, he doesn’t want. Sin has such an effect upon us that we live in a world of unreality. Jesus’ question “Do you want to get well?” calls us back to reality. The man’s answer is one of the most pitiful calls for help that can be heard: “Sir, I have no one to help me,” or as the KJV renders it: “Sir, I have no man.” This man suffered more from his loneliness than from his sickness. Sin had isolated this man from God and consequently from his fellowmen. Added to this, this man had, in his sickness, locked himself up in his own world, thirty-eight long years.

As stated above, the mention of the angel coming down in the pool is not found in the oldest manuscripts. Vs. 4 is taken to be a later addition based on popular superstition. Without entering into this question, we want to observe that on that particular day the Angel of the Lord, the second Person of the Trinity, visited the pool of Bethesda and pointed out the person He wanted to heal. We may doubt whether the stirring up of the water was really the work of an angel, but we have to admit that, in that piece of popular superstition, was hidden a prophecy about the angel which was fulfilled in the visit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference is in the fact that the healing changed from a mechanical process (“whoever stepped in first,... was made well of whatever disease he had”) to a being touched personally by the Lord. The way the Lord performs this healing reestablishes the dignity of this man’s personality; it rehabilitated him.

But before healing him, the Lord first asked his permission. He was not healed whether he wanted to be healed or not. It is true that there was this side of this man’s existence in which he had accommodated himself comfortably in his helplessness and hopelessness. He was a fallen man who did not wish to get up. But Jesus’ question was directed to the new man, to the image of God in him. The Lord honored this man by addressing him in his deepest dignity. Jesus ignored the man who was a toy of sin and of the devil. He won the victory by addressing this man from the position of victory. How glorious and majestic is this command: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!”

This threefold command becomes a paradigm of God’s calling of all men. Every divine call can be traced to these fundamental phases. Man is fallen in sin and lies helplessly on the ground. He is unable to get up by himself. As the Word of God created order out of chaos, so the creative Word of God enables this man to do what he is ordered. That is a normal procedure. It is the Word of God that determines what we ought to do and it enables us to do it. There is a “getting up,” a “resurrection” in the life of every person to whom the Word of the Creator comes. There is, after all, little difference between the resurrection of a dead person and the getting up from his bed of someone who has been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. One is an extension of the other. Jesus’ command here is based on His own resurrection. In the performance of all His miracles, Jesus reached out in faith to His own death and resurrection. Our faith consists in both reaching back and reaching forward; we reach back to the accomplished work on the cross and forward to the consummation of all things.

¹³⁰ Matt. 8:16. See also Mark 1:34; Luke 4:40

The command “pick up” constitutes the second phase of the call. It is a task description, the giving of a responsibility. For this man it was his mat, for other people it will be something else. The Lord never heals us in order for us to remain idle. His enabling is always geared to a certain goal. It is interesting to observe that it is this point that evokes the greatest resistance of the enemy. As in the story of Ezra, at the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, or in Nehemiah, with the restoration of the wall of the city, the enemy begins to stir only when people give themselves to do what God wants them to do. The Sabbath was broken in this small incident, the carrying of a sleeping mat. It is this small offence that brings out Jesus’ “greater transgression”: the healing of a person on the Sabbath. And it leads to God’s greatest breaking of the Sabbath in raising the dead. The enemy recognized immediately where things began to go wrong! The command “Pick up your mat” is confrontational. Jesus could have told the man to leave his mat and come back the next day. But He wanted him to break the Sabbath in order to demonstrate what the Sabbath was all about.

The third order “walk” is also important. Jesus did not say “dance” or “run.” The word “walk” is frequently used in Scripture, often in the context of going together. “Enoch walked with God”¹³¹ And “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.”¹³² We are not supposed to walk alone. Walking is a form of fellowship. The man, obviously, did not understand this, as is clear from what follows. The word “walk” also applies God’s dealing with us. We are raised from the dead in order to take up that task that is given to us and to walk through life with Him.

This incident took place on the Sabbath. The Jews had a valid reason to protest that carrying one’s mat on the Sabbath was labor, which was forbidden by the law. The man justified his transgression by linking it to his healing. He had obeyed Jesus’ command to get up, which brought about his healing; consequently, he obeyed the command to carry his mat. The Jews tried to separate one from the other. They tried to ignore the healing and concentrate on the carrying of the mat. It turns out that this could not be done; the two were inseparable. The only justification for the breaking of the Sabbath was the healing. For this reason, Jesus assumed all the blame for His command to break the Sabbath, and He clarified that He was the one responsible for the breaking of the Sabbath, not the man who was healed. The man could have done little else but to obey. Once he obeyed the command to get up, he also had to obey the command to carry his mat. He had to keep on obeying.

The Pulpit Commentary clarifies: “Judging by the letter of the law (Exod. xx. 10 and xxxv. 3), and by the precedents of Scripture (Numb. xv. 32-35), and by the special injunctions of the prophets (Jer. xvii. 21-23; Neh. xiii. 15, etc.), the man was infringing a positive command. Rabbinism had indeed declared that, in cases affecting life and health, the law of the sabbath was legitimately held in abeyance; but this relaxation was so hedged about with restrictions that the poor man and the layman were unable to apply the rules. The rabbinic interpretations of the sabbatic law concerning burden-bearing were so intricate and sophisticated that the entire majesty of the law, and the merciful intent of the prohibition, were concealed and vitiated. Apart from these complications, the man was *prima facie* disobeying the letter of the law.”

A certain surprising element in the story is that the man didn’t know who healed him. The fact that he spent his life in Bethesda was probably the reason he had not heard of, or seen, Jesus’ public ministry. Rumors about it must have penetrated Bethesda also but at that time the man may not have seen any connection between the stories and the coming of this stranger. Added to this, the personal faith of this man hardly played any role in his healing. He was restored to full health by an unilateral act of God, exclusively by the faith of the Lord Jesus.

We also see that Jesus avoided publicity. He disappeared in the crowd immediately after the healing. The man who had been healed had had no time to see who had healed him. As soon as he got up, he was alone. The Lord did not remain at his side to help him digest all that had happened. The man’s reaction to his healing, however, was very healthy; his first visit is to the temple. We read that Jesus found him there later. The man must have understood that his healing was a direct intervention in his life by the hand of God. He was, evidently, not that lonely! Jesus did not let him go completely either. The encounter in the temple was not a coincidence. And we see that Jesus kept on backing up this man while he is being accused. He took all the responsibility of what had happened upon Himself. It wasn’t the man who broke the Sabbath by doing work; it was the Lord. He is the accused and He is this man’s warrantee. Human efforts to break through the loneliness of fellowmen never go that far.

In the temple, a short conversation took place between Jesus and the man. Jesus drew the man’s attention to the fact of his healing. That seems rather redundant. The man could hardly have thought of anything else in the first days after his healing, especially in the first few hours afterward. There would come a time, however, when he would even get used to the health of his body just as if he had accommodated himself to his sickness before. Then the Word of the Lord could possibly stick in his mind and keep him from backsliding.

¹³¹ Gen. 5:24

¹³² Gen. 6:9

Much has been speculated about Jesus' admonition: "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." Jesus established with those words a direct link between the man's acts and his sickness. Some people believe, on the basis of this, that the man must have suffered from a venereal disease that had caused his paralysis. That is, of course, quite possible. The stress in Jesus' words, however, is upon the words "Something worse may happen to you," referring to the final judgment of his life. When God's hand touches our body, there ought to follow a renewal of life; otherwise physical healing has little value. We should not, of course, base a doctrine of cause and effect upon this biblical incident.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary suggests that there was a connection between the man's sickness and specific sins he had committed. We read: "He showed him that he knew the secret of the past-sin no more: thereby intimating that his former sins were the cause of his long affliction." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* puts the accents of Jesus' words in a different way and states: "Physical healing at Jesus' hands may be supposed to include forgiveness of sins (cf. Mark 2:9-12). This forgiveness must not be lightly accepted. The worse thing is left undefined, and the warning is the more effective for this reason."

The Pulpit Commentary contributes a most profound and well-balanced thought to this: "The form of the sentence points to something special and persistent in this man's habits, rather than to the general corruption of human nature. Christ's penetrating glance discovered all the hidden misery and bleeding wound and putrefying sore of the man's soul. Apart from the obliteration of the consequences of his bad life, and without a clean and free condition of things, the future would have proved hopeless, and deliverance from the yoke of fear and concupiscence impossible; but now this new chance is given. He was made whole, born again physically. As Naaman's flesh became like that of a little child, so this man—once bent, crippled, distorted by his self-indulgence, and now made whole—is to 'sin no longer.' It would not be reasonable to conclude from this that Christ's doctrine, like that of Job's friends, involved the indissoluble connection of sin with sickness, or made the amount of pain in any case the criterion of individual sin. Our Lord repudiates this position in ch. ix. 3 and in Luke xiii.1-5; but special calamities have unquestionably followed wrong-doing, and can, in many instances, be referred to obvious transgressions, to specific acts, or inveterate habits. The man's own conscience would respond to the charge."

It seems strange that the man, after this conversation with Christ, immediately went to report Jesus to the authorities. We should refrain from hasty judgment, but it seems that the man, even after his healing, continued to be rather self-centered. First, he could not remember who healed him and then he tried, as it were, to distance himself from the Lord by exposing Him. If this is the case, it is even more surprising to see that the Lord continued to take full responsibility for what happened. "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."¹³³

Jesus' defense is very impressive. His words are the deepest and clearest interpretation of the Sabbath found in the whole Bible. The Sabbath has its roots in creation. We read in Genesis: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."¹³⁴ When Jesus says: "My Father is always at his work to this very day," we must draw the conclusion that God gave up the Sabbath rest when man fell into sin. The work of the Father and the Son pertains to undoing the consequences of sin.

The fact that we find the Sabbath command in the Ten Commandments does not contradict this. We read in Exodus: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."¹³⁵ God never abandoned His Sabbath ideal. The coming of sin only meant a temporary interruption of the Sabbath, not an abolition. In the law God does not accommodate Himself to man's fallen condition. That is the reason the law, including the Sabbath command, became a curse to man. From a day of rest to enjoy God's perfect creation, the Sabbath became a day of death. (The Sabbath is typified by the words "You shall not...").

We read in Numbers how someone who broke the Sabbath was put to death. "While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the

¹³³ II Tim. 2:13

¹³⁴ Gen. 2:2,3

¹³⁵ Ex. 20:8-11

camp.' So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses."¹³⁶ This is also the reason Jesus was in the grave on the Sabbath.

That which on earth was represented as one day as a point in time was in reality an expression of eternal glory, without any limitations of time. We read in Genesis that God rested on the seventh day but we don't read what He did on the eighth. The original Sabbath was an eternity-concept. But when sin entered, God went back to square one, to the first day of creation. God began to create again light out of darkness and order from chaos. He continued up to the creation of the new man and the resurrection from the dead. Now we live in the "second week." When Jesus spoke these words, the restoration was not yet completed. We now live in the week that began with "It is finished!"¹³⁷ The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, therefore: "After [Jesus] had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven."¹³⁸ And: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."¹³⁹

The Jews considered Jesus' words to be the greatest blasphemy. It is interesting to see on what they base their conclusion. If I were not a Christian, I would stumble over Jesus' argument that God breaks the Sabbath Himself. But to the Jews, the offense was that He called God His Father. Jesus taught that all born-again people may address God as Father. The implication Jews drew from this is of the utmost importance for us also. As we saw earlier, Jesus introduced the title "Father". In the Old Testament the word "Father" for God is only used by way of comparison. Jesus demonstrated that fatherhood on earth is an image of the reality of God's fatherhood. The Jews were right in concluding that the relationship between a father and a child indicates equality of being. Many who call God "Father" never realize this. Yet, one of the pillars of the Gospel message is that the purpose of forgiveness is that we would become partakers of the divine nature through regeneration. That which was dangled before the eyes of Adam and Eve in Paradise as something that they could only possess if they stole it from God, turns out to be their rightful heritage. The fact that the Jews did not endeavor to refute Jesus' argument "My Father is always at his work to this very day," is an indication that they agreed with that part. They admitted that God broke the Sabbath command Himself.

2. Jesus' Exposition Concerning the Meaning of the Sabbath 5:19-47

The story of the healing of the paralytic brings us to one of the most impressive discourses our Lord has given in the whole New Testament. It appears that John used the event in Bethesda as a prelude to this great proclamation.

As always, Jesus immediately drew a line from a point in time to eternity. By showing the right relationship between this event and God's eternal plan, the Lord demonstrated the relative value of this healing. The healing of the paralytic is elevated, from an isolated incident, to a model of that great day when the dead will rise up from their graves. At the same time, the purpose of the Sabbath is placed in the limelight. The Sabbath is lifted up from a day of rest to a day of great works on which the result of sin is annihilated in creation.

It is not easy to outline the points of Jesus' argument, beginning with vs. 17 through 47. The monologue begins with vs. 19 but without vs. 17 we would miss the development of the argument.

- a. The Job Description - verses 17-23
- b. The Call for Faith - verses 24-29
- c. The Testimony of Witnesses - verses 30-40
- d. Conclusion and Exhortation - verses 40-47

a. The Job Description - verses 17-23

The occasion was the healing of the man in Bethesda. The Lord justified His breaking of the Sabbath by saying: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." Jesus had consciously surrendered His own initiative and energy to the Father in order to be used completely by Him. The mention of this complete surrender is important because it forms the basis for all that follows.

This also clarifies that His imitating the work of His Father is based upon a revelation. The Father shows the Son what He should do because of the intimacy of love between them. Jesus performed the miracle of healing

¹³⁶ Num. 15:32-36

¹³⁷ ch. 19:30

¹³⁸ Heb. 1:3

¹³⁹ Heb. 4:9-11

because the Father showed it to Him. At the same time, the Father promised that this healing would be a foreshadowing of the great restoration, the resurrection from the dead. Among the “even greater things than these” are undoubtedly the more spectacular miracles, such as the healing of the man who was born blind and the resurrection of Lazarus. But vs. 21: “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” contains the strong suggestion that much more is involved than incidental acts of restoration on a physical level. The Lord draws a comparison between the resurrection of the dead and the giving of life by the Father and His own giving “life to whom he is pleased to give it.” The two acts are linked together by the words “even so.” The impression given is that, although the work of the Son bears an outward resemblance to the work of the Father, it is more than a mere copy of it. The fact that Jesus speaks, in the same breath, about judgment is an indication that His giving of life is done on a spiritual level. The Lord makes, evidently, a comparison between that which occurs on a physical level, like the miracles He performed at that moment because the Father had revealed this to Him, and the spiritual miracle He would perform by giving eternal life to those who would put their faith in Him. He places the resurrection from the dead by the power of the Father next to the new birth. What He says is: “What the Father does on the natural level, I do on the spiritual level. It is the same kind of act but on different levels.” We have to bear in mind that, throughout this discourse, Jesus continuously draws this comparison; otherwise we cannot understand what is said in the following verses.

There seems to be a contradiction between what is said in the preceding vs. 21, which states that the Son can only do what the Father reveals to Him and the “to whom he is pleased to give it.” This proves that the surrender of the Son’s will to the will of the Father does not rob the Son of His own will. The surrender guarantees that there will be no independent functioning of the Son’s will but a harmonic, organic cooperation, a creative working together of both persons of the Deity. This is only possible in a relationship of perfect love. “To whom he is pleased to give it” does not mean either that the Son acts arbitrarily, as if the decision whether a person would have eternal life or not has nothing to do with the laws of conversion and repentance but would depend solely on a divine caprice. The will of God is never in conflict with His character, which is expressed in the laws He created.

Directly connected with Christ’s power to give eternal life to human beings is His authority for judgment. Jesus uses the expression “all judgment.” This suggests that judgment consists in different parts. The following verses confirm this. There is a final judgment that becomes effective at the physical resurrection of the dead and there is a judgment that is related to the spiritual resurrection. The judgment that pertains to the new birth is a judgment about the faith or unbelief of man. The judgment that takes place at the time of the physical resurrection relates to the good or evil man has done.

The purpose of this transmission of authority from the Father to the Son is, in the first place, a matter of honor. On this basis, the Lord demands that we honor Him in the same way as we honor the Father.

How horrible those words must have sounded to the people who heard them and who saw in Jesus nothing more than an itinerant rabbi! The whole tone of this discourse, fearless and without any sign of being intimidated by those present, indicate how far Jesus, as a human being, stood above the rest of humanity. For us, who worship Him as the Second Person of the Trinity, it is hard to imagine how those words must have sounded coming from the mouth of a human being.

b. The Call for Faith - 5:24-29

That which Jesus claims to possess, He immediately offers to His hearers. Vs. 24 gives us a classic definition of the position of a child of God: “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

- a. The condition is hearing the Word of Jesus and believing in the Father.
- b. The position pertains to the present, “*has* eternal life.”
- c. As far as the future is concerned—no judgment.
- d. As far as the past is concerned—an irreversible transition from a condition of spiritual death to spiritual life.

Jesus’ unity with the Father is so perfect and complete that hearing His Word and believing the Father are identical actions. Jesus’ Words are the Father’s Words and whoever believes in the Father believes in Him. Put in the most simple terms: “Who hears and believes has...”

Putting possession of eternal life in the present is one of the great surprises of the Gospel. This places the moment of death in a completely different light. That which appears to be for man the irrevocable end turns out to be nothing else but a door from one phase of living to another.

It is difficult for man to conceive of eternal life as existing on this side of the line of separation. Jesus demonstrates the unity of life on both sides of death. That which begins here is continued on the other side. The joy of this certainty in these words ought to encourage us greatly.

The meaning of the words “whoever hears my Word” goes beyond simply listening to what the Lord has to say. The Lord repeats the same thought in verses 25 and 28, but there it is the dead who hear His voice. This points to a special kind of hearing, and also to a special kind of Word. The Word of God is the vehicle of creation. It creates life out of death. In chapter 3, Jesus compared faith to a new birth. In this chapter, He says that it is a resurrection from the dead. The comparison is here not merely used as an image but as a parallel. Both events take place at the same time. People who are spiritually dead will come to life, as do dead bodies. It is even difficult to distinguish between the image and the reality. Both are the events of the same importance but they occur on different levels. One cannot exist without the other. One resurrection proceeds from the other.

“[He] will not be condemned.” A child of God cannot be judged. Paul says: “The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”¹⁴⁰ Because we have the mind of Christ we cannot be judged. Judgment pertains to fallen man. It began with God’s question to Adam: “Where are you?”¹⁴¹

The fact that the new man is no longer required to give an account on matters of life and death is an indication of how absolute forgiveness is. A person who is really alive does the works that God prepared for him. And God does not have to ask about His own works what they are. Judgment takes place between life and death. People who are raised from the dead, have already passed that stage. Their judgment has been given and the punishment has been executed in Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not mention the secret of the transition from death to life. We, who can look back upon this, know that not being condemned does not mean that there is no judgment but that judgment has already occurred. Jesus took our judgment and condemnation upon Himself. Because for Him it is a thing of the past, it is also for us something that is behind us, because we are in Him. Judgment cannot be repeated. The case is closed. In Him, the resurrection has also already taken place, that is to say, the resurrection on the spiritual level. In His physical resurrection, He conquered death on all levels. Everything Jesus says in this discourse is based upon His own death and resurrection, which at that time were still future events.

Vs. 25 is the only place in this Gospel where Jesus calls Himself “the Son of God.” This fits of course in the line of argument and it indicates that Jesus did nothing to counter the accusation of the Jews that He made Himself equal with God. It is remarkable, however, that immediately following, Jesus calls Himself “the Son of Man.” These verses are, obviously, the climax of the discourse.

“A time is coming and has now come...” Obviously, Jesus does not speak about the resurrection of the dead from the grave. With a very few exceptions, all the dead in Jesus’ days remained in their graves. The resurrection in verses 28 and 29 is, of course, the physical resurrection of the body at a future time. What takes place in the present is the giving of spiritual life to people who are dead in their sin. It is in connection with His speaking that causes a spiritual resurrection that Jesus called Himself “the Son of God.” It is God, the Son, who as He spoke His awesome Word at the beginning of creation through which light and life came into being, speaks His creative Word here with the same authority. Paul says: “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”¹⁴²

Yet, the two acts of creation are not absolutely parallel. Light, matter, and life came into being by obeying mechanically to the creative Word. In the heart of man, the miracle of creation occurs only when he hears and obeys the Word of the Son. The bridge between hearing and obeying is the human will. The Lord does not force eternal life upon us.

Verses 26 and 27 contain some deep truths that are not easy to understand. The fact that the Father and the Son both have life in themselves makes us understand that there is equality between the two. When Jesus said earlier that He had surrendered Himself to the Father, He did not imply that His life was in any way inferior to the Father’s. His submission was free and voluntary. Secondly, it clarifies that there is no mutual dependence upon one another. The Father did not beget the Son as a father begets a son in a human relationship. The Father did not create the Son. Yet, Jesus says that the Father “has granted the Son to have life in himself.” We will have to leave this paradox for what it is.

Having life in Himself is the essence of His divine nature. But the authority to judge and to give a verdict in the great court case of God versus Satan is rightfully His because He is Man. It was probably on the basis of Jesus’ words here that Paul could say that the saints will judge the world. Writing to the Corinthians, he said: “Do you not

¹⁴⁰ I Cor. 2:15,16

¹⁴¹ Gen. 3:9

¹⁴² II Cor. 4:6

know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!”¹⁴³

The legal battle is between God and the devil. Man is caught between this and is mostly the victim of it. God claims His right upon man whom He created in His image and likeness. Satan, however, claims that man belongs to him because of sin. God does not justify Himself but He leaves His justification in the hands of men who have chosen His side. Man, who has experienced the horror of sin in all of its depth, is given the task of pronouncing the verdict over the one who is responsible for all evil and over those who have chosen Satan’s side. As the Israelis brought Adolf Eichman, who was responsible for Hitler’s “Final Solution” to trial in Jerusalem, so there will be a great Eichman case on the last day of world history. The Lord Jesus will be the judge and we will be the jury.

Jesus mentions in the same breath judgment and the resurrection of the dead. As we saw above, this resurrection is different from the one in vs. 25. Here there is no question about responding or not responding to the voice of the Lord. “All who are in their graves *will* hear his voice.” The Word of authority of the Lord will call all the dead to give account of their lives, whether they want to or not. This is the reason Jesus links the resurrection to judgment. That is the moment of the great separation. Jesus later speaks of this in the form of a parable in Matthew where He says: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.”¹⁴⁴

In the light of the New Testament teaching about justification and judgment it may sound strange to us that eternal life and judgment would depend upon the good or evil man has done during his life. A closer look at the doctrine of justification, however, will make us understand that our good or evil deeds are never discarded as a criterion for our eternal destination. We find the essence of Paul’s argument in Romans in the words: “What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the ‘stumbling stone.’”¹⁴⁵ Justification by faith has never replaced righteous living and good deeds. But justification by faith is the only possibility to live a life that is acceptable to God. The Gospel is “the power of God to salvation.”¹⁴⁶

e. The Testimony of Witnesses - 5:30-40

Vs. 30 forms the bridge between the two parts of this discourse. “By myself I can do nothing” refers to the judgment. In vs. 19, Jesus used the same words to describe His relationship with the Father. Here it determines His relationship with His fellowmen. Man is subjected to various laws that govern life. Jesus subjects Himself to those same laws. He does not act arbitrarily in His judgment over our lives but He measures our lives according to the laws that determine our moral behavior. Those laws are a summary of the character of the Father. All that we call good and righteous is what is in agreement with the character of God. That which opposes Him or does not measure up to His glory is sin. In vs. 19 Jesus spoke of the surrender of His will to the Father’s will, in this verse He establishes the Father’s character as the highest norm.

This is, in a sense, the Son’s testimony about the Father. Following this is the testimony the Father gives about the Son. What Jesus means is probably that the Holy Spirit testifies about Him. The words “There is another who testifies in my favor” do not explain specifically who is meant.

All this is part of the testimony of witnesses regarding the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The witnesses appear one after the other. In vs. 32 it is the Holy Spirit, in verses 33-35 it is John the Baptist. This is following in vs. 36 by the miracles Jesus performed, which is the material evidence. Then the Father testifies Himself in verses 37, 38 and, finally, there is the testimony of the Old Testament in verses 39 and 40.

At the mention of each of these witnesses, the Lord clarifies briefly the relationship of His hearers to each of them. There is a parallel passage in John Chapter Eight.¹⁴⁷

The first person who takes the witness stand in behalf of Jesus is God, the Holy Spirit. The fact that Jesus calls Him “another” indicates that the audience could, at that time, not yet relate to Him. To them, the Spirit of God was the great Unknown One. Yet, He is the first one to confirm that Jesus is who He claims to be. We read that, at

¹⁴³ I Cor. 6:2,3

¹⁴⁴ Matt. 25:31-33

¹⁴⁵ Rom. 9:30-32

¹⁴⁶ Rom. 1:16 (NKJV)

¹⁴⁷ See ch. 8:13-19

the moment of Jesus' baptism, He appeared in physical form, descended upon Him, and filled Him.¹⁴⁸ Both during Jesus' life on earth as well as now, after His ascension, the Holy Spirit of God is the crown witness. John says elsewhere: "And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth."¹⁴⁹ The Spirit's testimony about Jesus becomes important to us, only when He ceases to be "another" but becomes the Lord of our lives, makes His abode in our hearts, and fills us. This is the reason Jesus speaks at this point "against a wall" because His hearers had no living relationship with the Spirit, who is the Lord.

One could argue that it is not fair for Jesus to call the Holy Spirit to the witness stand, when the time of the Spirit's witness in the heart of man had not yet come. Every time Jesus called upon the Holy Spirit, He reached forward to Pentecost. As in the performance of His miracles He reached forward to His resurrection, so He based His teaching upon the work the Holy Spirit would perform in the future. Jesus' Word laid the foundation so that the Holy Spirit could later take the truth that had been formally presented and bring it to life in the heart of man. Jesus would later explain to His disciples: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you," and "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

Immediately after having called the witness whom man could not verify or refute, the Lord introduces a witness who was very close to the audience: John the Baptist. "You have sent to John" probably refers to the delegation the priests and Levites had sent to John, mentioned in chapter one.¹⁵⁰ Jesus appeals to John's answer to that delegation as proof of His ministry. The Bible does not state that anyone ever disputed John's words. The general consensus was that God sent John the Baptist. The masses received John's ministry with great joy and the spiritual authorities exploited John's preaching in a clever way to keep things in balance. This is obvious from the cautious way they tried to avoid saying anything negatives about John when they questioned Jesus' authority. Matthew reports the incident: "Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?' Jesus replied, 'I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism-where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?' They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men'-we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We don't know.' Then he said, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'"¹⁵¹

Jesus knew that He would not encounter any contradiction by calling John the Baptist to the witness stand. He also knew, though, that many people looked upon John as a successful and entertaining speaker, without taking his message too seriously. John was treated as Ezekiel of whom we read: "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD.' My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice. When all this comes true-and it surely will-then they will know that a prophet has been among them."¹⁵²

Jesus summarizes the whole of John's ministry with the words "he has testified to the truth." John not only testified to the truth, he also announced the coming of Him who was the truth incarnated. When Jesus says that He does not accept human testimony, He means that His authority is not derived from it. The value of John's testimony lay in the fact that the Lord came, not the other way around. The Lord Jesus Christ has value and worth in Himself and everything on earth that has any value is only valuable inasmuch as it is related to the Lord. Jesus only appeals to John's testimony because it made Him connect to His audience. The people loved to hear John speak. It is pleasant to be surrounded by light. But unless man is changed by the light, the light does him no good. In saying, "I mention it that you may be saved," Jesus indicates that the opportunity to be saved had not yet expired. The possibility to come to faith has only just been opened.

A more important testimony than the one John gave was "the work" Jesus performed. What is meant is, of course, the miracles, like the healing of the paralytic that preceded this discussion. It may sound strange that the Lord makes a distinction between Himself and His work. But this is consistent with what He said at the beginning of

¹⁴⁸ See Luke 3:21,22; 4:1

¹⁴⁹ I John 5:6

¹⁵⁰ See ch. 1:17-29

¹⁵¹ Matt. 21:23-27

¹⁵² Ezek. 33:30-33

this discourse about His imitating the deeds of the Father. Jesus had put Himself at the Father's disposal. That is the reason His work rises above Him as a human being. What He does is the fruit of His fellowship with the Father, the result of His obedience. Jesus leaves it to His hearers to find another explanation for His work. The Pharisees tried to explain Jesus' miracles as occult phenomena, but that could not be maintained consistently. The conclusion is unavoidable: If Jesus claims to be sent by God and if He performs supernatural acts, He either speaks the truth or He lies. If He could be refuted on one single point only, He would not only be unreliable but would also be the greatest deceiver the world has ever produced. This is the reason *The Quest for the Historical Christ* has failed so miserably. It is impossible to find a compromise without throwing overboard the fundamental antithesis between truth and lie.

The fourth witness is the Father Himself. Jesus probably meant more with the Father's witness than only the work He mentioned earlier. These words are not a mere repetition. We saw already that, although Jesus calls His work an imitation of the work of the Father, there is in Jesus' work a creative initiative that originates in Himself. The levels on which the work is produced by the Father and the Son are also not the same. The Father's testimony here pertains to His direct intervention in the course of history, like the voice that sounded from heaven at Jesus' baptism, and that would later sound after the resurrection of Lazarus, and most of all, the witness of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Bible calls Jesus' resurrection the ultimate proof of His ministry. Paul says: "[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."¹⁵³

Immediately following this mention of the Father's testimony, Jesus indicates again what the relationship is between His audience and this witness. The knowledge of God is like a closed circle. One is either outside or inside; there is not in-between. The testimony of the Father carries decisive weight for those who know the Father. Whoever knows the Father also has proof regarding the Son. But for those who do not accept the Son, the knowledge of the Father is closed off. That is the circle. Jesus indicates that His audience stood outside that circle. They had never heard the Father's voice or seen His form. Yet several of those people must have been present at Jesus' baptism at the River Jordan when the Father spoke. They had heard the sound but it had no meaning for them. The key to knowledge is in the understanding of the Word of God. To these people who knew the Scriptures by heart, Jesus had to say that God's Word did not dwell in them. As far as the Bible is concerned they were professionals, but the seed of the Word of God had never germinated and borne fruit in their hearts. Mark the tragedy in this: They possessed the Word of God, they studied the Word and they understood that it dealt with the subject of eternal life, they even thought to have reached that goal, and yet they completely missed the point. Life begins with coming to the Lord; that is, accepting His person and His work and surrendering oneself to Him.

At the same time, Jesus said positively some very important things about the Bible. It is meant to be diligently studied. The KJV renders the words as if it were a command: "Search the scriptures." Grammatically, this is not incorrect but the context definitely favors the NIV rendering. The Jews did not have to be commanded to study the Scriptures, they already did it. The purpose of their study should be eternal life. Scientific research of the Scriptures is only legitimate as long as it does not detach itself from the matter of life. "Unbiased" research is, in this context, not scientific. All research that separates itself from God, the source of all knowledge, is not science. The Jews thought that their research was geared toward life, but in this they deceived themselves. Man is a very complicated being!

Jesus says further that the subject of the testimony of the Scriptures is the person of the Messiah. Research that is geared to life ought to have Him as its object. With all their searching in the Scriptures, the Jews proved to have very little interest in the coming of the Messiah. When the Magi from the east came to Jerusalem to ask about the birth of the Messiah, the scribes said, without hesitation to King Herod, that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. But none of them showed enough interest to go and look for themselves. The same turns out to be the case here. Their research of the Bible did not center around the person and the coming of the Savior. The awareness of their need for salvation had obviously diminished to the point that it had lost its urgency. That is the reason they never seriously considered the possibility that what Jesus said could be true.

Verses 45-49 are part of the preceding section that deals with the testimony of the Scriptures. Jesus again shows the relationship His audience has with the witness. As we saw, the Jews of Jesus' days, in spite of their professional relationship to the Scriptures, had no living relationship with the Word of God. The Word of God did not dwell in their heart. Now, Jesus says that they do not believe what Moses wrote. It is not difficult to imagine what effect these words had on the audience. They cut into the depth of their souls. Jesus' Word shows how much man can deceive himself. The Bible can become a symbolic prop in our lives. We can profess it to be the infallible inspired Word of God. We may sing Luther's Hymn: "That word above all earthly power, no thanks to them, abideth," without that Word having its roots in our lives and without our truly believing it. Such a condition can be

¹⁵³ Acts 17:31

fatal. As Jesus pointed out, that Word will ultimately condemn us. It is impossible to handle the Word of God with impunity. If the Bible does not lead us into the arms of the Lord it will push us into the arms of the devil.

One of the great hindrances to come to faith in Christ turns out to be man's aspiration. We are always concerned about our reputation. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes about the Jews of Jesus' day: "They chose rather to lose their souls than to forfeit their reputation among men!" We often fail to realize that what matters is not that men honor us but that God accepts us. No human honor will do us any good if God rejects us!

On the words "He wrote of me," *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "For instance, in reciting the prophecy of Jacob, Gen 49:10. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until SHILOH come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. And in Deut 18:18: I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, etc. Confer this with Acts 3:22, and 7:37. Besides, Moses pointed out the Messiah in a multitude of symbols and figures, which are found in the history of the patriarchs, the ceremonial laws, and especially in the whole sacrificial system. All these were well-defined, though shadowy representations of the birth, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Savior of the world. Add to this, Moses has given you certain marks to distinguish the false from the true prophet, Deut 13:1-3; 18:22, which, if you apply to me, you will find that I am not a false but a true prophet of the Most High God."

It is remarkable to see how often Jesus mentions the subject of honor, not only in this passage but also in other parts of this Gospel.¹⁵⁴ Sin has caused us to lose sight of the fact that bearing the image of God entails honor. God honors man and He honors His Son. Accepting praise and honor from our fellowmen is, in itself, not sinful. It is wrong when it becomes detached from the honor of God. If we honor God, He will honor us and those who are honored by God ought to be honored by their fellowmen. In daily life, the roles are reversed and we often honor that which God rejects. The antithesis occurs when man endeavors to hold on to the right order. That is why Paul writes to the Galatians: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."¹⁵⁵

In vs. 44, Jesus gives us one of the most profound analyses of the mystery of unbelief: "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?" In order to come to faith, man has to seek the honor of God. This road seems to be completely blocked. Man knows by intuition that God does not approve of the things he does and that He will not honor him in his natural condition. This is the reason we seek the honor of others who are rejected by God instead of seeking the honor that comes from God. Man has abandoned the gold standard and thus his devaluation has become complete. The fact that we can come to the place where God will honor us if we confess and are converted, is outside the field of vision of most people.

In this discourse that resulted from Jesus' breaking of the Sabbath, our Lord makes the deepest and most awesome observations that can be made about life on this side and the other side of the grave. He says this with such an insight and authority that it is impossible that it would be a figment.

This brings us to the end of the phase of Jesus' ministry which began with His departure from Jerusalem, at the moment of the imprisonment of John the Baptist and which ends again in Jerusalem.

The Thompson Chain Reference Bible places the episode described in this chapter between Jesus' first journey through Galilee and the appointment of the apostles, probably because the apostles are not mentioned in this chapter. John does not give us any reference points to clearly determine the time. The fact that the disciples are not mentioned does not prove that they could not be present. It is even possible that the first episode of Jesus' ministry ended with His rejection in Nazareth, described by Matthew and that Jesus' discourse in this chapter follows this.

The second phase probably began with the death of John the Baptist. It is interesting to see the parallel between the various periods in Jesus' public life and the events in John's life. The diminishing of John's popularity coincides with Jesus' departure from Jerusalem. John's imprisonment corresponds to the ministry in Galilee, and when the word of John's death reaches Jesus, He looks for a quiet place to digest the emotions this news evokes in Him. This is the point where the next chapter of this Gospel picks up the story.

¹⁵⁴ See vs. 23; ch. 7:18; 8:49; 12:26

¹⁵⁵ Gal. 1:10

II. The Opposition during Passover Time in Galilee

ch. 6

1. The Feeding of the Multitude 6:1-15

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: “The miracle before us is the only ‘sign’ recorded in all four Gospels. Mark and Luke speak of Jesus as teaching the multitude prior to the miracle, but John alone records the discourse which Jesus gave on the following day.”¹⁵⁶

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ decision to cross the lake seems to be prompted by the news, complete with all the gruesome details, of the death of John the Baptist. We read there: “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.”¹⁵⁷ The emotional turmoil the Lord obviously experienced at the hearing of the crime that claimed His precursor’s life, gives to the scene that follows an unusual depth and beauty. Jesus was never given the opportunity to grieve, as He obviously wanted. He is thrown into the midst of a ministry that would have overwhelmed the strongest. He deals with the situation with such authority and majesty that the crowd is ready to crown Him as their king.

According to the record in Mark’s Gospel, this retreat coincides with the return of the disciples after the evangelistic campaign.

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this chapter with the following observation: “If we had no synoptic tradition to give a closer historical setting of the narrative which here follows, we might take Meyer’s view, and say that the ‘after these things’... of ver. 1 referred to the discourse of the previous chapter, and that the ‘departed’... referred to Jerusalem as its starting-point; and, notwithstanding the extreme awkwardness of the expression, we might have supposed that ‘the other side’ of the sea was the other side of it from Jerusalem (cf. ch. x. 40; xviii. 1). Some commentators appear to have a morbid fear of reducing a difficulty, or seeing a harmony, among these four narratives. One thing is clear, that they are independent of one another, are not derived from each other, do each involve side views of the event distinct from the rest, and yet concur in the same general representation.”

There is some confusion about the location due to the fact that various names are used to designate the body of water and the location of the cities mentioned. Luke calls the lake “Lake Gennesaret,” Matthew and Mark “the Sea of Galilee,” and John “the Sea of Tiberias.”¹⁵⁸

John pinpoints the time by stating that the Passover was near. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “This was the first Passover after Christ’s baptism. The second is mentioned, Luke 6:1. The third, John 6:4. And the fourth, which was that at which he was crucified, John 11:55. From which it appears, 1. That our blessed Lord continued his public ministry about three years and a half, according to the prophecy of Daniel, Dan 9:27. And, 2. That, having been baptized about the beginning of his thirtieth year, he was crucified precisely in the middle of his thirty-third.”

The retreat Jesus had planned for Himself and for the disciples is disturbed by the gathering of a crowd of people. A mass of more than 10,000 walked around the lake while Jesus and His disciples crossed by boat and arrived on the other side before the boat. We could see in this an effort by the enemy to disturb Jesus’ ministry. When he fails to curtail the work of the Kingdom with too little fruit, he tries to discourage the laborers with too much. It is wonderful to see how Jesus solves this problem.

There is nothing wrong with the holding of retreats or going on vacation. But there is a danger when we are so full of the thought that we need a rest that we leave the work of the Lord at a time the Lord doesn’t want us to leave it. As soon as Jesus sees the multitude, his fatigue and sorrow over the death of John the Baptist disappear and He is filled with compassion over them. As was the case after His conversation with the Samaritan woman, the joy of the harvest overwhelms His heart and obeying the will of the Father becomes His food and relaxation.

Each of the Gospels put a different emphasis on what Jesus does. Matthew says: “He had compassion on them and healed their sick.”¹⁵⁹ Mark states: “he began teaching them many things.”¹⁶⁰ Luke combines the two by saying: “He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.”¹⁶¹ John limits himself to saying that “Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples.” This suggests that He began teaching. But the most sensational of this event is, obviously, the mass feeding of the crowd.

¹⁵⁷ See Matt. 14:1-13

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:31-44; Luke 9:10-17

¹⁵⁹ Matt. 14:14

¹⁶⁰ Mark 6:34

¹⁶¹ Luke 9:11

Both Matthew and Mark both comment that Jesus' reaction upon seeing the crowd was that "He had compassion on them and Mark even adds: "because they were like sheep without a shepherd."¹⁶² Those words originate with Moses. In praying for Joshua, his successor, he said: "...so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."¹⁶³ The same words are used by the prophet Micaiah, who foretelling the death of King Ahab, said: "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd, and the LORD said, 'These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace.'"¹⁶⁴ The words are always used in connection with the leadership of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel makes some pertinent observations which point to the Lord Himself as the shepherd of His people.¹⁶⁵ Israel was a theocracy. In principle it was not strictly necessary that Moses appoint a successor. The successor was needed because the people were not ready to be governed directly by God. The comparison of the people with sheep is not very flattering. God created man as man. A person who is aware of his humanness, who knows to be the bearer of the image of God, is ready to be guided directly by God. Those who behave like sheep will be treated as sheep. The fact that man, individually, as well as en masse cannot orient on God, evokes Jesus' deepest compassion. In this, the devil has done more damage than in the decapitation of John the Baptist. The death of God's herald was so obviously an act of injustice committed to a man sent by God. The fact that here are over 10,000 people who have lost the image of God, and that this is not considered an act of injustice, is infinitely worse. Jesus' teaching of the crowd must be seen against this background. Jesus' teaching is geared to man "being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator," toward "the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."¹⁶⁶ It is on this basis that Jesus heals the sick and feeds the hungry.

We see here duplicated what was also typical of the ministry of John the Baptist, that people left their towns and villages to go there where the Word of God was preached. Many people still react positively to that which is genuine and living. We can imagine the festive atmosphere that must have been prevalent among the crowd. People were healed of sicknesses and there was the greatest preaching ever heard on earth. And at the time when it was supposed to end, it only began. Instead of being driven home by hunger, the crowd was treated royally on a dinner of fish and bread. The occasion called for more than preaching only.

Typical for this meal is not the extravagance of variety of food but the simplicity and the abundance of it. It is as if the Lord wants to emphasize the fundamental significance of eating. One has to eat to stay alive and have energy. Eating is needed for survival. There is also the element of surprise to find food where it is not expected. Satisfaction also plays an important role. And then there is the miracle of the multiplication. As a person who is starving best knows the value of a piece of bread, so the Lord highlights the real value of bread and fish here.

We could say that the people who had followed Jesus had not planned ahead well enough. They had left their homes without knowing how long they would be gone and they had made no preparations whatsoever. Among a crowd of over 10,000 only one person could be found who had 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes. The majority was probably not aware of the fact that they were in the process of first seeking the Kingdom of God. This caused them to be the more amazed when they realized that "all these things [were] given to [them] as well."¹⁶⁷ The laws of the Kingdom are always at work in the presence of the Lord, whether we realize this or not.

In John's Gospel it is particularly Philip who is put to the test. We can imagine how Jesus' command to the disciples "You give them something to eat"¹⁶⁸ must have exasperated them. The Lord performs His greatest miracles when man is desperate and all human solutions fail.

We don't read how the miracle was performed. It appears that Jesus divided first the bread and the fish among the twelve disciples. They stood there with some bread and fish in their hands. The crowd of more than 10,000 had split into groups of 100 or 50. There must have been about 150 to 200 of those groups. This made every disciple responsible for 1000 to 1500 individuals. If we take it that every disciple divided his bread and fish in 10 pieces and gave those to one person in each group, that person must have given it out to the other members of his group. The bread and fish increased as it was being divided. This would be the least time consuming way for the miracle to be performed.

We could ask why the Lord ordered the leftover pieces to be gathered up. The meal was finished and the gathering of the pieces could only serve to make an inventory of the miracle. It gave proof of the sheer abundance; after more than 10,000 people had eaten there were still twelve baskets full left. John gives as a reason Jesus' words

¹⁶² Matt 14:14; Mark 6:34

¹⁶³ Num. 27:17

¹⁶⁴ I Kings 22:17

¹⁶⁵ See Ezek. ch. 34

¹⁶⁶ See Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24

¹⁶⁷ See Matt. 6:33

¹⁶⁸ Mark 6:37

“Let nothing be wasted.” This presents us with a strange paradox. The miracle produced an overproduction but nothing could be thrown away. The superabundance was carefully catalogued! We are not told what happened with the leftovers. It is possible that the bread and the fish were sold and that that money was put in the money bag. It surely would not have been gathered in order to be thrown away again.

The prophet Elisha performed a similar miracle for a widow who was in debt, by multiplying the small amount of olive oil she had. Then he told her: “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”¹⁶⁹ It could be that the people in this story were given the leftovers to take home. That would have given the Lord a good reason to send the people away. It is not easy to dismiss a crowd of 10,000 people.

It seems that the immensity of the miracle became clear only when the people saw the baskets with the leftovers. It is seeing the leftovers that brought the people to the realization that Jesus was the expected “prophet.” This title is a reference to Moses’ prophecy: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him... I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.”¹⁷⁰ It is interesting to see that at the moment of the miracle the people immediately connected Jesus with Moses’ prophecy, but in the ensuing discussion of the following day, the connection between Moses’ manna and Jesus’ bread is forgotten. For one moment the fog in people’s mind lifted to descend again upon them the next day. When the people saw clearly, confusion entered. People mixed up spiritual things with material ones. They immediately wanted to crown their prophet king. This was done of course with the intent to chase the Romans out of the country. Jesus immediately perceived the danger, and He knew that He could not count on the disciples under those circumstances. That is why He forced them to embark and row back to Capernaum.

The counter measures Jesus used were very effective. John merely states that Jesus “withdrew again to a mountain by himself.” But Matthew records: “Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.” The Greek word is *anagkazo* which means “to necessitate, or compel.” The KJV renders it: “Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship.” As at the moment of His rejection in Nazareth, Jesus demonstrates here His enormous spiritual authority over people. He binds the strong man, the invisible opponent, and after that there is simply no question of disobeying His command. After the disciples left, Jesus dismissed the crowd without any difficulty. This suggests that the disciples may have played an important role in influencing the people to crown Jesus king. Mark uses a word that implies courtesy.¹⁷¹ The Greek is *apotassomai* which can be rendered “to say adieu” or “bid farewell.” The NASU renders the verse: “After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.” The authority is blended with respect for fellow human beings.

Then arrives the hour of rest the Lord had longed for. All Gospels emphasize the fact that Jesus was alone on the mountain and that He was in prayer. We can only guess how the Lord rolled the burden of His heart upon the Father and how, after a few hours, He left the place refreshed. The Bible remains silent about these hours of perfect intimacy between the Son and the Father. We can only guess what took place.

The Flemish poet, Guido Gezelle, expresses jealousy in his poem “You Prayed Alone on a Mountain.”

“You prayed on a mountain alone,
and...Jesus, I cannot find one
where I can climb high enough
to find You alone;
the world wants to follow me,
wherever I go,
wherever I look...”

Although we may be jealous of Jesus’ solitude and communion with the Father and we don’t know what took place, it is good for us to imagine ourselves to be present. Jesus must have come with questions that cried out for answers. The death of John the Baptist, and maybe also the threats of King Herod, and the result of the evangelistic campaign the disciples had just concluded were all a matter of intense prayer. We envision that, immediately when Jesus went into this closet with the Father, the place was filled with the glory of God. The man Jesus must have fallen down in ecstasy and worship, and reaching out to this glory. He may have quoted Psalm 131

My heart is not proud, O LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;

¹⁶⁹ See II Kings 4:1-7

¹⁷⁰ Deut. 18:15,18

¹⁷¹ Mark 6:46

I do not concern myself with great matters
 or things too wonderful for me.
 But I have stilled and quieted my soul;
 like a weaned child with its mother,
 like a weaned child is my soul within me.¹⁷²

Our questions never hold up in the presence of God. His presence is the answer. When God is not there, there are no answers. When God is present there are no questions! We learn from Matthew and Mark that Jesus did not go to the disciples until “the fourth watch of the night,”¹⁷³ which is between 3 and 6 AM. This means that Jesus spent most of the night in prayer. For someone who needs a full night of sleep, this is something else to feel jealous about. We can be jealous, not only of Jesus’ prayer life but also of His good health. Some people can skip a night of sleep without any trouble. Albert Schweitzer once remarked that, as a young man, he could sometimes work all through the night and still be fit for the work of the next day.

2. The Storm on the Lake and Jesus’ Walking on the Water 6:16-21

It is one of the mysteries of life that, after this great miracle was performed, the storm broke loose and the disciples almost drowned. Yet, we believe that there are no secondary causes.

In the meantime, while Jesus prayed, the disciples found themselves in great difficulty. The lake was rough and, although they had left late in the afternoon or early evening the day before, at 3 AM, they had not yet reached the other shore. The distance between Bethsaida and Capernaum by way of the lake is only about 5 miles. For 12 strong rowers that would have been a trifle under favorable circumstances. John tells us “they had rowed three or three and a half miles.” Matthew tells us that the boat was “buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.”¹⁷⁴ This gives the impression that the boat was pushed backwards, away from the shore. John describes the anxiety of the disciples with the words: “By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them.” Mark observes that Jesus “saw the disciples straining at the oars.”¹⁷⁵ There was a great need and the disciples were aware that the presence of the Lord would make all the difference. There is the watchful eye of Jesus who could clearly see their predicament from His high vantage point. But Jesus made no haste to come to His disciples’ help.

We mentioned already that Jesus constrained His disciples to go in the ship. We cannot say that He provoked the storm but He must have foreseen it. At another occasion, it was obviously that a similar storm on the lake, as well as other disturbances of the balance of nature can have a demonic background. The fact that Jesus, at one point, rebuked the wind and the waves is an indication of this.¹⁷⁶ Maybe we could say that Jesus was given a choice between being forced to become king or have the disciples brave the storm. In both options Satan played an important role. The storm was the least dangerous alternative. We may see a parallel with Israel’s battle with the Amalekites in the desert and the struggle there.¹⁷⁷ What a victory was won in both cases because someone prayed!

Then the Lord Jesus Christ walked on the water toward His disciples. We have to remind ourselves that everything Jesus did as man was done on a level that is accessible to human beings. What He did, He did by the power of the Holy Spirit, with faith in the Father. This thought can make us dizzy. How is it possible for a human being to gain such a victory in faith that enables Him to literally walk on water! By the creative power of God, the simple word of faith makes the atoms of the water obey. We can understand that God can do those things, but the fact that the power of God is active here in a human body surpasses our comprehension.

The crowd Jesus had fed was inspired by demonic powers to try to crown Jesus as king. After His prayer on the mountain, Jesus revealed His heavenly majesty here. The temptation of Adam and Eve in paradise and of Jesus in the desert were repeated here. Jesus’ walking on the water demonstrates the beginning of the total victory. I don’t know if every person who experiences fellowship with God would be able to do what Jesus did here, even if he were completely free from all traces of sin. Not every good chess player becomes a world champion.

Mark adds to this story that Jesus was about to pass by them. This seems to be contradictory. Jesus went to them because they strained at the oars. If He had come to help them, why would He act as if He wouldn’t help? Jesus’ attitude, however, turns out to be consistent. He wanted to test the disciples, first by waiting till the fourth watch of the night and then to act as if He wasn’t going to help. Such tests serve to free us from the deep-rooted

¹⁷² Ps. 131:1,2

¹⁷³ See Matt. 14: 25; Mark 6:48

¹⁷⁴ Matt. 14:24

¹⁷⁵ Mark 6:48

¹⁷⁶ See Matt. 8:23-27

¹⁷⁷ See Ex. 17:8-16

suspicions we sometimes have about God. We fail to understand that, if God had ulterior motives, if He abandoned His standard of absolute holiness, honesty, justice, and love, the universe would fall to pieces. The fact that the atoms of creation still hold together is our guarantee that God is still true to Himself.

We shouldn't be too amazed about the disciples' reaction when they see Jesus approaching them. Whether they were superstitious by nature or not makes no difference in this case. It is much worse for a rational person who does not believe in ghosts to see one than for those who have made specters part of their philosophy of life. Jesus did not reproach the disciples their nervous outburst. He knew that His apparition was more than they were able to comprehend. His words are an encouragement: "It is I; don't be afraid." We are never tempted or tested beyond what we can bear. When there is a danger that we reach the limit, the Lord will always make us experience His presence. The purpose of God's testing of His children is nowhere explained so clearly as in Moses' second speech in Deuteronomy. Reviewing the desert crossing, Moses said: "Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."¹⁷⁸ God allowed His people to go hungry, not because He did not have enough to feed them but because there are certain lessons to learn that cannot be learned in any other way. The Book of Job teaches us that the attacks of the devil upon us become, in God's hand, the material for the building up of our character.

John does not mention Peter's experiment in walking on the water as Matthew and Mark do. When Jesus climbs into the boat there occurs an immediate change in outward circumstances. Matthew tells us that the wind died down and John states "Immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading." Stanley Jones, in one of his diaries, comments on this by contrasting the hopelessness of human toil with Jesus' matter-of-fact like victory. When Jesus arrives the goal is reached. He is the goal.

3. The Discourse in the Synagogue of Capernaum 6:22-59

Only John describes in detail the reception Jesus and His disciples receive upon arrival in Gennesaret. Matthew and Mark give a very condensed version.¹⁷⁹ There remained a crowd, although less numerous than the over 10,000 on the other side of the lake. They had seen how the disciples had embarked and left without Jesus. There had been no other ships. They had drawn the conclusion from this that Jesus had remained on the other shore. There is a good deal of humor in the fact that there is in human logic no place for walking on water, yet Jesus was not where He was supposed to be! I imagine that the angels in heaven and God the Father Himself were amused about this. There is a similar situation when Peter escaped from prison.¹⁸⁰ The people finally gave up and most of them embarked to cross the lake. The fact that the crowd could cross the lake suggests that there were not more than a few hundred people left. The fact that some had stayed made it necessary for Jesus to escape via the "shortcut."

At this point Jesus is at the peak of His popularity. From here on we see Him decline in the public opinion polls.

The accounts of Matthew and Mark suggest that the people who initially welcomed Jesus at Gennesaret where not the same as those that had eaten of the bread and fish on the other side. John describes the reaction of the people who had looked for Jesus in Tiberias; they finally found Him in the synagogue of Capernaum. It is not quite clear whether Jesus preached His whole sermon in the synagogue or whether some of it was given close to the lake. John makes us suppose that everything that happened in those last 24 hours found its culmination in this great discourse of the Lord.

This is the second great sermon Jesus preaches in this Gospel. The first one about the resurrection and judgment was prompted by Jesus' breaking of the Sabbath; this second one, after the feeding of the multitude, deals with the subject of the real food.

Jesus analyzed in a sharp and profound way the inner attitude of the people who sought Him. The previous evening, the mood had been overheated and the people had displayed an unholy desire to crown Him king. In the light of the next day their real motives became evident. Jesus did not answer their question about how He had managed to cross the lake without a boat. We could paraphrase His answer as follows: "You are completely absorbed by the struggle for existence. You suppose to have found a solution to the problem by means of the

¹⁷⁸ Deut. 8:2,3

¹⁷⁹ See Matt. 14:34-36; Mark 6:53-56

¹⁸⁰ See Acts 12:18

multiplication of the bread. Your priorities are wrong! Food is an image of a spiritual reality. If spiritual food is your priority, everything else will fall in place.”

It is amazing how often the Bible teaches this profound truth. Jesus’ whole discourse is actually a commentary on Deuteronomy 8:3. Moses said to the people who had just finished their journey through the desert: “[God] humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” It is a lesson about eating. That lesson is often best taught when food is scarce. Jesus learned this lesson Himself during His temptation in the desert.¹⁸¹ In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus speaks about the seed that fell among the thorns, which He identified as “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.”¹⁸² He calls our building up of financial security and our faith in the same as well as our doubts about it “work for food that spoils.” The inescapable conclusion in all of this is that our attitude in life should not be to work for food that spoils. Our worry about this is not only an indication that we never learned to fully trust God, but also that we never really tasted His food. The two kinds of food are opposites. One cannot spend all his energy in trying to make a living and, at the same time, work for food that endures to eternal life. Working for food that spoils is the occupation of the man who is under the curse of God. It is related to the fall. The Genesis record reads: “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”¹⁸³

Ever since man turned his back to God, he labors and sweats for his food. The situation is different for the redeemed person. David says in the Psalms: “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat--for he grants sleep to those he loves.”¹⁸⁴ God has especially delivered us from this kind of concern so that we would be able to give our full attention to the real food and drink. We are all limited in our energy. If we use it for the wrong purpose, we have nothing left. Isaiah analyzes the situation sharply with the question: “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?”¹⁸⁵ The Constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven states: “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”¹⁸⁶

We also note the comparison the Lord draws between earthly food that spoils and heavenly food that remains. We can say that, as the tabernacle on earth was a copy of the true one in heaven,¹⁸⁷ so is what we eat and drink a shadow of the real food. We can go further and say that, since man is created in the image of God, all that is put under man’s jurisdiction is a shadow of the heavenly reality.

The reference point in the comparison is satisfaction. As our eating and drinking satisfies our physical hunger so does accepting the truth satisfy our spiritual hunger. The clearest example of the relationship between the image and the reality is found in the Lord’s Supper. Jesus took that which was closest to Him and He said: “this is My body... this is My blood.” He did not take a specially consecrated piece of bread to express a heavenly reality. The reality is expressed on all our eating and drinking.

Some theologians see in Jesus’ words a reference to the Eucharist, and they suggest that the New Testament church edited the text to project the Lord’s Supper. Such confusion is caused when people try to distinguish between everyday eating and sacramental eating. In Christ, everything becomes a sacrament. If our life is sanctified, our deeds also become holy before God.

It becomes clear from Jesus’ words that eating the real food does not begin when we leave this world in which everything is shadow and enter the reality of heaven. The Lord states emphatically that the food endures to eternal life. This means that it begins in the present. Man who is created as an image and who feeds himself with images must begin to feed himself with the real thing, with the truth, while he yet is alive on earth. In the previous chapter Jesus said: “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.”¹⁸⁸ In vs. 47 of this chapter we read the same statement in the present tense: “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”

The next truth that becomes evident is that eternal life is a gift. It is not something that is already present in us and that we have to learn to develop. It is a completely new element which is introduced from outside. It is

¹⁸¹ See Matt. 4:1-4

¹⁸² See Matt. 13:22

¹⁸³ Gen. 3:17-19

¹⁸⁴ Ps. 127:2

¹⁸⁵ Isa. 55:2

¹⁸⁶ Matt. 6:33

¹⁸⁷ See Heb. 9:24

¹⁸⁸ ch. 5:24

important to note that, in connection with this, the Lord uses the title “the Son of Man.” Eternal life may come to us as a new element from the outside, it is not a foreign element. Later on Jesus explains what the gift of eternal life consists of and how it is given. Then it becomes clear how essential the Incarnation was in connection with all of this. Jesus’ use of the title “the Son of Man” indicates that receiving eternal life is related to the fact that God has revealed Himself to us as Man.

All Jesus says about that at this point is “God the Father has placed [on Him] his seal of approval.” The Greek text says literally: “Him the Father has sealed.” This is the first instance in the New Testament in which the seal is used as an image of the Holy Spirit. This seal is identical with the anointing. In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus introduced Himself as the Anointed One. Reading from the Book of Isaiah, He said: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me.”¹⁸⁹ Here, in the synagogue of Capernaum, He called Himself the Sealed One. In Nazareth, the emphasis of the message was on His ministry as healer and preacher of good news to the poor. The topic of the sermon in Capernaum was His atoning death. Jesus presented Himself here as the Lamb of God. We could say that the anointing pertained to Jesus’ ministry and the seal to the setting apart of the Lamb for the Passover celebration. This setting apart of our Lord Jesus Christ from among all of men is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus used the word “work” and the people reacted to this. They knew what it meant to labor and sweat for their daily bread, but they didn’t know what to do to obtain the food that endures. For this reason they made a distinction between their own work and “the works of God.”¹⁹⁰ What they mean is not the work that only God can do but the work they do for which God will pay them. This approach is consistent with the Jewish philosophy of life in which merit plays an important role. For us who are steeped in Christian doctrine, the thought that we would present a bill to God for work done hardly crosses our mind. I once visited the temple site in Jerusalem where I was handed a pamphlet that warned the Jews not to enter the temple square. I had to read it twice to understand what it said. It stated that the return of the temple site to the nation of Israel was in recompense to the Jews for their suffering during the Second World War. The Jews in Jesus’ day had, evidently, no problem conceiving of the thought that God would pay them with food that endures. The only thing they wanted to know is what kind of labor God required from them. The apostle Paul would later elaborate on the answer Jesus gave here.

Man is correct in not considering faith as an achievement. Yet in God’s bookkeeping, man’s faith is credited to him as righteousness. Faith shifts the accent from a personal achievement to the accomplishment of someone else. The work has to be performed but not by us. The Jews, evidently, understood this because they asked Jesus what kind of labor He would perform that would be a substitution for theirs. The work is not only presented here as a substitution but also as a condition. They think that they could work themselves up to a certain level of faith in Jesus if the miracles He performed would be sensational enough. In this they deceived themselves. A human being hardly ever comes to faith because he is convinced by the evidence. Faith is the result of the surrender of the rebellious self. That is the point to which Jesus’ answer here was directed.

It seems strange that people who had experienced the miracle of the mass feeding on the other side of the lake asked for another miracle on which they could base their faith. The miracle Jesus had performed was probably considered as sufficient evidence but the people tried to convince Jesus that He should repeat that kind of miracle at certain fixed times. That seems to be the point of their questions. They were not really interested in a lesson about food being an image of a spiritual reality. They saw a possibility of escape of the law of “eating food by the sweat of their brow.” They wanted Jesus to give them this “manna” every day. On the other side of the lake, they had been ready to crown Jesus as their king; here they repeat the offer. They presented their case in a rather diplomatic way but they also gave proof of the fact that they had not understood a word of what Jesus was saying to them.

Jesus answered that they would receive their manna on a daily basis but on a higher level. They were given much more than they asked for. The tragedy is that they were not willing to receive this. What they wanted was much less than what the Lord was ready to give them. People do love darkness better than light. This is implied in Jesus’ correction of their quotation from the Psalms. “He satisfied them with the bread of heaven.”¹⁹¹ Jesus placed this quotation in the present tense: “It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.” The Jews implied that Moses had given the bread to the people, as if *he* had produced the miracle. Their point of argument was: “This is what Moses did, what are you doing?”

By stressing that fact that not Moses but the Father was the real giver of the manna, Jesus revealed at the same time why the Jews did not react appropriately to His message. They had never acknowledged the Father. They had no living relationship with the Father. God’s miraculous intervention in Israel’s history had been reduced to a dead tradition because the people only saw the historical figures of the past instead of recognizing the living, eternal

¹⁸⁹ Luke 4:18

¹⁹⁰ KJV

¹⁹¹ Ps. 105:40

God in all the events, the God who is as real for those who live in the present as He was for the previous generations.

Jesus also wanted to say that He was not the giver but the gift. What He gives points to what He is. The multiplication of the bread and the fish was a sign, a revelation of Himself. When Moses spoke the words: "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD,"¹⁹² he prophesied about the Word Incarnate. Living by the Word of the LORD means living by Jesus Christ. That fact also places Jesus' answer to the devil during the temptation in the wilderness in a glorious light. To the subtle temptation: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread. Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " ¹⁹³ Jesus answered Satan with an Old Testament prophecy that announced Him as the Word of God that gives life to the world.

We don't live in a dead world; in this world, we are surrounded by life. We are full of life ourselves. But that is not the life Jesus meant here. All the life that every breathing creature possesses on earth is also an image of the real thing, of real eternal life.

The Jews' request: "From now on give us this bread" is proof of their misunderstanding of Jesus' words. As in the conversation with the Samaritan woman in chapter 4, they mistook the image for the reality. The Jews were still speaking about bread but Jesus spoke about eternal life. They asked for something they didn't know and that they probably didn't even want.

Jesus answered their request with one of the deepest and most glorious words that can be found in all of Scripture: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." This is the first I AM in the Gospel of John. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* comments on this: "Only in John do we find the 'I am' sayings: 'I am the bread of life' (6:35), 'I am the light of the world' (8:12), 'before Abraham was, I AM' (8:58) 'I am the door of the sheep' (10:7), 'I am the good shepherd' (10:11), 'I and My Father are one' (10:30), 'I AM, the way, the truth, and the life' (14:6), and 'I am the vine' (15:5). In each of these sayings the 'I' is emphatic in Greek. It recalls the name of God, 'I AM' in the Old Testament (Ex 3:14)." The Greek *ego eimi* is the equivalent of the Old Testament "*SHER EH'YEH*, 'I AM.'" Although Jesus' words are given in Greek, He spoke Aramaic. The Jews were not allowed to pronounce the words that formed the Name of God, of which I AM is a part. In using them Jesus identified Himself as the Son of God. When, at a later time, Jesus made the statement: "before Abraham was born, I am!" the Jews took this as a direct reference to the divine and that is the reason we read: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him."¹⁹⁴

These 7 or 8 "I AMs" form the core of Jesus' revelation of Himself. We can see in them a rising line that corresponds with the spiritual growth of a child of God. It begins with eating and ends with the most intimate organic unity with the Lord. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman on the subject of living water, Jesus said: "I who speak to you am he."¹⁹⁵ In the context of that chapter we could say that Jesus identified Himself with the living water. But He never openly called Himself "the living water." That title is specifically reserved for the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁶

What do we learn from Jesus' words: "I am the bread of life?" In the first place, that it pertains to a person and not to a principle. No philosophy can give life to us. Even as a woman cannot become pregnant and reproduce life without intimacy with a man who has the same kind of life and personhood she possesses, so it is impossible to receive life but through fellowship with Jesus Christ. In this we see again how God honors man who is created in His image.

The second truth we can draw from Jesus' words is that He spoke about matter-of-fact things that pertain to daily life. He used the word *artos*, which is the most common form of bread. *Vincent's Word Studies* states: "An inferior sort of bread is indicated by the term... food fit for beasts." There is in this image a clear suggestion to Jesus' humiliation in His Incarnation and it also speaks of the fact that it is abundantly available. Jesus' image speaks of common food. Sometimes missionaries who translate the Scriptures in another culture encounter problems when they use a word that is the equivalent of bread when bread is not the common food of the people. One missionary who worked among primitive tribes people, by using the word "bread," created the misunderstanding

¹⁹² Deut. 8:3

¹⁹³ See Matt. 4:3,4

¹⁹⁴ See ch. 8:58, 59

¹⁹⁵ ch. 4:26

¹⁹⁶ See ch. 7:37-39

that Jesus was like the food that white people eat, which the tribes people could not afford. Sometimes Jesus' words should be rendered: "I am the rice of life," "I am the sweet potato of life," or "I am the sago of life."

Then the image illustrates how it works. The word "bread" clarifies the meaning of faith. We will never put spoiled food in our mouth. We eat only that which passes the critical examination of our nose and stimulates appetite. There is no better illustration of what it means to believe than to take food and eat it. Jesus also draws a parallel in this verse between coming and believing. It begins with coming, progresses to taking, then to eating and it ends in becoming. The food we eat is transformed into the particles that constitute our body. We are in a way what we eat.

Jesus demonstrated with these words that it is a matter of a complete and eternal satisfaction of our human life. It speaks of the ultimate meaning and destination of our existence. As our mouth and stomach were created for food, so our spirit and soul are meant for God. We think in connection with this of Augustine's words: "Restless is our heart within us, o God, until it finds rest in Thee!"

Jesus offers Himself to us. This implies that there ought to be an act of receiving on our part. This condition is clear in the words "He who comes to me" and "he who believes in me." Following this are the words "But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe." The problem is in man's heart. God's offer is complete. We do not have to try to soften God's heart; we have to overcome our self.

The words in vs. 37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" make it difficult to determine whether Jesus reveals the mystery of human will and God's determination or whether He hides it. The verses 36-40 give no indication that a person who wants to come to Christ would be rejected because the Father had decided not to enable him.¹⁹⁷ The point Jesus wanted to make is that believing in Him is related to believing in God, the Father. In a negative sense, this means that unbelief in Jesus Christ can be traced back to a lack of faith in God. The Jews were absolutely convinced that they believed in God. But they utterly deceived themselves in this. Holding on to certain traditions without surrendering the will to the Father, may be taken by man to be faith but it isn't. The touchstone of real surrender in faith is our relationship with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was true when Jesus spoke these words as it is today. Some people at that time recognized Jesus for who He was because their relationship with God was a living reality to them. Simon and Nathaniel are examples. To those who really were what they claimed to be, the Lord lifted up a tip of the veil. Those, who pretended to know God but did not have fellowship with Him, would not receive enlightenment from Jesus' words.

Everything Jesus said in these verses is positive with the exception of the words: "still you do not believe." This approach focuses on what is important. That which is negative is always found on man's side; God is always positive. Hindrances to faith never originate with God. The Calvinistic doctrine that God has predestined some to be saved and others to be lost cannot be deducted from what the Bible as a whole teaches. It is also not true that Jesus addressed here a crowd of illiterates who did not know yet whether they would be saved or not. He addressed the people of Israel, the people who belonged to God. He said: "You may believe that you are part of God's covenant but you are not." We cannot assume that they would be excluded from God's covenant by factors outside themselves. Jesus clearly spoke of their unbelief.

Because Jesus expressed Himself positively, we can say that His words are a guarantee for those who do believe. As we saw in vs. 35, Jesus offered them, in the first place, full satisfaction. He also guarantees full acceptance to all who would come. After this assurance of complete salvation is offered and, finally, the Lord promised resurrection from the dead.

The Lord based the practical application of all of this on the will of the Father which is carried out by the Son. It is an undeniable fact that this leads us to the heart of the doctrine of predestination but not in the Calvinistic sense of election and rejection. The emphasis is upon what the Father wills, not on what He does not will. The words were meant to give full assurance to those who would come, not to give an excuse to those who did not want to come. As we said earlier, Jesus changed the emphasis from believing, or not believing, in Him to believing, or not believing, in the Father. The Lord Jesus accepts everyone who believes as a gift of the Father to Him. There is a giving of a gift from the Father to the Son and, at the same time, there is a coming of those who are the gift. It is not a gift of slaves who do not have a will of their own, as one monarch would give his serfs to another monarch. Those who are given come of their own free will, they walk on their own legs. This is only possible if the person who is given understands the will of God and surrenders himself wholeheartedly and completely.

Jesus mentioned the real basis for this acceptance in passing. It would be easy to read this without paying attention to it. He said: "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." In saying this, He gave an example of what it means to come willingly but the meaning goes far beyond that. It

¹⁹⁷ See vs. 65

was ultimately the surrender of His will to the Father that brought Him to the cross. Without His dying on the cross, our accepting His offer would not be an option. It is His act of complete surrender that makes our acceptance complete: complete in a judicial, a factual, and an emotional sense.

Jesus then summarized in His definition the will of the Father and the whole process of salvation. As far as life on earth is concerned, the Lord guarantees His protection. Jesus pledges that He will watch over us so that we will not be lost. As far as the future is concerned, He promises that this mortal body will be raised from the dead.

Four times Jesus repeated the assurance "I will raise him up at the last day."¹⁹⁸ This strong emphasis should not pass unnoticed. The Stone Age tribes people in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, had heard that people who believe in Christ have eternal life. They were all perturbed when the first baptized believer died. They supposed that eternal life meant that a person would not die. They felt that something had gone wrong. We are all too familiar with the fact that people, including Christians, die. It would be good, in a sense, if we would share in their confusion and amazement. Death robs life of its meaning. Death is non-sense! But Jesus' fourfold assurance restores meaning to life. It also infers that eternal life is not only a spiritual phenomenon. Man is not complete if his body is not resurrected. Eternal life is for the whole man. This solemn pledge determines our everyday life. If death were the end, there would be no point in living a holy, modest, moral, and victorious life. The apostle Paul says: "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'"¹⁹⁹ The hope of the resurrection finds its practical application in the keeping of a clear conscience. As Paul said, pleading his case before the governor Felix: "I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."²⁰⁰

In vs. 40 the Lord briefly shows the way to eternal life. We read: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." This may be a covert reference to the story of the bronze serpent Moses erected in the desert.²⁰¹ Jesus made reference to this in His conversation with Nicodemus.²⁰² The words looking to the Son and believing in Him make more sense if they refer to His death on the cross than to His ministry while He was alive.

The problem in this passage is, of course, that Jesus' hearers cannot have understood anything of what Jesus said. What He prophesied here is clearly fulfilled in His death on the cross. He is the bronze serpent that is lifted up so that man who has the venom of sin in his blood can find healing by beholding Him. Jesus spoke both of the beginning of life, that is looking to Him and believing, and the sustenance of that life, which is eating the bread of life.

His words met with strong resistance from the side of the Jews. Jesus stated that He had come down from heaven. That was unacceptable to them. None of those people knew anything about the mystery of the Incarnation. Even as far as the birth of every other human being is concerned, they could not explain where man comes from, where he goes, and why he lives. But in spite of this complete ignorance, they felt completely justified in doubting Jesus' statement. They had already determined that Jesus could in no way be different from them. The question concerning why they did not heal people or multiply bread does not enter the picture. They refuted Jesus' declaration by saying: "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" This refutation only indicates the limitations of their vision. They purposely limited their field of vision to the world of that which is visible and, in doing this, they closed the door to all spiritual understanding. It would of course have been extremely difficult for them to know who Jesus really was. Nobody on earth could have had such insight before the coming of the Holy Spirit. But their approach indicates that their understanding of bearing the image of God had become blurry. They had, in their own lives, strayed so far from God's standard that they did not recognize the image of God in someone who expressed this image clearly in everything He did and said.

Jesus answer in verses 44-47 limits itself to the most fundamental part of the problem. Jesus did not reproach the people their lack of insight but He earnestly warned them against a spirit of rebellion. "Stop grumbling among yourselves" is an imperative. This may be directed to the spiritual power that incited the people against Jesus, more than being an admonition to the people themselves. Jesus then indicated to them the way of faith. Although the phrase opens with the words "no one can come to Me," it does not mean the closing of a door. The Lord rather pointed to the key for the door. Faith is based on God's drawing of man and it is fed by God's teaching to man. As we said earlier, Jesus addressed these words to people who pretended to know God. The Lord quoted

¹⁹⁸ See verses 39,40,44,54

¹⁹⁹ I Cor. 15:32

²⁰⁰ Acts 24:15,16

²⁰¹ See Num. 21:4-9

²⁰² ch. 3:14,15

from Isaiah, "All your sons will be taught by the LORD."²⁰³ This is what the Holy Spirit does in the hearts of those who open up to Him. What the Lord said here in brief to unbelievers, He would later elaborate on before His disciples in the chapters 14-16. We see that the way leads from the Father to the Son but also in the opposite direction from the Son to the Father. Jesus would later tell His disciples: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."²⁰⁴

We may have a unique situation here, or maybe it is always so that knowledge of God the Father brings us to the acknowledgment of Jesus as God the Son. There were, among those Jesus addressed, people who knew the Father but who did not know Jesus. In knowing Jesus, they came to the realization of how little they knew God. The knowledge of the Son brought them to a deeper knowledge of the Father. We may say that the Old Testament axiom is: "Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me" and the New Testament maxim is: "No one comes to the Father except through me." The same can be said in connection with seeing the Father. When Jesus spoke those words, no one had yet seen the Father. It was only after some people had come into a more intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus that He could say to them: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."²⁰⁵ The key to both learning and seeing is faith, which means accepting the truth and trusting God, or rather, entrusting oneself to Him who speaks this truth. If a baby can entrust itself to its mother, why cannot man entrust himself to Him who created everything and who is "sustaining all things by his powerful word?"²⁰⁶ As in the images used above, life is dependent upon faith. "He who believes has everlasting life!"

How wonderful and imposing are the words that Jesus repeated twice: "I am the bread of life." The comparison with the manna is elaborated on. The manna helped the Israelites in their crossing of the desert. It was the miracle bread that kept them from death by starvation. But in spite of that fact, all who ate it died. The context suggests that there was more involved than mere physical death. After all, eating the bread of life does not protect us against the dying of our bodies. Or does it? When mentioning eternal life, Jesus always spoke in the same breath of a resurrection at the last day. The physical death of the Israelites in the desert was an outward manifestation of their spiritual death caused by their broken relationship with God. In the same way is the resurrection at the last day the direct result of a renewed relationship with God. The eating of the manna had no effect upon man's spiritual bankruptcy. But the bread of life creates life in the desert of our existence. What Jesus was saying in this image is that, by His death, He would bring about reconciliation between God and man and that man, by identifying himself with this atonement, would become a partaker in the victory over sin and death.

Jesus' statement brought the controversy and misunderstanding to a head. Maybe there was no misunderstanding. The Jews continued to reason on a material level. This makes Jesus' words absurd. It was obvious that Jesus did not propagate cannibalism. In his commentary *The Gospel According to John*, G. Campbell Morgan suggests that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man" means "unless you accept the truth of the Incarnation," and that "drink his blood" means the recognition of His atoning death. That sounds like a reasonable interpretation.

Accepting the Incarnation did, of course, not mean that the Jew would only recognize that Jesus was a genuine human being. That was all they did see in Him. It means rather that they would recognize in Him the person of God. In our day, we tend to emphasize only the divinity of Christ and it would be good to recognize that, unless "the Word" and "Flesh" are given equal emphasis, we do an injustice to the person of our Lord.

Jesus mentioned three points (which provide an ideal division for a sermon) regarding the eating and drinking of the real food.

1. It provides eternal life and resurrection (vs. 54).
2. It guarantees our remaining in Him and His remaining in us (vs. 56).
3. It demonstrates the "how" of the relationship and the life. The Son lives because of the Father and we live because of Jesus (vs. 57).

The Lord began by saying that those who did not partake of the real food did not have life. Their spirit was dead; they were spiritually dead. Since eating and drinking is an act of faith it generates life. In the natural, a person does not begin to live because he eats and drinks but on the spiritual level our faith is linked to an act of creation by God which brings about spiritual life in our hearts. This way, believing the fact that God became man and that He died as a payment for our guilt creates life in us. Jesus repeated the assurance "I will raise him up at the last day."

²⁰³ Isa. 54:13

²⁰⁴ ch. 14:6

²⁰⁵ John 14:9

²⁰⁶ Heb. 1:3

Jesus made no effort to clear up the misunderstanding. At the same time, He put such an emphasis on what He was saying that it was obvious He could not be speaking about things on a physical level. As we saw earlier, the words “real food” and “real drink” indicate that all other food and drink are merely an image.

The second result of our eating and drinking is remaining in Him. The Lord would elaborate this truth later in His discourse with the disciples.²⁰⁷ In this image the emphasis is on the mutual character of the relationship and on the importance of human initiative. It remains true, of course, that it all begins with God’s seeking of man, not with man’s seeking of God. But as far as the experience of the relationship is concerned, much depends on what we do. In the image of the vine and the branches the Lord would use later with the disciples, the point that is stressed is the organic unity as a vital aspect of the relationship. To the Jews the Lord only stated that the relationship exists already when we feed ourselves with the knowledge that He became man and died in our stead.

Vs. 57 constitutes one of the great revelations in the Bible. It provides us with insight into the character of God and of our relationship with Him. In this connection Jesus used the term “the living Father.” The subject is eternal life. The term indicates that the Father is full to the brim of this life. He is the source and the abundance of it. This title for God, “the living Father,” ranks with the other titles John uses in his Epistle: “God is light”²⁰⁸ and “God is love.”²⁰⁹ The word “living” when linked with the word “Father” acquires a special meaning for the people He created. To those who did not believe in the resurrection, Jesus would say later: “He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”²¹⁰ When God is called “the living *Father*” it implies that life cannot merely be limited to God alone.

Jesus continued by saying that He lived because of the Father. This revelation is preceded by a comparison “Just as the living Father sent me...” The complete dependence of Jesus upon the Father is related to His being sent into the world, which refers to His Incarnation. As the Second Person of the Trinity, our Lord exists on a level of equality with the Father, but as the Word-become-flesh He is connected to God by the umbilical cord of faith. Cutting this cord would have meant certain death for the man Jesus, just as it did for Adam. Thus, the Lord set His fellowship with the Father as an example of our fellowship with Him. He incarnated this relationship for us. Being sent and living is, evidently, closely connected to each other; not only for Jesus but for us also. Our living because of Him cannot be separated from our obedience to His commands. It would be dangerous to try to find out what the minimum requirements of obedience would be to maintain a living relationship with the Lord. It is equally dangerous to assume that our obedience creates life. Life exists, of course, before there can be a question of obedience. But Jesus clearly demonstrated that there is a correlation between the experience of life and accepting the commission. In this respect also Jesus exemplified in His life in a glorious manner what this means. His obedience to the Father was not the breaking of a stubborn will but a positive and joyful acceptance of the will of the Father.

Jesus said: “I live because of the Father,” or “I live by the Father” (KJV). An unborn baby lives by the mother. It is fed by what the mother eats and kept alive by the breathing of the mother. This is the way in which we can understand our Lord’s relationship with the Father. This relationship, however, is not automatic as with an unborn child. The Lord made Himself deliberately dependant upon the Father by an act of complete surrender of His will to the will of the Father. His earlier statement: “the Son can do nothing by himself”²¹¹ testifies to this, as well as His whole life and death. Jesus Christ gave in everything the place of priority to the Father. This is the reason the life He lived for us is a demonstration of complete victory. It is truly *Life on the Highest Plane*.

For some reason we always tend to think of surrender of our will in a negative way. This is the result of the propaganda of the enemy. We do well to concentrate on the positive aspect of the statement that the Son *lives* because of the Father. “I live because of the Father!!” is like the sound of a trumpet which rings through the ages. The music was first heard after the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary. A fuller harmony was heard when the grave was found to be empty and the disciples took up the tune by shouting out: “The Lord is risen indeed.”²¹² The apostle John heard it in heaven when Jesus said to him: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!”²¹³ We live because of Jesus Christ in the same sense and with the same intensity.

²⁰⁷ See ch. 15

²⁰⁸ I John 1:5

²⁰⁹ I John 4:8

²¹⁰ Matt. 22:32

²¹¹ ch. 5:19

²¹² Luke 24:34 (NKJV)

²¹³ Rev. 1:17,18

The picture of eating Jesus used suggest an act that is repeated over and over again. Jesus emphasized that the immediate result of this eating will be a cessation of all hunger and thirst. "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." Yet in this life, where we are under constant pressure of the enemy and of the desires of our own heart, it is of vital importance to maintain a constant fellowship with the Lord. This aspect is evinced in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The bread Jesus took was the unleavened bread that had to be eaten during the whole week following the Passover celebration, which is symbolic of a lifetime of daily fellowship with God. There is a complete satisfaction, a total ending of hunger and thirst when we first accept the Lord in our lives, and after that there is maintaining of the fellowship on a daily basis.

The Lord ended His discourse with a repetition of the comparison between the manna and Himself but this time the emphasis is negative. The manna in the desert was unlike the bread of life. Those who ate it died anyhow. They died, not only physically, but they also died in their disobedience. The bread of life conquers the spiritual death through the fellowship with God it brings about, and it conquers physical death in the resurrection on the last day.

This most awesome of all sermons was preached in the synagogue of Capernaum. John succeeds in expressing in those words all the amazement of the fact that God became man and that heavenly realities can be expressed in human words in a world of men. The people who heard those words did not accept them, but we feel like blessing the stones of the synagogue in which the sermon was delivered.

4. The Disciples Reaction to Jesus' Discourse

6:60-71

In these verses we read the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' sermon. Verses 60-66 report that there was a separation between a large group that turned away from Christ at this point and the twelve who remained. In verses 67-71 were read about the twelve only. A great number of those who heard Jesus were irritated by what He said. The Greek word translated "hard" is *skleros*, which means "hard" or "tough," or, figuratively, "harsh," or "severe." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* notes that the word *skleros* is "synonymous with *austeros*, but to be distinguished from it... It was applied to that which lacks moisture, and so is rough and disagreeable to the touch, and hence came to denote 'harsh, stern, hard.' It is used by Matthew to describe the unprofitable servant's remark concerning his master, in the parable corresponding to that in Luke 19 ... *Austeros* is derived from a word having to do with the taste, *skleros*, 'with the touch.' *Austeros* is not necessarily a term of reproach, whereas *skleros* is always so, and indicates a harsh, even inhuman character."

The way those people expressed their feelings would make us think that they were sophisticated, sensitive people who thought that Jesus used coarse and uncivilized language. Jesus used the word "offend" when He questioned His disciples. The Greek word is *skandalizo* from which our word "to scandalize" is derived. It means "to entrap, to trip up, or entice to sin."

There were two misunderstandings between Jesus and His audience. A literal interpretation of Jesus' words about eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood is, of course, absurd. If Jesus had meant this literally, He would have been crazy, and it would not have been a matter of merely using coarse language but of lunacy. It is hard to believe that Jesus' disciples seriously believed that Jesus preached cannibalism. Those who turned back at this point must have had deeper reasons for doing so.

The reason they gave cannot have been the real one. There must have been a deeper resistance against Jesus' words, which the people were not willing to openly admit. It was more a matter of self-deception than of misunderstanding. There is in each human heart a rebellion against God, which can be traced back to the great rebellion of the fall. This rebellion remains till we surrender ourselves unconditionally to God. It makes no difference what we call our mutiny. It can be camouflaged with a veneer of civilization or with an unwillingness to understand. The presence of a "mental block" is often an outward sign of an inward resistance.

Jesus had made clear that there is a difference between that which can be observed by our senses and the invisible reality that is represented by images. The ultimate reality can only be seen with the eye of faith. Symbols that are not backed up by realities are objects that make no sense. The real reason for our being "offended" is our rebellion against God. Our broken relationship with God has caused a breaking of a relationship with everything that represents God in this world. This makes everything we can see around us offensive to us. We are offended because life makes no sense to us. This is a vicious circle in which we find ourselves entrapped.

Jesus announced, at the same time, a sharpening of the contradictions and a breakthrough of the circle. Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit brought life to the shadows and images that surround us. C. S. Lewis once said that we find ourselves in the atelier of a sculptor surrounded by various sculptures. And there is a

persistent rumor that one day those sculptures will come alive.**²¹⁴ Jesus connected everything He said to the coming of the Holy Spirit. He spoke in anticipation of the Spirit's ministry who would take His words and make them alive. To His disciples He would later say: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."²¹⁵

What Jesus said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood does not only have a spiritual meaning, it is also the way in which that which is spiritual comes to us. Without Jesus' ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit none of Jesus' words would make any sense. Not only would there be no real eternal life in the heart of men without the coming of the Holy Spirit but the Spirit could not have come had Jesus' body not been broken and His blood been poured out on the cross. Even the very body of Christ, this perfect marvel of God's creation (as is every human body) would have no meaning in itself. It acquired meaning in Jesus' surrender to the Father, which was the fulfillment of His coming into the world.

"The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." Jesus did not only *speak* about the coming of the Holy Spirit and about the spiritual meaning of matter and about eternal life; His words *are* spirit and life. The little word "are" puts "word," "spirit," and "life" on the same level. We will understand better what Jesus meant when we think of the creative power of the Word of God. When God said, "Let there be light,"²¹⁶ He not only spoke about light, He brought light into existence. It is also important to understand how the Holy Spirit uses the Word in the life of the child of God. Our new birth and sanctification are directly linked to the Word of God. The Word and the Holy Spirit are one. This doesn't mean that the Lord did not distinguish between the Second Person and the Third Person of the Trinity but in their ministry in God's creation in general and man in particular there is no difference. The same can be said about the unity between the Word and Life. The concept of "a dead letter" cannot be applied to God but only to the devil. All God's speaking is synonymous with eternal life, as He Himself possesses. Life is the result of the creative power of the Word of God and in the sustaining of this life the Word is the only factor. "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."²¹⁷

We can see how it was possible for the Lord Jesus Christ, in His use of everyday language, to always penetrate immediately to the core of the matter. In our speaking, we always tend to deviate and lose ourselves in peripheral details; we are inaccurate because of the kind of word we use. The Word is either Life, or the word is dead or it brings about death.

The difference can be traced back to believing or not believing. When Jesus said: "Yet there are some of you who do not believe," He pointed to the reason for their not differentiating between the image and the reality, between life and not living by the Spirit and the Word. We cannot see too sharply how deep that misunderstanding goes. We tend to think that the Old Testament always expresses spiritual truths in earthly terms. When we read the Song of Songs or a Psalm of David that says: "You care for the land and water it; you enrich it abundantly. The streams of God are filled with water to provide the people with grain, for so you have ordained it. You drench its furrows and level its ridges; you soften it with showers and bless its crops. You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance. The grasslands of the desert overflow; the hills are clothed with gladness. The meadows are covered with flocks and the valleys are mantled with grain; they shout for joy and sing"²¹⁸ we must interpret this as having a spiritual meaning. This is clear for us as New Testament Christians, but I wonder if the average Jews understood it that way. They may have believed that "the medium was the message." To them, God's blessings mainly, or exclusively, consisted in material abundance. When Jesus said that they did not believe, He stated that they were not the truly believing Jews they thought they were. Consequently, they did not put their trust in Jesus Christ and in His words.

This brings us to the question of Jesus' foreknowledge. John states: "For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him." "From the beginning" probably does not apply to the period immediately following Jesus' choice of His disciples. We can say that shortly after Jesus came to know Judas better, His human psychological insight told Him that Judas was no good. John's choice of words is consistent with his style of writing the Gospel. He uses expression such as "In the beginning" and "before the world began." John speaks here about Jesus' knowledge as the knowledge of the omniscient Second Person of the Trinity. The question why Jesus chose Judas as one of the twelve remains a mystery. We can be sure that Jesus' call to Judas was

²¹⁴ Check quote

²¹⁵ ch. 16:12,13

²¹⁶ Gen. 1:3

²¹⁷ Deut. 8:3

²¹⁸ Ps. 65:9-13

not different from the call of any of His other disciples. The blame for Judas' betrayal is on Judas, not on Jesus. Our human logic in trying to figure out problems like this is not very helpful.

Here also, we can deduct from Jesus' words nothing more than the attitude of a human being who had made Himself completely dependent upon the Father. When Jesus chose His disciples, He did not consult His own human insight. Luke tells us that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before He chose the disciples.²¹⁹ He chose the ones the Holy Spirit pointed out to Him. He only took those the Father gave to Him.

Vs. 66 shows us that Jesus' popularity took a turn for the worse at this point. It had reached its pinnacle with the feeding of the crowd. Now many who had followed Him closely turned back. The Greek text reads literally: ">From that time many disciples of his went back, and no more with him walked." *Vincent's New Testament Word Studies* observes that the Greek is very expressive at this point and that it says: "They went away to the things behind." That is the opposite of what a Christian is supposed to do. Paul's definition of the Christians life is: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."²²⁰

This chapter ends with a confession by the disciples and a demonstration of the deep, intimate fellowship between the Lord and the disciples, followed by a severe warning by Jesus. To begin with the warning, Jesus sounds as astonished as we are at the discovery that, among those He had chosen so carefully, there was one who was a devil. I don't understand how that can be reconciled with John's earlier observation about Jesus' foreknowledge. It demonstrates, however, that the two elements of divine knowledge and human amazement were both present in the person of Christ. The words "Yet one of you is a devil!" were not addressed directly to Judas but they were a warning to him. Judas' natural tendency on hearing the discourse Jesus had just delivered must have been the same as of all those who knew no personal relationship with God. He must have rebelled. Yet, although what Jesus said went against the grain of everything Judas stood for, he did not turn away from Jesus as the others did; he stayed. Judas had good grounds to distance himself from Jesus a year or two before His death. We get the impression that Judas knew what he did, as Jesus knew what Judas was planning to do. This must have meant tremendous suffering for our Lord during this whole period Judas stayed with Him. Jesus knew that, 24 hours of the day, there was a serpent among His intimate friends. It is foolishness to suppose that Judas didn't know what he was doing or that, initially, he was honest. Jesus' words meant for Judas that he had been unmasked. At that point he could have given up. The very fact that he didn't is proof of his perversity.

Jesus' question to the disciples "Do you also want to go away?"²²¹ was two-edged. This was not an academic question. It separated the different reasons the disciples had to remain. Simon Peter was the spokesman of the majority with his counter-question: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" He did not ask, "where shall we go?" but "to whom?" The person and the life that person possessed were more important than the place. This indicates an important difference between those that turned away from Jesus and those who stayed. Those who turned away went to "the *things* behind"; those that stayed, stayed for the *person*. This simplification is the determining factor for all following or not following of our Lord. They that seek things have themselves taken the place of the person; they that seek Him have given up the first place. The right sequence is always, first the person, then things. Even a materialist sticks to that order.

Peter probably expressed himself more intuitively than reasonably when he answered Jesus' question not with a "where to?" but with "to whom?" In this the whole confession of our Christian life is concluded. The person of the Lord Jesus Christ occupies the center place. He possesses what we lack, and the activating factor is simply our believing this. It is as simple as that. Everything we are not and everything we do not possess is in Him and it is for us.

III. The Opposition at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem 7:1--10:21

1. Jesus' Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem 7:1-36

The Thompson Chain Reference Bible regroups the chronology of the following chapters of John's Gospel and begins with the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple in chapter 10, followed by the healing of the man who was born blind,²²² followed by the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, and finally Jesus' journey to Perea.²²³ The

²¹⁹ See Luke 6:12-16

²²⁰ Phil. 3:13,14

²²¹ (NKJV)

²²² ch. 9:1-41

reason for this regrouping is because, in John's version of the events, the feasts do not follow the calendar. But I doubt that the Thompson version is the correct one. It seems unreasonable to assume that John would, all of a sudden, abandon the strictly chronological order he had followed up to this point. It is more logical to suppose that this chapter describes the Feast of Tabernacles in the year of Jesus' death. Jesus must have interrupted His Galilean ministry, which is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels to make this journey to Jerusalem.

John begins his account in Galilee, probably before Jesus, as Luke calls it, "set his face to go to Jerusalem."²²⁴ Jesus was not yet ready at this point to face the menaces of Jerusalem. It seems likely that this journey occurred before Jesus announced to His disciples that He would suffer in Jerusalem.²²⁵ Jesus was fully aware of the fact that His life would be in danger if He went to Jerusalem. The opening verses of this chapter present us with a contradiction. Initially, Jesus refused to go to Jerusalem when His brothers insisted that He go, but at the end He went anyhow. A close reading of John's words reveals that Jesus' refusal to go was not a desire for self-preservation but a question of timing. "The right time for me has not yet come" is consistent with His earlier remark: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing."²²⁶ Evidently, the Father had not yet given Him the fiat to go. We recall a similar situation at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when Jesus told His mother: "My time has not yet come."²²⁷ Jesus' total obedience to the Father ought to teach us a fundamental lesson. As a man, He was completely surrendered to the Father's will. His own will and judgment were totally yielded to the Father.

The Old Testament paradigm is found in the Book of Numbers: "On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."²²⁸

John tells us that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him. When they say: "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world"; they either mocked their brother, saying that He should seek more publicity, or they considered Him to be some kind of miracle worker without seeing any divine revelation in Him. It was probably the former. Witnessing to the members of one's own family is often the most difficult. Jesus' reproach to His brothers is very sharp. The relationship between Jesus and His brothers was like that between Joseph and his brothers in the Old Testament. The brothers called Joseph *ba'al chalom*, which means, "Master dreamer." Jesus' brothers may have considered Him to be a dreamer also. If Jesus' brothers understood that Jesus' life would be in danger if He went to Jerusalem, their challenge: "You ought to leave here and go to Judea," was less innocent than it sounds.

Jesus served them with a two-fold answer. He compared His brothers' attitude with His own on two points: toward God and toward the world. Jesus' relationship with God was one of total obedience; His brothers' of total independence. They did what they wanted to do, when they wanted to do it. Jesus' relationship with the world was one of tension. To people who lived in sin, Jesus' words and life were a reproach. Jesus exposed those who tried to cover up their wickedness and their rebellion toward God with a blanket of pious words and acts. That was the reason the world hated Jesus and wanted Him dead. In His warning to His brothers, Jesus said that, in their disobedience to God, they associated themselves with this hatred and murder. After His resurrection, the eyes of at

²²³ ch. 10:40-42

²²⁴ Luke 9:51

²²⁵ See Matt. 16:21

²²⁶ ch. 5:19

²²⁷ ch. 2:4

²²⁸ Num. 9:15-23

least two brothers, James and Jude, were opened, so that they became partakers of the Holy Spirit who had filled Jesus earlier.²²⁹

It must have been approximately three days after the departure of His brothers that Jesus received permission from the Father to also go to Jerusalem. The words “not publicly, but in secret” could refer to the way in which Jesus traveled or to the fact that, at the feast, Jesus did not show Himself in public. If they refer to His way of traveling, we have the more reason to suppose that this journey was not the same as the one mentioned by Luke, when “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”²³⁰

In this chapter, John describes the mounting tension that surrounded the person of Christ at that moment. The people who had come to celebrate the feast were divided in their opinion about Jesus, and there was a spirit of fear because of the repressive measures by the Jewish Sanhedrin.

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated from the fifteenth through the twenty-second of the seventh month. Near the eighteenth, Jesus suddenly appeared in public and began a discourse in the temple courts. We are not told what Jesus said but we read how the public reacted.

The section of verses 14-36 can be divided in three parts:

- Verses 14-24 – Jesus answered the question regarding the origin of His teaching
- Verses 25-29 – Jesus answered the question regarding His own origin
- Verses 30-36 – Jesus referred to His death

The people did not question Jesus directly and it is possible that Jesus answered their unspoken questions. This He did often.

On the first question regarding the origin of His teaching, the people whisper, “Where did He get this?” The same question had been asked in Nazareth: “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”²³¹ The people were swept away by Jesus’ words of grace. Even the temple guards who were sent to arrest Jesus were spellbound. The problem the audience faced was that Jesus had not had any formal training, which, at that time, was the only way in which the truth could be preached. Israel had returned to the days of Samuel of whom we read: “In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”²³² As in the days of Samuel, the people had the Law of Moses, but the application of this law through the ministry of the Holy Spirit was seldom experienced. God kept His secrets to Himself because there was no one who loved Him enough to set his heart on knowing God’s secrets. Only when Hannah surrendered in love to the Lord and little Samuel became completely obedient, began God to speak again to His people. We read: “The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.”²³³ All the surrender and obedience of the Old Testament believers foreshadowed the obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ who said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’”²³⁴

It is good to realize that Jesus presented Himself here as a perfect man to whom and through whom God revealed Himself. Jesus made it clear that it was not a matter of His own wisdom. In the Incarnation, He had temporarily laid aside the perfect and eternal wisdom of which He Himself was the source, in order to live the life of a helpless human being who is completely dependent upon the Father. This is implied in the words, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.” The only difference between Him and us on this point is that His obedient surrender was complete. The same kind of obedience is expected of us as a condition for understanding the truth. The Lord made clear what the cause was for the doubts of His audience. Our lack of discernment is related to our desire for self-preservation. Scripture tells us: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.”²³⁵ The key to understanding lies in the surrender of ourselves. If speaking divine wisdom is part of Jesus’ humanity, it means that, through our regeneration, we become partakers, not only of the divine nature, but also of this wisdom.

This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthian church: “But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the

²²⁹ See I Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14; James 1:1, and Jude vs. 1

²³⁰ Luke 9:51

²³¹ Luke 4:22

²³² I Sam. 3:1

²³³ I Sam. 3:21

²³⁴ Heb. 10:5-7

²³⁵ Prov. 1:7

gift of prophecy.”²³⁶ He who interprets the wisdom of God is a prophet. We understand from the context of Jesus’ words that the entrance to this wisdom brings with it obligation. God’s wisdom is not a separate, self-existing entity; it is His very nature. We cannot isolate His wisdom from His power, His holiness, or His love. This is the reason Jesus introduced at this point the honor of God. We cannot enter into God’s wisdom by ourselves but if we practice surrender, obedience, and reverence to God, He opens the doors of His treasure chambers for us. We were created for the purpose of demonstrating God’s glory. Our body is supposed to reflect it, our spirit has to interpret it, and our mouth has to speak it. The person who sees himself as the center of the universe, who is after his own honor, hits his head against God’s closed doors.

Jesus’ words also indicate that there is room for sincere doubts and honest questions. No one is required to accept Jesus’ statement against his better judgment. To believe in Jesus Christ does not mean being gullible. We have the right and the duty to put things to the test. Jesus indicated that there were two things that constituted proof. One was in the relationship of His hearers with God and the other was His own bond with the Father. God will give us certainty regarding the claims Jesus made if we are willing to surrender our will to Him. Most doubts, if not all, are related to disobedience. It is amazing to see how many questions melt as snow before the sun when we come to the point of placing ourselves without reservations in the hand of God.

Jesus invites us to examine His life in order to determine to whom it was geared, to the Father or to Himself. Even the most hardened atheist will have to admit that the life of Jesus as it is presented to us in the Gospels is the most unselfish life that was ever lived on earth. He went around doing good and healing and He gave His life for others. He even credited the ones He healed for their faith by saying: “your faith has healed you.”²³⁷ If proof is required, Jesus has given it.

The reason for Jesus’ discussion with the people must have been a healing that is not recorded. We only know that Jesus performed it on the Sabbath. Whether the discussion was held on the same day, we do not know. John follows here the same sequence as in the chapters 5 and 6. In those chapters, the reason for an animated debate was also a healing that took place. The miracle that is not mentioned here must have been sensational enough for the Jews to decide to get rid of Jesus. Vs. 26 indicates that the inhabitants of Jerusalem were aware of the plot. We read: “At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, ‘Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill?’ ” But the people who had come to Jerusalem from all over the country were unaware of the intentions of the Sanhedrin.

What Jesus said in verses 21-23 about the connection between circumcision and the healing He performed on the Sabbath opens new horizons and places both the Sabbath and circumcision in a completely new light. Circumcision, for Abraham, was the sign of the covenant God had made with him.²³⁸ Paul calls this “a seal of the righteousness that [Abraham] had by faith.”²³⁹ Jesus said in this chapter that it is a partial healing of man; it is the beginning of the restoration of the whole person. The Jews must have been irritated by this irrefutable argument. It became clear that they had neither understood the meaning of circumcision nor the real significance of the Sabbath.

Jesus based His arguments on the law. Even His breaking of the Sabbath was based upon the keeping of the Law of Moses. Moses had given the law of the Sabbath and the law of the circumcision. Neither one, however, originated with Moses. The Sabbath was instituted at the completion of creation as a symbol of divine rest. Circumcision, as we saw above, was given to Abraham as a seal of the covenant. Ever since man fell into sin, the Sabbath has been God’s workday.²⁴⁰ The law of circumcision not only superseded the prohibition of working on the Sabbath but the Sabbath became the day of restoration par excellence. This is emphasized when Jesus healed the woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. He said: “Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”²⁴¹ For sinful man the Sabbath was the day of death; for Jesus it was the day for renewal. It was the day of preparation for the resurrection. It is the day on which man and beast are untied from their bonds to be led out of the power of darkness into the glorious light of God’s forgiveness.

Jesus also showed that circumcision is the beginning of a total renewal. It was a physical token of the covenant with Him who makes all things new. What Jesus said here is a revelation. No one of those present would ever have given this kind of interpretation to circumcision. Yet, they had to admit that Jesus’ words were irrefutable. Jesus demonstrated that He had insight in God’s plan of salvation that no one else possessed.

²³⁶ I Cor. 12:31;14:1

²³⁷ Matt. 9:22

²³⁸ See Gen. 17:11

²³⁹ Rom. 4:11

²⁴⁰ See ch.5:17

²⁴¹ Luke 13:16

For the Jews, the Sabbath and circumcision were obligations that had to be performed on punishment of death. God said to Abraham: "Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."²⁴² And in Numbers we read: "While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.' So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses."²⁴³

The law of circumcision, as it is given in Leviticus, implies that a boy must be circumcised on the Sabbath if that is the eighth day after his birth.²⁴⁴ To Jesus circumcision was the beginning of restoration and the Sabbath was the day of renewal. This change in significance is based on the fact that Jesus paid for both in His death on the cross. He declared: "The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."²⁴⁵ He could say that because He paid for it. Jesus would spend the Sabbath in the grave. Paul uses the expression "the circumcision of Christ." To the Colossians he wrote: "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ."²⁴⁶ We become partakers in the circumcision of Christ when we consider ourselves to be crucified with Him. Circumcision, therefore, is an image of the death of our Lord and that aspect of His death the gives us victory over sin.

When Jesus spoke of "healing the whole man on the Sabbath?" He envisioned more than mere physical healing. In claiming the Sabbath as the day on which to perform His works, He proclaimed the victory over His own death as well as victory over death itself. In connecting circumcision with healing, He showed God's plan of restoration of His image in us. How positively and victoriously Jesus spoke of those things that were related to His death! There is no trace of the finality that death has for many people. Everything was placed in the light of the resurrection.

The Lord did not say that the Jews were not allowed to judge Him, or even condemn Him. They could if there were grounds to do so. It is part of the dignity of man to judge. Jesus honored this dignity in His hearers. He warned them not to judge, or to condemn, on the basis of a wrong interpretation of certain facts. In order to be able to judge corrected, a full measure of dignity is required. The Son of God invited people who lived in a fallen world and who were, themselves, fallen creatures, to evaluate the work He was doing for their salvation and to judge Him. God is always completely fair and honest in all He does.

This brings us to the second question about Jesus' own origin (verses 25-29). The question whether Jesus is the Christ or not is connected to His place of birth. The people knew for certain that the prophet or the Messiah was not coming from Galilee but from Bethlehem. It is commendable that they clung to Micah's prophecy about the coming of the Messiah: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."²⁴⁷

It sounds strange that the people said: "When the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "The generality of the people knew very well that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, in the city, and of the family, of David; see John 7:42. But, from Isa 53:8, 'Who shall declare his generation?' they probably thought that there should be something so peculiarly mysterious in his birth, or in the manner of his appearing, that no person could fully understand. Had they considered his miraculous conception, they would have felt their minds relieved on this point. The Jews thought that the Messiah, after his birth, would hide himself for some considerable time; and that when he began to preach no man should know where he had been hidden, and whence he had come. The rabbis have the following proverb: Three things come unexpectedly:

1. A thing found by chance.
2. The sting of a scorpion: and,
3. The Messiah.

It was probably in reference to the above that the people said, No man knoweth whence he is. However, they might have spoken this of his parents. We know that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, of the family of David; but no man can know his parents: therefore they rejected him: John 6:42, 'is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?' "

²⁴² Gen. 17:14

²⁴³ Num. 15:32-36

²⁴⁴ See Lev. 12:3

²⁴⁵ Mark 2:28 (KJV)

²⁴⁶ Col. 2:12 (NKJV)

²⁴⁷ Mic. 5:2

On the basis of Micah's words 'whose origins are from of old, from ancient times,' the public could probably not imagine that an eternal person would look as human as Jesus did. People in Jesus' days could, of course, not envision what the Incarnation of God's eternal Word would look like. It probably took time, even after Jesus' death and resurrection, before the full implication of this revelation became clear to the apostles. The Prologue of John's Gospel was not written immediately after the day of Pentecost; it was the fruit of a process of ripening that took a long time. Yet, it would not have been too difficult for the Jews to find out where Jesus was born. We read nowhere that any efforts were ever made to bring the truth to light. We find this same incomprehensible apathy among the priests and teachers of the law who were consulted by King Herod. They could tell him exactly where the Messiah was to be born but they themselves did, as far as we know, make no effort to seriously follow up any lead.

There is a touch of irony in Jesus' exclamation: "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from." They thought they knew. But even if they had done their homework, they would never have been able to penetrate the mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus' proclamation to sinful people who were used to lies and deception is particularly solemn: "He who sent me is true." He is *The God who is There*²⁴⁸, the Eternal One, the Truth. Jesus used this title "the true God," not only to exclude all deception but also to unmask deception. In spite of their extensive knowledge of the law and of God's full revelation of Himself in the Old Testament, those people did not know God at all. Jesus' words "You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me" cannot be explained away. Jesus said twice that God had sent Him. All the meaning of life is contained in these words "There is a God who is true" and "I know Him." This knowledge is the only thing that makes life worth living. This makes us live in the full confidence that we will see this God one day. That will be the fulfillment of our being. This weight of glory will make all the difficulties and sorrows in life seem light. We should praise God for this clear and fearless testimony of Jesus on these pages.

Mark the contrast between "You know me" and "You do not know him." In saying this, Jesus, not only contrasts the superficial with the deeper knowledge but also the essential and the non-essential. Their knowledge of the man Jesus was of little importance. What they knew of Him only touched upon the outer part of His being. Jesus defined the essential when He said: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."²⁴⁹ The whole tragedy of the people of Israel can be summed up in the words "You do not know him." The whole of God's revelation in their own history, in what they themselves had experienced, had passed them by without touching them. Their history was a history of divine revelation but they stood outside. It is impossible to understand Israel's history apart from the person of Jesus Christ. He is the key to the understanding of it. His is the essence of history. Paul says of Him: "By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together..."²⁵⁰

What Jesus said to the people was said on the level of His divine nature. The relationship between God the Son and God the Father is best expressed in the law on the burnt offering where the Second Person of the Trinity surrenders Himself in love to the First Person. Yet, Jesus spoke these words, not as God the Son, but as a human being. The little word "because" in the phrase "I know him *because* I am from him and he sent me" establishes a relationship between the knowledge of the Father and obedience to Him. One cannot be separated from the other. In those words, the key of Jesus' humanity is found. It also provides a key for us in our becoming partakers of the divine nature. The apostles Peter and John stated: that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him.²⁵¹

John does not specify who the ones were that tried to seize Jesus. They were probably not the mass of hearers, because we are told that many of them came to believe in Jesus. Vs. 32 states that "the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him." It is quite possible that several groups were sent out and that the first unit was one of those. Whoever they may have been, their efforts to seize Jesus failed miserably because "his time had not yet come." John does not clarify how the ones who tried were kept from doing so. In order to carry out a command there has to be a certain unanimity among the participants. This unanimity was never reached or it was hindered. Jesus was finally arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, not because the people who came were stronger than He was but because Jesus surrendered to them. We read later on in John's Gospel: "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it you want?' 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I am he,' Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, 'I am he,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, 'Who is it you want?' And they said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' 'I told you that I am

²⁴⁸ borrowing the title from Francis Schaeffer's book

²⁴⁹ ch. 17:3

²⁵⁰ See Col. 1:15-20

²⁵¹ See Acts 5:32

he,' Jesus answered. 'If you are looking for me, then let these men go.' This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: 'I have not lost one of those you gave me.'²⁵² The reason that the temple police were unable to carry out their orders was because they tried to arrest Jesus during the wrong feast. The Lamb of God that carries away the sin of the world had to be killed on the Feast of Passover, not on the Feast of Tabernacles. It may very well be that the abortive efforts to arrest Jesus contributed to the fact that a good number of Jesus' hearers came to believe in Him. When the efforts to arrest Jesus in public failed, it must have made quite an impression on the crowd. Jesus turned out to be invincible. Their conclusion was a logical one. The people saw the connection between the miracles Jesus performed and His claim of being the Messiah. He had performed enough miracles to substantiate this claim. It is quite likely that the people who believed at this time later formed the nucleus of the 3000 first members of the young church, which was born on the day of Pentecost.²⁵³

These new development made the Pharisees boil with rage and they sent out another party charged with special instructions to arrest Jesus. As vs. 45 indicates, this effort also failed. Yet, for Jesus this became an occasion to proclaim His coming death, though in terms that were not understood by the crowd or by the disciples, who would only understand it several months later.²⁵⁴ Jesus always saw His death as a means of being reunited with the Father. This is the reason His hearers were not able to go where He went. In the following chapters Jesus returned several times to this theme that those who rejected Him would die in their sin.

2. The Last Day of the Feast 7:37-53

Jesus may have begun the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles hesitatingly; He ended it in a grandiose way. The discourse Jesus gave on this last day belongs to the highlights of the Bible and touches the deepest foundations of the Christian life. The Feast of Tabernacles was mainly a commemoration of Israel's journey through the desert.²⁵⁵ The feast emphasizes the transient character of our pilgrimage as well as the hostile nature of the desert through which we have to pass. In the middle of this valley of death, however, stands the rock from which flows a stream of living water. Jesus' words place the historical event in the light of eternity. They demonstrate that the experience of the fathers was an image of the heavenly reality. Paul expressed this in an unusual manner when he wrote to the Corinthians: "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."²⁵⁶

This means that there are two kinds of thirst: physical thirst and spiritual thirst. The one is a shadow of and a pointer to the other. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God." Since the Feast of Tabernacles is a reminder of the desert crossing it projects a double image. The desert that causes thirst is a reference to human life on earth. The whole purpose of the thirst in the desert seems to be to reveal that Jesus is the real quencher of all genuine thirst. Jesus declared this also in His conversation with the Samaritan woman.²⁵⁷

The Bible often speaks of thirst. Jesus may have thought of Isaiah's exclamation: "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters."²⁵⁸ One of the last verses of the Bible states: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."²⁵⁹

Jesus' invitation contains a promise that there is quenching of thirst. God, who created water as well as the thirst that makes man drink, also created the void in our hearts that He wants to fill in Jesus Christ. Quenching of thirst consists in believing in the person of Jesus Christ. For the Jews of Jesus' day this meant accepting Him as their Messiah, which is the theme of this chapter. This means, first of all, taking God's promises seriously and acknowledging the need for salvation. Jesus' words make clear that drinking is identical with believing. Believing means, of course, more than holding things for true. Drinking is not only identical with believing; this indicates also that it is giving in to the deepest desires of our heart to own and assimilate that which the Lord offers us. Drinking encompasses believing, quenching of thirst, and being satisfied. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water

²⁵² ch. 18:4-9

²⁵³ See Acts 2:41

²⁵⁴ See also ch. 13:31-35; 16:16-20

²⁵⁵ See Lev. 23:33-44

²⁵⁶ I Cor. 10:3,4

²⁵⁷ See ch. 4

²⁵⁸ Isa. 55:1

²⁵⁹ Rev. 22:17

welling up to eternal life.”²⁶⁰ The image Jesus used expresses the deepest fulfillment of the human heart. Not only is there satisfaction, there is also rehabilitation. God created us for the purpose of making us fountains, people who would literally radiate His glory and produce streams of living water.

The words “as the Scripture has said” are intriguing. There is no specific Old Testament text that can be referred to. *Barnes’ Notes* observes on this: “This is a difficult expression, from the fact that no such expression as follows is to be found literally in the Old Testament. Some have proposed to connect it with what precedes—‘He that believeth on me, as the Old Testament has commanded or required’—but to this there are many objections. The natural and obvious meaning here is, doubtless, the true one; and Jesus probably intended to say, not that there was any particular place in the Old Testament that affirmed this in so many words, but that this was the substance of what the Scriptures taught, or this was the spirit of their declarations. Hence, the Syriac translates it in the plural—the Scriptures. Probably there is a reference more particularly to Isa 58:11, than to any other single passage: ‘Thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.’ See also Isa 44:3-4; Joel 3:18.”

Passages like “As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools”²⁶¹ come to mind as well as Ezekiel’s vision of the temple brook.²⁶² The implication of Jesus’ words is that there is satisfaction in our passing on of the blessings we receive. That closes the door to an egoistical enjoyment of our fellowship with the Lord. There has to be personal drinking but the full satisfaction of our desires is a byproduct of the blessing, not the main issue. Jesus said elsewhere: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”²⁶³ As rest is found in the taking up of the yoke, so fulfillment is found in passing on the blessing. This paradox is a fundamental principle of the Kingdom of Heaven. Only that which is given up becomes real possession. This refers, first of all, to losing our lives but also to everything else. “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”²⁶⁴

John comments on Jesus’ words with: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” Without this explanation, we would have difficulty understanding what Jesus meant. Jesus’ words were, first of all, a prophecy about the source of living water that would be opened. In saying this, Jesus reached forward to the fruit of His suffering, death, and resurrection. He was determined to finish His work, and He could therefore offer the gift of Pentecost, which was still to come, before it was there. In doing this, Jesus did not act irresponsibly. He did not sell “the skin of the bear before the bear was killed.” The future was as certain as the promises of God. One wonders what would have happened had anyone at that time taken Jesus’ words seriously. The experience of the complete fulfillment of Jesus’ promised could, of course, not be realized at that point. The presence of the Lord Himself would probably have compensated for this lack to the point where the difference would not have mattered. The hindrance at that time consisted in the fact that actual atonement had not yet taken place so that God would not have been free to act and send the Holy Spirit upon man.

In a sense, we are still in a similar situation in which complete fulfillment is not a reality. The fullness of the Holy Spirit in the present time is never a constant or complete condition for anyone. In our situation the hindrance is not a legal factor but a practical one. Our sin has been paid for legally but sin is still with us, in us, and around us. We experience sin’s intimidating presence daily. But for us also, the Lord compensates for us in the presence of His Word. The presence of the Holy Spirit and the written Word of God are enough to keep us to the day that nothing and no one can hinder us from drinking and becoming a clear source, the water of which will not disappoint. That will be the case on the other side of the gate of life.

We can say that the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of everything Jesus promised here. He quenches our thirst when we drink of Him. He is the faith-factor that links us to the Lord Jesus, and it is He who streams through us like living water that wells up from the depth of our soul.

The very fact that we can see our relationship with the Holy Spirit as an act of drinking is refreshing. We drink from the Holy Spirit like a baby drinks from his mother’s breast. The milk not only feeds a child physically but it also meets all his emotional needs of feeling wanted, protected, and loved. Those who drink from the Holy Spirit can say with David: “I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.”²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ ch. 4:14

²⁶¹ Ps. 84:6

²⁶² See Ezek. 47:1-12

²⁶³ Matt. 11:29

²⁶⁴ Matt. 16:25

²⁶⁵ Ps. 131:2

Drinking from the Holy Spirit is also the act of an adult. The man who is thirsty in his work or during his journey needs to drink. There is renewal of strength in drinking from the Spirit. David describes this with the words: "He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head."²⁶⁶ The Holy Spirit is the great quencher of this great virile thirst that is caused by standing one's ground in the battle, by carrying responsibility, and by facing the results of sin.

Drinking must be an intimate and personal experience, like the sexual intimacy of partners in a marriage relationship. The Book of Proverbs presents this image in words that strongly resemble the language Jesus used here. We read: "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer--may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love."²⁶⁷ The secret of the Holy Spirit is exclusively private. Flowing through, therefore, doesn't mean that we advertise our deepest experiences for everybody to see. It is more the influence we exude, often unconsciously, caused by the presence of the Spirit in us.

John states, "The Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." This means, of course, that the Spirit was not yet functioning in the sense in which the text speaks of Him. We cannot say about the Spirit of the omnipresent God that He is sometimes present and sometimes not. The word "glorified" is used to describe the whole complex of Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. His suffering and death form the legal basis for the cancellation of our debt. On that basis, God the Father can extend to us His grace without compromising His holiness. The resurrection is, on the one hand the guarantee of the value of Jesus' suffering and death and, on the other hand, the rehabilitation, both for the Lord and for us. The ascension placed the Lord in a position where He could, with authority, give the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. In the words of the apostle Peter: "Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."²⁶⁸

The Gospel of John was, like all the other books of the New Testament, written after Pentecost. John's comment about the coming of the Holy Spirit, therefore, rests on his personal experience of being filled with the Spirit. He understood Jesus' words because he experienced in his own life what it meant to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This fact lends authority to his explanation.

The reaction to Jesus' words was both positive and negative. The people in Jesus' day thought that the prophet Moses foretold²⁶⁹ and the Messiah who was to come would be two different persons. No one understood that both prophecies pertained to one and the same person. The negative opinion was as much based on Scripture as the positive one. What it amounted to was that no one knew the facts of Jesus' life, which did not prevent the people from pronouncing a judgment upon Him.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary explains about "the last and greatest day of the Feast": "It was a Sabbath, the last feast day of the year, and distinguished by very remarkable ceremonies. 'The generally joyous character of this feast,' says Olshausen, 'broke out on this day into loud jubilation, particularly at the solemn moment when the priest, as was done on every day of this festival, brought forth, in golden vessels, water from the stream of Siloah, which flowed under the temple-mountain, and solemnly poured it upon the altar. Then the words of Isa 12:3 were sung, 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of Salvation,' and thus the symbolical reference of this act, intimated in John 7:39, was expressed.' 'So ecstatic,' says Lightfoot, 'was the joy with which this ceremony was performed-accompanied with sound of trumpets-that it used to be said, whoever had not witnessed it had never seen rejoicing at all.' On this high occasion, then, He who had already drawn all eyes upon Him by His supernatural power and unrivaled teaching-- [Jesus stood (probably in some elevated position), and cried]-as if making proclamation in the audience of all the people, [Saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.] What an offer!" In his commentary *The Gospel According to John*, G. Campbell Morgan is, however, of the opinion that this ceremony was carried out all through the week of the feast but was omitted on the last day to indicate that the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy had not yet occurred.

The NIV reads that Jesus "said in a loud voice." The Greek word is *krazo*, which means "to call aloud," or "to exclaim." The Lord did not merely call but He literally shouted out the words. There is a suggestion of a deep emotion of the same kind as in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exclaimed with deep feeling: "Oh, the blessedness of the poor in spirit...!"

²⁶⁶ Ps. 110:7

²⁶⁷ Prov. 5:15-19

²⁶⁸ Acts 2:33,34

²⁶⁹ See Deut. 18:18

The authority and dignity with which Jesus spoke were so obvious that the men who had been sent to arrest Him were afraid to touch Him. This Man was a King, the King all men ought to have been but are not because of sin. Jesus' eminence was proof of the fact that in Him there was no sin that could rob Him of His original authority. We see this same majesty demonstrated in the Garden of Gethsemane where the soldiers "drew back and fell to the ground."²⁷⁰ Jesus could only be arrested because He willingly surrendered. This same authority is also demonstrated at His resurrection. Satan wanted to lay hands on the Lord of glory as He entered the kingdom of death. But the dungeon shone with the light of His majesty and He rose from the dead with the keys of death and Hades in His hands.²⁷¹

The Pharisees defended themselves against Jesus' authority with a mixture of sarcasm and extreme haughtiness. One would conclude from their attitude that they considered themselves to be the incarnation of wisdom. They adopted this attitude, both toward the temple guards who returned empty-handed, as well toward Nicodemus who appealed to the law. They, obviously, struggled with a deep psychological need that had to be covered up. Rather than confessing that they also needed redemption, they maintained their rebellion against God at all cost. As we saw earlier, they never took pains to investigate whether Jesus really originated from Galilee. The astounding miracles Jesus had performed ought to have given rise to the question whether they could be wrong. Their argument that the Scriptures did not predict any prophet to come from Galilee was a miserable pretext. Their memory did not go back far enough to remember Herod's massacre of the children of Bethlehem, which took place about 30 years earlier. Sarcasm is the easiest defense; it is also the cheapest.

3. The Woman Caught in Adultery 8:1-11

Seen from the viewpoint of textual criticism, this portion of John's Gospel, together with the end of Mark's Gospel, belongs to the weakest parts of the New Testament. The NIV states "The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary has by far the most extensive comments of any of the commentaries on this problem: "The genuineness of this whole section, including the last verse of John 7-twelve verses-is by far the most perplexing question of textual criticism pertaining to the Gospels. The external evidence against it is immensely strong. It is wanting in the four oldest manuscript-the newly-discovered Codex Sinaiticus ('Aleph'), the Alexandrian Codex (A), the Codex Vaticanus (B), and the Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C)-and in four other valuable Uncial manuscripts, although two of these have a blank space, as if something had been left out; it is wanting also in upwards of 50 Cursive manuscript: of ancient versions, it is wanting in the venerable Peshito Syriac and its Philoxenian revision, in one and probably both the Egyptian versions-the Thebaic and Memphitic-the Gothic, probably the Armenian, and two or three copies of the Old Latin: several of the fathers take no notice of it-as Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Cyril, Chrysostom: it is wanting in the most ancient tables of the sectional contents of the Gospels, though afterward inserted as an additional section: the variations in the manuscript which insert it exceed in number and extent those in any other part of the New Testament: and of those manuscript which insert it, four Uncials and upwards of fifty Cursives have an asterisk or other critical mark attached to it, as subject to doubt or requiring investigation.

The internal evidence urged against it is that it unnaturally interrupts the flow of the narrative, whereas if John 8:12 come immediately after John 7:52, all is natural; that the language of this section is strikingly dissimilar, especially in the particles, to that of John; and that the statement in John 8:1, as to Jesus having gone to the mount of Olives, is one of the strongest grounds of suspicion, since nowhere else in this Gospel is 'the mount of Olives' mentioned at all, nor does our Lord's passing the night there agree with this or any stage of His public life except the last. That we have here very strong evidence against the genuineness of this section, no intelligent and impartial judge will deny. Moved by this evidence, Lachmann and Tischendorf exclude it from their text; Tregelles prints it in small type below the approved text, which Alford also does; and hardly any recent critics acknowledge it as John's, except Stier and Ebrard, to whom may be added Lange and Webster and Wilkinson (though the latter do not, like the former, grapple with the difficulties).

But let us look at the other side of the question. Of the four most ancient manuscript which want this section, the leaves of two at this place have been lost-of A, from John 6:50 to 8:52; and of C, from John 7:3 to 8:33. We have, therefore, no certainty whether those manuscripts contained it or not. As to the two (L and Delta) whose spaces are not long enough to make it possible that they contained this section, the inference is precarious, since no more may have been intended by those spaces than simply to indicate that there a portion of text was wanting. But it

²⁷⁰ See ch. 19:6-8

²⁷¹ See Rev. 1:18

is found in seven Uncial manuscript, though the letters in that most remarkable one, the Codex Bezae (D), are said to be very different from the others, while in one of the others but a small number of the verses is given, and in another one verse is wanting; it is found in above three hundred of the Cursive manuscript without any note of question, and above fifty more with an asterisk or other mark of doubt.

Of versions, it is found in the Old Latin-which may be held to neutralize the fact of its absence in the Peshito Syriac, as the one appears to have been executed for the Western churches about as early as the other for the Eastern; and it is found in the Vulgate; while Jerome, to whom we owe that revision of the venerable Old Latin, states that in his time-the fourth century, and we have no manuscript of older date than that-this section was found 'in many manuscript both Greek and Latin.' Turning now from external to internal evidence in favor of this section, it appears to us to be almost overpowering. Requesting the reader to recall the exposition of it, we confidently ask if historical authenticity is not stamped upon the face of it, and-admitting that some such incident as this might not be beyond invention-whether the very special and singularly delicate details of it could be other than real.

And if the question be, whether, supposing it genuine, there were stronger motives for its exclusion, or, if spurious, for its insertion? no one who knows anything of the peculiarities of the early Church can well hesitate. The notions of the early Church on such subjects were of the most ascetic description, and to them the whole narrative must have been most confounding. Augustine accordingly says, 'Some of slender faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, have removed it from their manuscript, fearing, I believe, that an immunity to sin might be thought to be given by it.' Nor was he alone in ascribing the omission of it to this cause. Such a feeling in regard to this section is sufficient to account for the remarkable fact that it was never publicly read along with the preceding and following context in the early churches, but reserved for some unimportant festivals, and in some of the service-books appears to have been left out altogether.

In short, to account for its omission, if genuine, seems easy enough; but for its insertion, if spurious, next to impossible. Moved by these considerations, a middle course is taken by some. Meyer and Ellicott, while convinced that it is no part of the Gospel of John, are equally convinced of its historical truth and canonical authority; and observing how closely John 8 agrees with Luke 21:37, think that to be its proper place. Indeed, it is a singular fact that four of the Cursive manuscripts actually place it at the end of Luke 21. Something very like this is Alford's view. This, of course, would quite explain the mention (in John 8:1) of 'the mount of Olives,' and our Lord's spending the night there being His last week. But this theory-of a fragment of authentic canonical Gospel History never known to have existed in its proper place (with the exception of four pretty good manuscript), and known only as part of a Gospel to which it did not belong, and with which it was out of keeping-can never, in our judgment, be admitted.

Scrivener, while impressed with its internal excellence, thinks the evidence against it too strong to be resisted, except on the singular theory that the beloved disciple himself added it in a later edition of his Gospel, and that thus copies having it and copies wanting it ran parallel with each other from the very first-a theory, however, for which there is not the slightest external evidence, and attended, it seems to us, with greater difficulty than that which it is designed to remove. On the whole, though we admit the difficulties with which this question is encompassed, as the narrative itself bears that stamp of originality, truth, purity, and grandeur which accord so well with its place in the Gospel History, so the fact that wherever it is found it is as part of the Fourth Gospel, and among the transactions of the Feast of Tabernacles, is to us the best proof that this is, after all, its true place in the Gospel History; nor does it appear to us to interrupt the flow of the narrative, but entirely to harmonize with it-if we except John 8:1, which must be allowed to remain among the difficulties that we, at least, find it not easy to solve...

Remark: While a sanctimonious hypocrisy is not infrequently found among unprincipled professors of religion, a compassionate purity which wins the fallen is one of the most beautiful characteristics of real religion. But until Christ appeared, this feature of religion was but dimly realized, and in the Old Testament but faintly held forth. It was reserved for the Lord Jesus to exhibit it in all its loveliness. In this incident, of the Woman Taken in Adultery, we have it in its perfection, while the spirit of the men that brought her to Jesus, appearing in such vivid contrast to it, acts but as a foil to set it off."

None of the above gives us any reason not to study this moving account.

The reason Jesus became involved in this incident was not because the Pharisees and scribes were objectively interested in Jesus' opinion. They knew the Law of Moses and they understood what sentence ought to be carried out. The law, however, stated: "If a man commits adultery with another man's wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death."²⁷² The man is not mentioned at all in this story. The most typical feature of the story is the one-sidedness of it. Jesus' attitude and reply has probably more to do with this fact than would appear on the surface.

²⁷² Lev. 20:10

The incident took place in the morning as Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. Assuming that the record is placed correctly in John's Gospel, we can say that Jesus took up the thread of the discourse He had given the day before, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. Vs. 12 and following verses then give us the contents of Jesus' teaching at that day. The text tells us that Jesus had spent the night on the Mount of Olives. He had withdrawn from fellowship with men in order to strengthen and comfort Himself in His fellowship with the Father. He urgently needed this strength and comfort. We should remember that, at that time, some people were out to take His life. Although Jesus knew that His time had not yet come, He must have felt the psychological tensions such a situation generates and He must have been in need of victory over it. Jesus must have found strength and comfort in the Old Testament Scriptures, which He had committed to memory. He may have compared His situation with some of David's experiences of narrow escapes. Or rather, He may have realized that David's experiences were a shadow of the reality "in Christ." David's poetry in the Psalms 52, 54, 56, 57, and 59 are prophecies about the experiences our Lord went through at that moment. This was part of the suffering of which the author of Hebrews writes: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering."²⁷³ The words of Hebrews link Jesus' experience to our glory. We may also find comfort in Jesus' being rejected when we are rejected. Jesus identified Himself with us so that we could identify with Him.

The trap the Pharisees and scribes set for Jesus is one of a series we also find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.²⁷⁴ This fact could be an indication that the incident described here did not take place when Jesus visited Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles but during His last visit at Passover. Whatever the occasion may have been, the intent was to catch Jesus on a word, preferably something that conflicted with the Law of Moses. They may have assumed that on the basis of what Jesus had said in the Sermon on the Mount,²⁷⁵ He could be enticed to say things that would actually contradict the law. If this is true, it indicates how little they understood of Jesus' words.

They place Jesus in a situation in which there is a conflict between the demands of God's righteousness and the demands of His love. In a sense, there is a hidden compliment in the fact that they consult Him on the matter. It means that the Pharisees and scribes assumed that Jesus would not pronounce a sentence on the woman who was caught in adultery. Jesus had said: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."²⁷⁶ They had, evidently, understood that much, otherwise there would have been no point in putting the Lord to the test on this point. Whether they realized this or not, they had put themselves on the side of righteousness, and they placed Jesus on the side of God's love and they hoped that Jesus would choose love over righteousness. They understood enough of the problem to know that the tension between these two opposites could not be solved. However improbably this sounds, they were wrong on this point! Jesus knew that it was this insoluble question that necessitated His coming in this world. While He hung on the cross, He experienced in His body the ultimate consequences of the solution of the tension. Jesus also knew, better than any other human being, that, ultimately, there are no contradictions in the character of God. Contradictions are only found in the heart of men because of sin. In God, holiness and love are not opposites. God is One. In placing the Lord on the side of love and themselves on the side of God's righteousness, the Pharisees impose a human pattern of contradiction on the harmony of God's character. The Lord straightened them out in a sublimely logical manner. To the accusers of the woman He said: "Are you sure to be correct in placing yourself on the side of God's righteousness?" That checkmated the opponents. Jesus could then turn to the woman and say: "If nobody takes the side of God's righteousness, I won't either." If we try to see in this story a victory of love over righteousness, we have not understood what it is about.

Throughout the ages, people have tried to understand the meaning of Jesus' writing on the ground. The KJV adds to the text: "as though he heard them not." It is quite possible that Jesus wanted to demonstrate that He wanted to ignore the question and the questioners. We are not told what Jesus wrote. Jesus' actions may have been a reference to a text in Jeremiah that reads: "O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water."²⁷⁷ But since John does not clarify anything, it is useless to speculate.

That which is written in sand can easily be erased. Writing in sand is the opposite of chiseling words on tablets of stone, like the Ten Commandments. We don't know if Jesus wanted to express this. Maybe He wrote what He later said: "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." This too is speculation.

²⁷³ Heb. 2:10

²⁷⁴ See Matt. 22:15-46; Luke 20:20-38

²⁷⁵ See Matt. 5:21-48

²⁷⁶ ch. 3:17

²⁷⁷ Jer. 17:13

One thing is sure; Jesus did not answer willingly. It was only after repeated questioning that Jesus could bring Himself to speak. The reason for this hesitation was, undoubtedly, the impure motives of the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord understood that those people would not only gleefully stone the woman to death but that they hoped to be able to murder Jesus with the same stones. In a similar situation, described by Mark, the writer observed: "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts."²⁷⁸ Such conflicting emotions of anger and sadness may have been present here also. That may have been the main reason why Jesus waited so long to answer. Jesus loved the woman as well as the scribes and Pharisees. In His answer He tried to save both parties.

What followed is a sheer miracle. The Holy Spirit used the Word of the Lord to bring about conviction of sin in the hearts of these would-be murderers. Each of them saw himself as in a flash in his sin and filth. John mentions that the older ones were the first to leave. This is a touching detail in this story. The younger ones may have maintained for a moment the illusion that they could stand uncovered before God. The experiences of life had taught the older ones that this was impossible. It is quite possible that the man who had committed adultery with the woman was among the crowd of accusers. If the woman was caught in the act, they must all have known who the man was. There must have been a conspiracy among the Pharisees and scribes to keep the identity of the man a secret. This point in the story makes it very relevant for us in our age of emancipation. This woman was being manipulated like an object for the purpose of some to reach a political goal.

On the other hand, the event has lost its moral meaning for us because adultery is no longer considered to be an unacceptable transgression of the law. We make a distinction between moral and civil offenses. That distinction never existed in Israel. There is no separation of church and state in a theocracy.

The fact that Jesus did not condemn the woman does not mean that He set the law aside. Jesus knew that both the man and the woman ought to receive capital punishment. Jesus confirmed the law by taking the place of the guilty parties and undergoing their execution. He was the only one who had the right to say: "Neither do I condemn you," because He would undergo in His own body the ultimate consequences of their sin. For that reason there is now forgiveness for adultery and for all other moral failures.

Only if we fully understand what the Lord did with our sin, can we receive the power to break with sin. "Go and sin no more" is the Lord's creative Word of power that enables us to do what we ought to do.

Finally, it is moving to see how our Lord places Himself in this on the side of the sinners. He who was the only one, who had the right to judge, placed Himself next to those who, because of the sin in their own lives, were forced to withdraw their accusation. Jesus identified Himself with all other vulgar sinners and all political manipulators. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."²⁷⁹

On the basis of what we saw above, the Lord not only extends forgiveness but also responsibility and renewal. Jesus did not take the woman under His wing; He sent her home. She had a road to travel and a task to perform. This means responsibility. Her encounter with Jesus and the pardon she received made her, more than ever, responsible for her life. Jesus restored human dignity to her. God's pardon makes us more human because it restores the image of God in us. So this woman was sent; not sent away. She was no longer doomed to fail. "Go and sin no more" opened an eternal perspective of victory over the power of sin and death. The devil hates those who oppose him on the ground of the forgiveness of their sins and overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; who do not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."²⁸⁰

4. The Fourth Discourse or Debate 8:12-59

In this section, John gives us the contents of Jesus' teaching in the same way as in the chapters 5, 6, and 7. In this chapter Jesus was repeated interrupted by the audience. Jesus' reactions to those interruptions and His answers to questions form an important part of this section. It is difficult to read Jesus' words and not to be impressed by the majesty of Jesus' personality. Even if we would suppose, as some people think, that these chapters are the product of the pious mind of some misled evangelist, we have to admit that we are confronted by a genius too great to be comprehended by this world.

We don't know when Jesus spoke these words. John only mentions the place as the temple treasury.²⁸¹ This discourse was probably also given during the Feast of Tabernacles mentioned in the previous chapter.

²⁷⁸ Mark 3:5

²⁷⁹ II Cor. 5:21

²⁸⁰ See Rev.12:11

²⁸¹ vs. 20

The section opens with Jesus' grand announcement: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The prologue of John's Gospel is probably derived from these words. In the prologue, life and light are linked together and they are both contrasted with darkness. We can best understand Jesus' words if we see them in that context.

Our problem is that we cannot understand light; we know what it does but not what it is. Against the background of the prologue we understand that Jesus' being light is related to His being the Word. "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."²⁸² As the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus was the one who created everything. The Father spoke and Jesus was the Word. The essence of creation is life and the condition for life is light. This is the reason God's first Word of creation was: "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This is the paradigm of the physical creation. The spiritual creation follows the same pattern but it unfolds on a different level. The former is an image of the latter. In the first phase of creation, God expressed Himself in forms of matter. In the second phase, He communicated the essence of Himself. Even the image of God that Adam bore was a shadow of God's "new man, Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ, and we in Him, is not only the image of God as every man bears it, but "the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."²⁸³ Only Jesus could say: "I am the light of the world" because He is the Word that creates life in our hearts.

After the fall of man and the deterioration of creation, man lost his ability to orientate on God. Sin brought about moral darkness. Man no longer knew who he was and where he was going. Jesus presents Himself, therefore, as the light in connection with the restoration of man's fellowship with God.

In his First Epistle, John equates light with holiness. He writes: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."²⁸⁴ This also fits the picture. God's holiness in Jesus Christ shows us how a human life ought to be lived. As sin and darkness are identical, so are holiness and light. When Jesus speaks of Himself as the light of the world, He speaks of God's life-creating holiness. The whole of atonement and restoration is included in this. Light reveals, it guides, and it shows the way. This has meaning only for people who understand that there is a way and that it is important to walk in it. It is impossible to follow Jesus without being born again.

It is difficult to trace the sequence of events in Jesus' words. There is a correlation between the new creation in us and our following of the light. The light increases as we follow, and life in us grows accordingly. "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day."²⁸⁵

Jesus clarifies in a very practical manner the effect light has on us if we follow Him. The first result is that we allow Him to cleanse us. This is also expressed in Jesus' washing of the feet of the disciples. He said to Peter on that occasion: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."²⁸⁶ Subsequently, our following Jesus means to do as He did. In the words of Peter: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."²⁸⁷ Finally, our following Jesus means serving Him. "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."²⁸⁸ This implies that we surrender our body to Him as instruments of righteousness. If we follow the Lord in this manner, we will always be surrounded by light. This will demonstrate itself, not only in our beginning to follow the right course that is set before us, but also in the fact that darkness disappears from our heart. Paul expresses this as follows: "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."²⁸⁹ And to the Ephesians, he wrote: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what

²⁸² ch. 1:4

²⁸³ Heb. 1:3

²⁸⁴ I John 1:5

²⁸⁵ Prov. 4:18

²⁸⁶ ch. 13:8

²⁸⁷ I Peter 2:21

²⁸⁸ ch. 12:26

²⁸⁹ Rom. 13:11-14

the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'²⁹⁰

The word "walk" is pregnant with meaning. It stands for more than advancing, although that is the primary meaning. It suggests a form of fellowship as in the words "Enoch walked with God"²⁹¹ and "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God."²⁹² It also speaks of a form of rapport with nature. Walking envisions enjoying the beauty of God's creation. Walking is both an exercise for the body and the soul. Walking in the light means that we enjoy the light and that we allow the light to exercise its rejuvenating and healing influence upon us. We come back to those beautiful words in John's First Epistle where the apostle states that walking in the light results in having fellowship with God and with other believers by which there occurs an ongoing process healing of the darkness within us. Jesus stated that following Him excludes any fellowship with darkness. Once our feet are placed on the Jesus Way, it will be impossible for us to "walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers."²⁹³

The word "never" lends to this promise a divine authority that allows us to cling to it in times of need. We can fall in sin and become polluted by evil, but it will be impossible for us to return to a condition where we will enjoy being in darkness. That condition is closed off for us forever. As we saw above, the words "the light of life" express the fact that light finds its origin in the new life. It also conveys the idea that there is an intimate relationship between light and life; together they form one organic unity.

Finally, the purpose of light is to provide knowledge. Paul expressed this when he wrote to the Corinthians: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."²⁹⁴ Following Jesus will result in the knowledge of God's glory. That is the purpose of our existence. Seeing and understanding God's glory will be the fulfillment of all our desires. It is difficult for us to comprehend the full extent of this. It begins as a ray of light on which we can orientate ourselves and it grows out into an ocean of light, endless, and immeasurable, which is the character of God.

No one of those present at Jesus' discourse could have understood what He was saying. The Pharisees attacked Him on a technicality: He testified on His own behalf, which was invalid according to Jewish law. The conclusion that this would make His testimony untrue is, however, illogical. The fact that this kind of testimony would not hold up in a court of law does not mean that it cannot be true. Jesus immediately refuted the accusation. In a previous debate in chapter 5, Jesus made clear that His testimony concurred with the testimonies of the Father, of John the Baptist, of the Scriptures, and that it was corroborated by the miracles He performed.²⁹⁵ Those claims are not repeated here.

Remarkably, Jesus linked the truth of His testimony to the fact that He knew where He came from and where He was going. People's confusion in life can always be traced to the simple questions: "Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" and "Where do I go?" Those who do not know the answers are perplexed. All our frustrations can be tracked down to these basics. If we find the answer to any of the three questions, all the other answers fall into place. Jesus demonstrated the unity of the three questions: "I know, of course, who I am because I know from where I have come and where I am going." We hardly ever expect the answers to the deepest questions of life to be so simple. Our lack of direction in life, the absence of a goal and a meaning, is all related to our lack of understanding our origin and identity. This seems to be one of the strongest arguments against the theory of evolution. Our supposed descent of the apes does not provide a satisfying answer to the question of our identity. The acknowledgement of God as our creator is closely related to our awareness that we are the bearer of His image. That understanding necessitates living with a purpose and pursuing a goal in life. All things exist because of Him and for Him. It is against that background that we can understand how God brings "many sons to glory."²⁹⁶

As is often the case, so here also, Jesus' words have a double meaning. The question of Jesus' birthplace is superficially the issue. The people supposed that He was born in Nazareth, and for that reason they believed that He could not be the Messiah. Jesus referred to this when He said: "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from."²⁹⁷ The question of Jesus' origin is, at the same time, related to His divinity. The Old Testament prophecy linked the two together. Micah had said: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of

²⁹⁰ Eph. 5:8-14

²⁹¹ Gen. 5:22

²⁹² Gen. 6:9

²⁹³ Ps. 1:1

²⁹⁴ II Cor. 4:6

²⁹⁵ See ch. 5:31-39

²⁹⁶ See Heb. 2:10

²⁹⁷ ch. 7:28

Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”²⁹⁸ The Jews were correct in assuming that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Unless Jesus were born there, His claim of being the Messiah was false. But because Jesus is who He is, He is indeed the light of the world. The rest of this profound discourse is a confirmation of the opening statement.

From Jesus’ declaration we conclude that the city of Bethlehem in itself is of little importance. Jesus reproached His audience that they judged by human standards, or as the KJV says “after the flesh.” Bethlehem was the place of origin of David, the “man after God’s own heart.” Bethlehem was only important inasmuch as it was an image, a pointer to the real man after God’s own heart who would come to deliver Israel from its only and real enemy, the devil. Their judgment was superficial because they were looking at a place without understanding the meaning of it.

When Jesus said: “I pass judgment on no one” He probably meant that He judged not as they judged Him. The only measure of judgment upon a person’s life is not in his descent or place of origin but in his relationship to God. The only important question is how we bear His image. On this point, Jesus is above any criticism. He is not only “the radiance of God’s glory” but also “the exact representation of his being.”²⁹⁹ Yet, there is also in Jesus’ words a hint of judgment but John does not elaborate on this. Jesus did not speak here as a judge to the accused but as a human being to His fellowmen. As a man, He says: “I am not alone.” Those words by themselves would have been enough to change the lives of all that heard them and make them into a new creation. Old Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands wrote an autobiography entitled *Lonely but not Alone*. Our Lord actually offered to His audience the same kind of relationship with the Father that He enjoyed Himself. This was the result of His passing the night on the Mount of Olives. His fellowship with the Father was dynamic not static. Jesus described this with the words “I stand with the Father, who sent me.” Or, as the KJV says: “I and the Father that sent me.”

Closely connected to the unity between the Father and the Son is the Son’s mission and His obedience to it. Fellowship and assignment belong together. Fellowship is based on what we are and what we do. The two are one. Jesus’ fellowship with the Father reinforced the reliability of His testimony, concerning what He states about Himself, as well as about others. Everything our Lord said and did hinged on His relationship with God. C. S. Lewis states correctly that it is impossible to take Jesus’ words with a grain of salt. He is either what He claims to be, “God, revealed in the flesh,” or He was the greatest deceiver the world has ever known. There is no neutral ground on which we can stand and be sympathetic toward Jesus and leave room for His errors. Jesus is all or nothing.

Then the children of the nation God had elected, these partakers of the covenant God made with Abraham and with Moses, put the question to Jesus, “Where is your father?” According to David, that is the question his pagan foes asked him. David said: “My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”³⁰⁰ Like David, “[Jesus’] bones suffer[ed] mortal agony.” He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.³⁰¹ The fact that they did not recognize Jesus for who He was was due to the fact that they did not know God. Those people were children of the covenant, they had been circumcised, and they partook in the worship of God. They were covered by the atonement provided for by the regular killing of sacrificial animals. They must never have understood any of their privileges. They had never asked themselves the question how the temple ceremonies ought to influence their behavior, their thinking, and their emotions. Because they had chosen to partake of the routine of the ceremonies without putting their souls into it, they could go their own way and they had never caught a glimpse of the God who stood behind the ceremonies. As knowledge of salvation comes through the forgiveness of our sin, so is the image of God darkened by the practice of sin. Jesus would later say to Thomas: “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.”³⁰² This is, in essence, what Jesus said to the people here. He made clear to them that they did not know Him and could not understand what He said because they had closed their hearts for God.

There is something touching in John’s mention of the place where Jesus pronounced those words, “These words Jesus spoke in the treasury.”³⁰³ Francis Schaeffer would call this “a prepositional communication in space and time.” It is a miracle that words of eternity take the form of human speech, expressed in vowels and consonants, that were heard at one specific point in world history, at one specific geographical location. Is it by accident that the

²⁹⁸ Mic. 5:2

²⁹⁹ See Heb. 1:3

³⁰⁰ See Ps. 42:10

³⁰¹ ch. 1:11

³⁰² ch. 14:7

³⁰³ NKJV

place is called “the treasury”? Paul calls Christ the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”³⁰⁴

The history of the previous day repeats itself; or it may have happened the same day. Unless we can be sure that the first eleven verses of this chapter are placed where they are supposed to be, we cannot answer that question. In any case, Jesus’ obedience to the Father protects Him from the danger of being arrested. Willingness to be obedient unto death is usually the best warranty against the danger of death.

The section that begins with verse 21 is the exact opposite of the beginning in verse 12. There Jesus spoke of light, here the subject is darkness. With this last warning, He tried to entice His audience to leave the darkness in which they lived and to come into His light. With a reference to His approaching death, He showed them that their only hope of salvation consisted in their believing acceptance of His person as their Messiah.

The tragedy of it all is caught in the words: “You will look for me.” Sin would not be able to still the hunger that gnawed at their souls. In spite of themselves, they would seek after the real food. Jesus’ words were the fulfillment of Amos’ prophecy: “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it. In that day the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst. They who swear by the shame of Samaria, or say, ‘As surely as your god lives, O Dan,’ or, ‘As surely as the god of Beersheba lives’ - they will fall, never to rise again.’”³⁰⁵ It is also a fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy: “‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.’ ‘And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.’ This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”³⁰⁶ This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Romans: “I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”³⁰⁷

There is a parallel between what Jesus said here to the crowd and what He would later say to the disciples: “You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.” But to the disciples He added: “but you will follow later.”³⁰⁸ The Lord spoke not only about the glory that awaited Him, which was beyond the reach of sinful men, but also about the way in which He would go, as the Lamb of God that would be slain for the sins of the world. The tragedy of the whole world is encompassed in those words “seek and not find.” The fragments of the image of God in man are the cause that man cannot find peace while living in sin. The heart only finds its rest in God, as Augustine discovered. This paradox, on which the Lord elaborates later, that man cannot help but sinning and yet cannot live in sin, tears life in two for each person on earth. There is a sense in which we are all alcoholics and drug users.

Jesus intended His words to be an earnest warning for the purpose of bringing the people to the realization of the danger that threatened them. The Jews, however, took them to mean that He, who is the source of all life, the meaning and goal of all that happens in this world, would become so depressed and desperate, that He wanted to kill Himself. He who walks in darkness sees only darkness.

Jesus repeated His warning while adding a declaration regarding His own origin and theirs. The words “You are from below; I am from above” do not pertain to the fact that they descended from Adam and Jesus was the Son of God but to the contrast between those who disobeyed God and Him who had come to accomplish the will of the Father. Jesus spoke as a man to men. He formed the bridge between the rebels and God against whom the rebellion was directed. Ezekiel had prophesied God’s Word: “I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.”³⁰⁹ Jesus was that man who stood in the gap. Without their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and their Savior, there was no hope for them. If there is only one way to the Father, what hope is there for those who have chosen not to walk on that way?

³⁰⁴ Col. 2:3

³⁰⁵ Amos 8:11-14

³⁰⁶ Zech. 8:20-23

³⁰⁷ Rom 11:25

³⁰⁸ See ch. 13:31-38

³⁰⁹ Ezek. 22:30

Vs. 24 reads in the NIV: "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins." The words in parentheses are not in the Greek. The Greek text reads literally: "I said therefore unto you that you shall die in your sins for not you believe that I am." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: "The sin which accounted for their ignorance and hostility would lead them to a hopeless death unless they believed in him as the I am (cf. Ex 3:14)." There is in Jesus' words a reference to God's revelation to Moses: "Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"³¹⁰ The Phillips Translation of the New Testament renders vs. 24 most beautifully: "For unless you believe that I am who I am..." The full emphasis is on "I AM" as it is even more clearly in vs. 58: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" The unrestricted use of the Name with which God revealed Himself to Moses is also not rendered clearly in the NIV: "Just what I have been claiming all along." Phillips' rendering here is also clearer: "I am what I have told you from the beginning." The Lord revealed Himself totally to those people who were out to kill Him. With this His warning that they would die in their sins becomes more dramatic. Even deeper and more complete becomes this revelation by the addition of the reference of His death: "I am going away" and "When you have lifted up the Son of Man..." Those utterances paint the deep shadows of death that accentuate the light of His self-revelation even more clearly.

God's judgments in the Bible are always connected to His grace. Announcement of judgment is never a goal in itself. As with Jonah's preaching in Nineveh, here also it was not the intention of the Lord that His audience would die but that they would live. The allusion to "lifted up" indicates that Jesus was ready to seal with His own life God's intention that man would live and not die. The tragedy, however, is that unless the Jews realized that the One they crucified and lifted up was the Son of God, no other way to life was left for them. Jesus presented His own death as the key to His Self-revelation and as proof of the veracity of the proclamation He had given. It is one of the deepest mysteries of God's eternal wisdom that the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ forms the beginning of our greatest acceptance. Crucifixion was the ultimate form of rejection. The miracle is that the more Jesus is rejected, the closer He comes to us. When He is "lifted up," they would understand, not only who He was, but also why He permitted this to be done to Him. His crucifixion was the ultimate consequence of His obedience to the Father's will. Jesus became obedient unto death.

Jesus' words can never be separated from His acts. As always, what He said was inseparably connected with the complete payment for sin made on the cross. All His life on earth, Jesus would reach forward, in His words and deeds to this climactic event. What Jesus said here in connection with His suffering and death, He said earlier in relation to the resurrection. "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."³¹¹ It was all part of His complete obedience to the will of the Father.

One of the problems in the following section of verses 30-59 is to determine what is meant by the faith of the Jews in Jesus' words and who the ones were that replied to Jesus' declaration. It is possible that Jesus initially addressed a group of people who had honestly opened their hearts for His words and that, afterward, He entered into a debate with another section of the crowd that was not susceptible to His teaching. It seems, however, that the faith of the Jews here was not the same kind of faith John speaks about at the end of his Gospel, the faith that gives us life in His Name.³¹² The Jews who reacted positively to Jesus' words, were open for what He had to say to them but we understand from what follows that they had not come to the place of obedience to the Father's will and they had not experienced a moral turning point in their lives. They had seen the beginning of the way and the Lord wanted to lead them on to the dawning of the full light of day. The guiding principle for walking on the way is the Word of God. That is the theme of this section.

The NIV renders vs. 31: "If you hold to my teaching..." The Greek reads literally: "If you remain in My Word..." In vs. 37 Jesus told them: "You have no room for my word." In verses 43 and 44 Jesus made clear that their inability to hear the Word was due to the influence the devil has upon their lives. The same is stated in vs. 47: "He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." The NKJV states more clearly: "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." In vs. 51, Jesus tried again to whet their appetite by saying: "I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he

³¹⁰ Ex. 3:13,14

³¹¹ ch. 5:19-21

³¹² See ch. 20:31

will never see death.” And finally Jesus put Himself as an example by saying that He kept the Word of the Father.³¹³ These six references to the Word are proof that the Word of God is the decisive factor in our walk on the way of salvation.

Jesus exemplified that truth in the Parable of the Sower.³¹⁴ In Mark’s Gospel we read: “The sower sows the word.”³¹⁵ The lesson of that parable is not, as some think, to illustrate how man receives eternal life but that there are factors that hinder the growth of the Word in the human heart. The goal of faith is the harvest of the Word of God in our lives. Paul writes: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”³¹⁶ One of the ripest fruits of the Word is a song of grateful praise.

Starting with the faith of His hearers, Jesus sketched in broad lines the scope and goal of salvation. The first step is remaining in His Word, which makes us His disciples. The result of this obedience will be understanding of the truth, and that insight will lead to freedom. Remaining in the Word involves more than accepting it. It involves perseverance in keeping the Word and there is a note of warning that we will meet with such resistance and confusion that we will be tempted to abandon the Word. In C. S. Lewis’ book *The Silver Chair*, we find a striking parable that illustrates what Jesus meant here. The lion Aslan warns the girl Jill that her memory will be less lucid in Narnia than with him on the mountain. She must therefore repeat to herself every morning when waking up and every evening when going to sleep the signs that he gave her. He sends her on her way with the words: “Remember the signs!” which is the equivalent of remaining in the Word of God. The Lord knows that everything in life will be against us and that our insight will be darkened and our emotions confused. There will be moment when a blind holding on to the Word will be the only hold on life we will have.

This, of course, is different from surrendering to myths and fables that are insults to our logic. Our blindly holding on to the Word is based on the understanding that, sometimes under the pressure of circumstances, we will not be able to determine what is logic and what is not. Faith in the fact that the God who created the heavens and the earth knows is the most reasonable conclusion we can draw in most circumstances. The Lord promises us that we will not be put to shame in the end if we put our trust in Him. Jesus stated that remaining in the Word and following the Word would, ultimately, lead to understanding of the truth. Thus far, all my personal experiences with the Lord have confirmed the correctness of this promise.

We see this remaining in the Word of the Father richly illustrated in the life of our Lord Himself. The culmination is seen in the way in which He underwent suffering and, ultimately, death. In the hour of His suffering, Jesus’ thoughts and emotions must have been confused and in great turmoil. Yet, in the deepest depths of despair, He clung to the Word. Nearly all of His cries uttered on the cross were quotations from the Old Testament.

It is the remaining in His Word that makes us His disciples. We find the definition of what it means to be a disciple in Mark’s Gospel: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”³¹⁷ Obedience to the Word of God always means obedience unto death. We pay for the understanding of the truth with our life. We pay, ultimately, the same price if we following the lie.

We do not have to be willing to deny ourselves and to give our life in order to become Jesus’ disciples. The only condition for discipleship is remaining in His Word. Jesus said: “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”³¹⁸ The sequence is hearing, doing, and understanding.

It is important to note that Jesus spoke in this context about the truth. What we call “truth” is only genuine truth inasmuch as it is related to the character of God. Truth is one of God’s absolute attributes. Sin is related to the lie, to a distortion of facts. All things are not what they seem to be. Understanding of the truth will influence the way in which we see the world around us. We will see more clearly the relationship between the knowledge of God and understanding what the world around us is, as we remain in God’s Word and act upon it. The Bible is not as simple a book as some people think. Our Lord has left us a key to the understanding of this Book, which opens for us a world of wisdom and understanding that is unparalleled by any human source of knowledge.

Seeing the truth means being freed from the lie and all its consequences, which we will experience as a form of healing. It all began with the temptation of Eve. Eve saw in the fruit of the tree qualities that were not there.

³¹³ vs. 55

³¹⁴ See Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23; Mark 4:3-8, 14-20

³¹⁵ Mark 4:14 (NKJV)

³¹⁶ Col. 3:16

³¹⁷ Mark 8:34,35

³¹⁸ NKJV

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”³¹⁹ She no longer saw the fruit in connection with God’s command. It is the essence of the lie that we lose the ability to see things in their relationship to God. This is the reason that Jesus, during His life on earth, was always drawing lines to the Father from the situations in which He found Himself. This ability to judge instantly the present in the light of eternity is the strongest proof of our Lord’s sinless nature. Sin is incongruent with the glory of God. This becomes also clear in Jesus’ mention of “the house.” The NIV may be clearer: “Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever,” but the NKJV is closer to the Greek with: “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” But before we take a closer look at this, we first have to say more about freedom through truth.

It is the tendency of the lie to hide things. This is the reason sin and darkness go hand in hand. Truth places things in the light; it unmask the lie and demonstrates what is wrong in order to bring about healing. This makes the clashing between the lie and the truth so intense in our lives and it makes confession and conversion into such serious struggles. But what Paul says is true: “But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.”³²⁰ Every place where God places His foot is holy ground. Everything He touches in our lives with His Word becomes alive and healthy. This process the Lord condensed in vs. 36 in being set free by the Son. The image of the slave and the son is very profound. Jesus actually said that when we have been set free, we have become sons. He called Himself “the Son” and us “sons.”

We find this principle of equality of being also in the second chapter of Hebrews. After the author describes the Son, in the first chapter of his epistle, as the Second Person of the Trinity, the origin of all creation, he presents Him in the second chapter as the human bearer of the image of God, quoting from Psalm Eight: “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?”³²¹ “You... put everything under his feet.”³²² The author clearly takes those words to apply to man in general. Immediately following this assumption, he clarifies that that, which ought to be true for all men, has become reality in the Man Jesus Christ. He is the Son who brings many sons to glory; He is “not ashamed to call them brothers,”³²³ and He is the Son who abides in the house forever. If we remain in the house, it is because of what He has done for us.

Jesus also demonstrated with those words how denigrating sin is for us. Slavery robs us of our human dignity. Sin and slavery have the same effect upon human dignity; they both throw our crown in the mud. God has made us to be free. This truth is almost too much for us to comprehend. If we are linked to God, we are in our element, we are free like a fish in the water and a bird in the sky. The devil tries to tell us that being free means to do what we want and that it doesn’t matter what we want. He hides from us that fact that our will is sick. If our will is healed through fellowship with God, we are really free and we can do as we wish. A sick will leads to slavery because in our sin, we can never free ourselves from the fragments of the image of our Creator that is still in us.

The image of slavery tells us that we never sin because we want to and we cannot cease to sin when we want to. Sin means severing the bond with God, and it is that bond that is the only source and guarantee of our freedom. It is nonsense to think that we can put our hands or our head in the mouth of the devouring monster and believe that we will get our members back after they have been bitten off. The devil blackmails his victims by a continuous threat of death. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that fear of death leads to slavery.³²⁴ There is, therefore, in Jesus’ promise of freedom, a hidden reference to His death and resurrection. When Jesus made this promise of freedom for us, He, once again, reached out to the payment He would make for our sin on the cross.

The mention of the house is important. The house is the Father’s house that Jesus would later mention when speaking to His disciples.³²⁵ This house is eternal; it is the opposite of the temporary tent-dwellings we occupy as mortals living on this earth. That house is not only a symbol of immovability and eternity but also of fellowship based on a bond of family. We have fellowship with the Father because we are His children. This house is our home.

The only answer the Jews were able to give to Jesus’ statement was that they were the children of Abraham. They pursued this theme into the ridiculous and they did not hesitate to weave some untruths in their arguments. Their statement: “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone,” indicates that their concept of truth was rather flexible. Ever since the Babylonian Captivity they had never been lords in their own

³¹⁹ Gen. 3:6

³²⁰ Eph. 5:13 (NASU)

³²¹ Heb. 2:6

³²² Heb. 2:7,8

³²³ See Heb. 2:10,11

³²⁴ See Heb. 2:14,15

³²⁵ See ch. 14:2

land. At the moment they said this, Roman soldiers were patrolling the city of Jerusalem. Their expectation was that the Messiah would free them from the Roman yoke. Even if they wanted to justify themselves by giving a spiritual connotation to their argument, believing that they were inwardly free, they were wrong. The fact that they felt threatened by Jesus to the point that they wanted to rid themselves of Him is proof of this.

Jesus answered their argument by demonstrating that descent is not merely a matter of physical pedigree. He did not elaborate on that point but He showed what a real relationship between a father and a child ought to be. A father sets an example that the child has to follow. If the father does not set an example (which is often the case) something goes wrong in the relationship. The same is true when the father does set an example but the child is unwilling to emulate it. Jesus said that in that case there is hardly a question of lineage.

The relationship between a father and his child is a profound subject, too deep to treat in detail in the context of this study. It is good to pause and ponder our own relationships as parents to our children and as children to our parents to see how healthy we are.

Even as a man bears the image of the God or the gods he serves, so also does he imitate the behavior of the father from whom he descends. This is a fairly consistent principle in life. Jesus proved this in His own life, both in His emulating the example of Abraham as well as in His obediently carrying out on earth what He saw and heard the Father do. It is true, however, that Jesus did not call Himself a child of Abraham. As we will see, He placed Himself above Abraham with the words: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" At the same time, Jesus denied the Jews the right to call themselves children of Abraham since they acted contrary to the principles upon which Abraham had built his life. Abraham had longed for the coming of Christ. The Jews in Jesus' day had no desire for redemption. Their desire to rid themselves of Jesus was proof of their actual descent. The devil always stands behind every murder that is committed. The father of lies is the murderer from the beginning.

Jesus told them: "If God were your Father, you would love me." After that He said: "You dishonor me," which is the same thing. Our knowing and honoring God will always go together with our honoring His image in our fellowmen. In our secular society honoring our fellowmen would be considered an outdated concept and loving one another even more. Imagine men in the business world loving and honoring one another! People hardly do this in the church. Yet, God established as a fundamental line of conduct that human beings in society should love one another; how much more when they are linked together in a common bond of being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

If only the Jews had treated Jesus as they ought to have treated any human being, they would have understood with whom they had to do. If their relationship with God had been what it should have been, the Holy Spirit would have drawn them irresistibly to Him who was the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. A classic example of a person who had this right relationship with God was Simeon, of whom we read: "Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts."³²⁶ We find something of this attitude also among the twelve disciples. Recognition of Jesus as the Messiah is closely related to acknowledgment of and obedience to God the Father. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Romans: "A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." And to the Galatians he wrote: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed."³²⁷

Jesus indicated several times the reason for the Jews' attitude towards Him. In vs. 37 He said: "You have no room for my word." We read in vs. 43, we read: "Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say," or more clearly in the NKJV: "Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word." And in vs. 47: "He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." This reveals the same principle as in the Parable of the Sower. "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path."³²⁸ When a person has no ear for the Word of God, he becomes immune to the Word. It leaves him cold.

Superficially, the question: "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" means, of course, that no one could catch Jesus in telling a lie. But theologians have correctly built upon this statement the doctrine of Jesus' sinless nature. As the apostle Paul states: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become

³²⁶ Luke 2:25-27

³²⁷ Gal. 3:29

³²⁸ Matt. 13:19

the righteousness of God.”³²⁹ We can reverse the saying “A man is as good as his word” into “A word is as good as the man who speaks it.”

Jesus must have made a profound impression upon the people who heard Him speak. If from the pages of John’s Gospel, He comes to us as a man who stood miles above any human being who was ever born into this world, how much more to the people, who could see Him, hear Him, and touch Him! Here is a man who was untainted by the sin and rebellion against God that stains us all. He is the perfect and spotless Lam of God, the perfect expression of God’s image. In John’s own words: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”³³⁰ This testimony that Jesus radiated before the Jews ought to have been sufficient for them to accept His word. But their reaction was: “Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?” In other words: “You are crazy!” This was a gross insult. I don’t know what was more insulting in the Jew’s mind, to be called demon-possessed or a Samaritan; probably the latter! In saying this, they insinuated that He who was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham³³¹ was nothing more than a pagan who had nothing in common with Abraham and who knew only part of the truth. In calling Jesus demon-possessed, they did the same as the Pharisees who had said: “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”³³² The Lord ignored this insult. He told His opponents that they had dishonored Him but that He would not try to vindicate Himself. If we obey God, He will watch over our honor; there will be no need for us to do so ourselves. David said: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.”³³³ It is more important that we be honored by God than by men. Jesus had said earlier: “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?” The greatest insult ever done to a man was done when Jesus was undressed and nailed naked to the cross. This is the reason that, in Paul’s words: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”³³⁴ Jesus’ words imply that who dishonors man, at the same time, dishonors the Father.

It is astonishing and moving to see that Jesus, immediately following this insult, repeated His offer of salvation in an even more glorious form than previously. He had told His audience earlier that remaining in His Word would give them the freedom of being a son. Following that, He demonstrated that freedom from sin would also mean freedom from death. This means that the person who believes in Jesus Christ will never know what it means to die. The soul will temporarily leave the body and the body will decompose, but for a child of God the door of glory will open on the other side. In C. S. Lewis’ book *The Last Battle*, people are pushed into a barn, symbolizing death. For those who were with Aslan, there is no barn; there is only a door that leads from the Narnia where war rages to the real Narnia. Keeping Jesus’ words means resurrection from the dead.

We notice to whom Jesus said these things. A few minutes later they will pick up stones to kill Him. Jesus knew what they would do and yet He demonstrated His love to them. From this point on it went badly with the Jews. They did not accept Jesus’ words and they rejected the life He offered them. Behind their denial and ultimately behind their attempted murder, lies their rejection of life itself. Those who choose death over life will choose it for others also. They repeated what they said before: “Now we know that you are demon-possessed!” Did they really believe that it is more logical and meaningful that human beings die and their bodies, that miracle of creation, rots in a grave? Doesn’t everything within us testify that death is the greatest and most inhuman insult that can be committed against us? Everyone who is of a sound mind rebels against what happens to us in death. Every human being ought to stand up and testify, as Job did: “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.”³³⁵ Jesus proclaimed here this reaction of man, proving that He is fully man.

The Jews could not see in Jesus anything else but a sinful human being who could not measure up to Abraham or to any of the Old Testament prophets. Man who does not know a living relationship with God compensates for the vacuum in his life with all kinds of idealistic images of heroes of the past who are far above the frailties of men. The man who knows God sees the Old Testament populated by people who battled with the same weaknesses and temptations he knows himself and who experienced the same grace and pardon which led them to victory. Abraham committed some terrible errors in his life, and with most of the prophets something negative can be found. For the people in Jesus’ day, Abraham and the prophets were symbols instead of human beings of flesh

³²⁹ II Cor. 5:21

³³⁰ ch. 1:14

³³¹ See Gen.12:3; 17:4-8

³³² Matt. 12:24

³³³ Ps. 3:3

³³⁴ Phil. 2:9

³³⁵ Job 19:25,26

and blood. We find it difficult to accept the truth that for God we are worth as much as Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel. Yet, we may consider ourselves to be “a friend of God,” “faithful in all God’s house,” “a man after God’s own heart,” “greatly beloved,” or like John, the apostle, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” For some it is easier to give love than to receive it. Jesus also set the example for us in this. He did not seek honor for Himself but He received and accepted the honor the Father bestowed on Him. The fact that He is the oldest Son should not make any separation between Him and us.

The Jews stated that they acknowledged God, yet they did not really know Him. Isaiah says: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”³³⁶ Modern liberal theology sees God as, basically, an unjust being who erases every distinction between good and evil because He loves us so much. Only those who have accepted the atonement for their sins can begin to discover something of Him, who is the eternal being in whom there is limitless love, righteousness, and wisdom consisting together in perfect harmony. The God of the Jews is dead. The God who sent His Son into the world is the living God in whose hands it is a dreadful thing to fall.³³⁷ This is the God Jesus confessed to know.

Jesus saw fit to use a touch of humor in this tensed situation. “If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you.” This means, in the first place, that Jesus would be a liar if He denied a fact that is true. If Jesus did not know God, He would be like the Jews because they did not know Him. It is, after all, man’s separation from God which makes him a liar, a man under the influence of “the father of lies.” If even Jesus would pretend to be like them, He could not have changed the facts. But it was impossible for Jesus to lie. In this verse, as in several others, Jesus demonstrates His virtuosity with words.

A final proof that the children of Abraham didn’t know the God of Abraham any more is the fact that hope had disappeared from their lives. The spark had died. Abraham had longed for the Day of the Lord. The people who argued with Jesus did not want to be disturbed in their comfort zone. Because they did not long for the Day, they did not recognize it when it came.

Jesus’ assurance that Abraham had seen His Day presents us with some exegetical difficulties. *Barnes’ Notes* gives the following comment on this problem: “[He saw it] See Heb 11:13: ‘These all died in faith, not having received (obtained the fulfillment of) the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them,’ etc. Though Abraham was not permitted to live to see the times of the Messiah, yet he was permitted to have a prophetic view of him, and also of the design of his coming; for,

1. God foretold his advent clearly to him, Gen 12:3; 18:18. Compare Gal 3:16: ‘Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.’

2. Abraham was permitted to have a view of the death of the Messiah as a sacrifice for sin, represented by the command to offer Isaac, Gen 22:1-13. Compare Heb 11:19. The death of the Messiah as a sacrifice for the sins of men was that which characterized his work—which distinguished his times and his advent, and this was represented to Abraham clearly by the command to offer his son. >From this arose the proverb among the Jews (Gen 22:14), ‘In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,’ or it shall be provided for; a proverb evidently referring to the offering of the Messiah on the mount for the sins of men. By this event Abraham was impressively told that a parent would not be required to offer in sacrifice his sons for the sins of his soul—a thing which has often been done by pagan; but that God would provide a victim, and in due time an offering would be made for the world.”

The thought that Abraham witnessed from heaven what took place on earth and that he could follow the events of salvation, from Jesus’ birth to His resurrection, is possible but not quite likely. More plausible is the interpretation that Abraham, during his lifetime, saw the fulfillment of God’s promises, which were a shadow of the heavenly reality. The righteousness that was imputed to Abraham when he accepted by faith that God would give him a son was not truly fulfilled at the birth of Isaac and did not ripen in the symbolic death and resurrection of his son; those events were images of what happened in God’s reality. By taking hold of God’s righteousness by means of the images that filled his life, Abraham did in principle the same thing we do when we accept Jesus as the Savior and Lord of our lives. Abraham may not have understood all of this. He must have known more than he was able to understand but he understood enough of what happened to him that he rejoiced. Abraham’s joy is proof of the fact that he had a hunch that, in God’s dealing with him, more was involved than his immigrating to Canaan, the birth of his son, and the sacrifice of a ram instead of Isaac. The difference between Abraham and the people in Jesus’ day was that they saw the reality of that which, for Abraham, was shadows. Abraham had rejoiced intensely in what he saw, but it left them cold. It is a terrible thing if human beings have no notion of the meaning of life.

³³⁶ Isa. 59:2

³³⁷ See Heb. 10:31

The Jews consistently turned Jesus' words around. Jesus did not say that He had seen Abraham but that Abraham had seen Him. Rather laconically, they inquire after Jesus' age. The thought that Jesus could be more than 2000 years old was, of course, a human impossibility. At present, about 2000 years after Jesus answered their question, His words still have the same clear and overwhelming ring as then: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" Even more convincing in the KJV: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." "Before Abraham was, I am" causes the rules of grammar of every language to shrink back in awe. Those words express in value what cannot be said in human tongue. If I had used such "bad grammar" in school, I would have failed the course. God's grammar is higher and better than ours. In God's mouth words become worth. The glory of Jesus' words lies exactly in the linguistic tensions they evoke. We are often too busy with our Past Perfect Tenses and Future Perfect Tenses that, when God uses an Eternal Perfect Present, we take a red pencil to underline the mistake.

What Jesus used was more than linguistic virtuosity. The Jews recognized immediately the meaning of those words. This was the Self-Proclamation God had given to Moses at the burning bush when: "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"³³⁸ With those two simple words Jesus said that He is the Word that was in the beginning by God; that He is God-become-flesh in order to pitch His tent among us. In comparison with Him, Abraham's life was nothing but a dot on a multi-dimensional plane. In the face of this kind of declaration man has only two options. Acknowledgment of the truth obliges us to recognize Him for what He is, to bow down before Him, to serve Him, and to love Him. The Jews chose the alternative. They wanted to stone Him to death on the basis of His "blasphemy." John does not tell us how Jesus "slipped away." The suggestion by some liberal theologians that Jesus' final words are a later addition to the text is absurd. An editor who can put such fictitious words in the mouth of his hero would be greater than the greatest in world literature.

III. The Opposition at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem 7:1--10:21

5. The Healing of the Man Born Blind 9:1-41

The lack of transition between the chapters 8 and 9 suggests that the incident took place in the same area and during the same period as the previous discourse. It is impossible to deduct from the text whether it was the same day the people had tried to stone Jesus to death or the next. The mention of the Pool of Siloam indicates that the place was Jerusalem.

John, obviously, meant to link this miracle to Jesus' statement in vs. 12 of the previous chapter: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." The healing of the man born blind is proof of the fact that Jesus did not make any spurious claims. This unity between the two chapters, however, does not prove that they both happened the same day; it may just be the result of John's editorial arrangement.

The New Unger's Bible Dictionary writes the following about The Pool of Siloam: "The expression 'pool of Siloam (which is translated, Sent)' (John 9:7) is found three times in Scripture-Neh. 3:15, 'Pool of Shelah'; Isa 8:6, 'waters of Shiloah'; John 9:7, 'pool of Siloam.' If we compare Neh 3:15 with 12:37, we find that the Pool of Shelah, the stairs that go down from the city of David (southern portion of the Temple mount), and the king's garden were in close proximity. Josephus frequently mentions Siloam, placing it at the termination of the Valley of the Cheesemongers or the Tyropoeon Valley (Wars 5.4.1)-but outside the city wall (Wars 5.9.4)-where the old wall bent eastward (Wars 5.6.1), and facing the hill upon which was the rock Peristereon, to the E (Wars 5.12.2). From these descriptions it is quite evident that Josephus speaks of the same place as the present Birket Silwan, on the other side of the Kidron. Further, the evangelist's account (John 9:7) of the blind man sent by Jesus to wash at the pool of Siloam seems to indicate that it was near the Temple. It was from Siloam that water was brought in a golden vessel to the Temple during the feast of Tabernacles; our Lord probably pointed to it when He stood in the Temple and cried, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink' (7:37). The pool of Siloam is fed by a conduit that is cut for a distance of 1,780 feet through solid rock, and which starts at the so-called Virgin's Spring (see EN-ROGEL). The reason for which it was cut is unmistakable. The Virgin's Spring is the only spring of fresh water in the immediate neighborhood of Jerusalem, and in time of siege it was important that, while the enemy should be deprived of access to it, its waters should be made available for those who were within the city. But the spring rose outside the walls, on the sloping cliff that overlooks the valley of Kidron. Accordingly, a long passage was excavated in the rock, by means of which the overflow of the spring was brought into Jerusalem; the spring itself

³³⁸ Ex. 3:14

was covered with masonry, so that it could be 'sealed' in case of war. That it was so sealed we know from 2 Chron 32:3-4."

The story tells us that Jesus saw the man who could not see Him. The Lord took the initiative in this healing. This marks a difference between this healing and the healing of other blind men who came to Jesus, asking to be healed. We read in vs. 8 and 9 that this man was a beggar. Since the day on which he was healed was a Sabbath, he was not allowed to practice his profession. We cannot deduct from the text whether he was sitting in his usual place.

Jesus and His disciples stopped and the disciples asked their question about the sin that had to be the basis of this blindness. We may suppose that the man could overhear the conversation, which would have been very humiliating for him. He was not only condemned to lead the life of a beggar because of a birth defect but people also reproached him in public that his lot, if not his own fault, must have been the guilt of his parents. This was not only the disciples' own conception but also the general public opinion. The Pharisees told the man: "You were steeped in sin at birth." This may have been the popular interpretation of the Ten Commandments in which God proclaimed: "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me."³³⁹ The devil uses some terrible tactics. He is the destroyer of God's creation. He is the origin of sickness, suffering, and death. This blindness was his doing. He added to the affliction of this poor fellow by insinuating that personal sin was involved in this, or that he had inherited a shameful legacy of his parents.

Jesus cut all ground from under the devil in His answer to the disciples' question. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned" does, of course, not mean that the man or his parents were not sinners. They were no exemption to the fact that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."³⁴⁰ But Jesus did not lose time in meditating upon the negative aspect of sin and guilt. People who indulge in that practice often reinforce the devil's position. By speaking from a position of victory, Jesus left Satan no ground to stand on. Jesus did not unrealistically deny the fact of sin, but He saw sin from God's viewpoint as a means to reveal God's glory. As God had created man from the dust, so sin furnishes Him the building blocks of a new creation.

For us who were born and reared in sin, it is difficult to imagine that God can form such beauty from such filth and that this does not happen accidentally. Jesus' words must have sounded authoritative and lofty in the hearing of this man. They comforted and elevated him and gave him the rehabilitation he needed. No one ever said such things to a blind beggar.

G. Campbell Morgan in *The Gospel According to John*, offers an interesting interpretation of this verse by changing the punctuation. Following the KJV, he reads the text: "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents but that the works of God should be made manifest in him, I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day." This does not imply that God had willed sin and this blindness; He manipulates the work of the devil for His own glory.

We should not conclude from the question of the disciples that they believed in a previous existence of the soul but rather that they considered the human embryo to be a complete person. When Jesus said: "We must do the work of him who sent me..." He included the disciples. They were no passive onlookers but active participants in the victory of the light over the darkness. They were probably not aware of this but their experiences with the Lord and the fact that they were eyewitnesses of numberless other healings must have created an atmosphere of faith that succored Jesus in performing this miracle.

What Jesus said about the day and the night far surpasses the reality of that moment. The fact was a blind beggar in front of Him. By placing this man's need against the background of the light of life of the eternal God and the darkness of god forsakenness, Jesus demonstrated what is essential. There are two kinds of light and darkness; or rather there are two different levels on which light and darkness manifest themselves. There is the physical level and the spiritual. This is brought out in the Prologue of John's Gospel: "In him [the Word] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness..."³⁴¹ It is also implied in Jesus' previous statement: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."³⁴² It was Jesus' task to restore creation that had been ruined by sin. It was the work of the Father, executed by the Son, in which we participate as God's children. The Lord repeated what He had said previously in the temple: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."³⁴³

³³⁹ Ex. 20:5

³⁴⁰ Rom. 3:23

³⁴¹ ch. 1:4-5

³⁴² ch. 5:17

³⁴³ ch. 8:12

In earlier cases in this Gospel, John first reports the miracle and then gives Jesus' spiritual application. We see this in chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 7 does not mention any miracle but we deduct from the context that one had occurred.³⁴⁴ In these chapters, the order is reversed; Jesus first delivered a message about the light and then followed it up with a demonstration in the healing of this blind man. As the raising from the dead of Lazarus proves that Jesus is the resurrection and the life,³⁴⁵ so here Jesus demonstrated in the healing of the man born blind that He is the light of the world. In that sense the healing of this man is a byproduct. What Jesus said was literally true; the purpose of this blindness was to give a proof. This man served God in the most literal sense of the word and his healing is an extra bonus for him. It is important to understand that the healing is a means and not a goal. This does not mean that the man is not helped in the deepest need of his life. We always benefit if God uses us for His purpose.

Jesus did not explain what is meant by the day in which one must work and the night in which no one can work. Those words may refer to a certain period in Jesus' life or in world history. If Jesus' own life is meant, the reference is, undoubtedly, to His suffering, death, and burial. If world history is meant, the manifestation of the Antichrist will be the period of night. Objectively, the presence of Jesus on earth as the light of the world is what is meant by "day." "Night" is the time when He would not longer be present. Jesus also hinted to this when He said, in Matthew's Gospel: "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast."³⁴⁶

In missions conferences the words about the coming night are often used as a cliché to indicate that, in some countries, the doors will not always remain open. The obvious implication is that things can only be accomplished when the Lord is present. Deployment of activity in itself has no value. It is only the presence of the Lord that counts. The presence of light determines the day. The Bible also calls us "the light of the world."³⁴⁷ The work of God will no longer be manifested when there are no people in this world through whom God's light can shine. It depends on us and on our surrender to the Lord whether the Holy Spirit can work in this world or not. Jesus' remark is an indication of His awareness that He had only little time left and that much was still left to be done. It may not be correct to say that Jesus worked with a feverish haste but Jesus' haste is an indication of the pressure under which He performed miracles in an efficient way.

"Having said this...." What follows is proof of the fact that Jesus is the light of the world. This healing thus becomes our warrantee that we may live in the light in this world. Whatever we do in the light will meet with success. David says about the righteous: "Whatever he does prospers."³⁴⁸ This promise is as certain as the fact that the blind man received his sight.

When Jesus proceeded to act after having spoken, He performed some strange acts. It would seem that what Jesus did would rather make the man's blindness worse than better. Almost all commentators observe that people in Jesus' day believed that saliva had medical qualities for the healing of eye sicknesses but, of course, not for blindness. I do not believe that Jesus meant to heal this man with His saliva. Jesus' act of spitting on the ground can be seen as an indication of derision. In our day, it is still very rude to spit on the ground in front of someone's feet. In the Old Testament, spitting on someone was an insult. When Miriam was struck with leprosy, we read: "The LORD replied to Moses, 'If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.'"³⁴⁹ Reminding a human being that he is formed out of the dust of the earth is usually taken as an insult. The Genesis account states: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."³⁵⁰ But after man fell into sin, the stress is put on the transient character of man: "dust you are and to dust you will return."³⁵¹ The man who sins is an insult to himself and to the image of God he bears. When Jesus, in applying a layer of mud on the man's eyes, demonstrated what sin (not necessarily the man's personal sin) had done, He displayed how serious man's condition is. Sin is much more serious than we ever realize.

We are amazed at the simplicity of the means used in this sacrament of mud. John is a master of photographic detail. As the Lord inaugurated the sacrament of service with a pitcher of water and a towel and the sacrament of His suffering and death with a piece of bread and a cup of wine, so He built here a monument for the breaking through of the light. Dust, the symbol of man's sin, and saliva, the manifestation of God's derision of sin,

³⁴⁴ See ch. 7:21-23

³⁴⁵ ch. 11:25

³⁴⁶ Matt. 9:15

³⁴⁷ Matt. 5:14

³⁴⁸ Ps. 1:3

³⁴⁹ Num. 12:14

³⁵⁰ Gen. 2:7

³⁵¹ Gen. 3:19

were applied to this man's eyes. That which ought to have been a ludicrous display became a manifestation, in the deepest sense of the word, of the victory of light over darkness. God's absurd humiliation elevates this man more than the world would ever have been able to do for him.

All the principles that were there in the death of our Lord are present here. We who believe are saved and rehabilitated by the foolishness and the weakness of the cross. As in every sacrament, in this one also is expressed what our Lord took upon Himself in His suffering and death. He became the mud that opened our eyes.

This man believed Jesus to the point that he followed His instructions to go to Siloam and wash himself. He may not have fully understood what happened but he accepted the humiliation that Jesus put on him. It was, after all, humiliating. It is easy to speak piously about outward manifestations of an inward condition but a blind beggar also needs self-respect. We don't know how far it was to Siloam and how many people laughed at the man on the way. Maybe nobody did but that did not alleviate the humiliation. Yet, the man did as he was told and in doing this, he came back seeing.

John's explanation of the meaning of the name Siloam merits our attention. The translation "Sent" implies more than that the man was sent to the pool to find healing. We must rather observe that the pool was sent to him. For what does the act of this man in going to the pond mean in comparison with the healing that he finds in the water? The water reflects to him the image of Him who was sent by God to do the work of Him who sent Him. As the mud is an image of the suffering and death of our Lord, so also is the water a picture of His resurrection. The victory of light over darkness took place at the dawn of "the third day."

As fellow humans we can imagine how the man will have reacted to his healing. I would have wept for joy. I suppose that his tears mingled with the mud and the water of Siloam. How overwhelming the experience must have been for him to see, for the first time in his life, the shapes, colors, and light in which our world daily bathes itself. It is the curse of those who can see that all we can see is *déjà vu* for us. We have changed from people who see to people who merely look. When this man washed the mud off his face, the feast began for him. His exuberant joy at that moment became the basis for all that follows.

The miracle of healing has taken place; what follows is both rather humorous and intensely tragic. The reaction of the people in the streets and in the synagogue is highly laughable. John must have chuckled when he wrote these verses. Something happened that could not have happened. In a well-ordered society that is disturbing. The same touch of divine humor can be found in the story of Jesus' walking on the water of the lake and the people in Capernaum trying to find out how He got there.³⁵² It is even more hilarious when the tomb is opened after Jesus' resurrection and only the empty cocoon of Jesus' shroud is found. The Psalmist says: "The One enthroned in heaven laughs."³⁵³ Our Lord poked fun at the neighbors and the Pharisees. Those people are like cackling hens that find a diamond in their grains of corn.

It all began with the neighbors. They, of course, recognized the man but they could not believe their eyes. This prompted the man who was born blind to give his testimony. He could, however, not answer their question where this Jesus could be found. He knew no more than what he had experienced himself. The spiritual lesson of his testimony lies in the development of his insight in the person of the Lord. His soul was ripe for the fullness of salvation only after Jesus revealed Himself personally to him as "the Son of Man." That was when the actual healing took place, of which the first was only a shadow.

The comedy continues. To the neighbors the miracle of healing was only a matter of being amazed; it had no serious consequences for them. To the Pharisees it was a religious problem because the healing occurred on the Sabbath. If Jesus had healed this man casually, as a mere miracle, not as a proof of His claim to be the light of the world, it would have been easier for them to accept. But since the healing was meant to be the proof of a claim, they could not accept the healing and reject the claim. Since Jesus' claim was unacceptable to them, they tried to deny the fact of the healing.

The fact that the healing took place on the Sabbath was, of course, a serious obstacle. It was in this case as if the Lord had done this on purpose. If not in all cases, at least in many, the Lord took the initiative to heal people on the Sabbath.³⁵⁴ The Sabbath was for Jesus the day on which fallen creation must be restored. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus commented at the healing of the woman who had been bent over with a back ache: "Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"³⁵⁵

³⁵² See ch. 6:22-25

³⁵³ Ps. 2: 4

³⁵⁴ See Mark 3:1-6; John 5:1-18

³⁵⁵ Luke 13:16

When the man gave his testimony before the Pharisees, disagreement arose among them about the question whether Jesus had broken the Sabbath or not. It is difficult for us to appreciate how heavily this Sabbath problem weighed upon those people. They had been reared in this principle of keeping the Sabbath. To them it was a question of life or death. Then comes this Rabbi who breaks down all the fences without any apology. On the other hand the miracle stood before them alive and inescapable and it looked them straight in the eyes. It could not be denied that a miracle had occurred, or could it? They tried to consider the event as a practical joke. The man's neighbors had asked: "*Where* is this man?" The Pharisees were more preoccupied with the question *what* Jesus was. They asked the man who had been blind: "What have you to say about him?" Later in the story we hear the man himself ask the question: "*Who* is he, sir?" Of those three questions, the *where* is the least important, the *who* the most. The Pharisees wanted to put a sticker on Jesus and place Him in a certain category. Was He a sinner or not a sinner? A prophet or not a prophet? We have to remember that to them a sinner merely meant someone who sinned against the ceremonial law. Their concept of sin had nothing to do with the corruption of the human heart. To them, the stumbling block was the fact that Jesus broke the Sabbath. He not only did not keep the Sabbath in accordance with tradition of the Talmud but He ignored the command of the Ten Commandments.

Jesus' handling of the Sabbath law was ultimately the reason for His being put to death. By breaking one of the commandments, He became guilty of all. According to the God's demand of righteousness, He had to die. In that manner He could legally take upon Himself our transgressions and bear our iniquities. Of all the commandments, the Sabbath command was the safest to break. The Sabbath was originally intended for the enjoyment of God and man. The coming of sin made it into a law. As the Son of God, our Lord could make the Sabbath into a workday at which creation was lifted up from the fall. As a man, Jesus became guilty of trespassing the Sabbath command and, consequently, He had to die. We can hardly reproach the Pharisees their lack of understanding of this enigma. It would have been impossible from their point of view to appreciate God's dilemma of sin, as the Sabbath dilemma is presented to us. At other occasions, Jesus admitted to breaking the Sabbath. Matthew records the incident of the disciples picking some heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath. The Pharisees draw Jesus' attention to the fact that this is unlawful. He answered: "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread-which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."³⁵⁶ Picking ears of grain on the Sabbath or making mud, or healing someone are not mere trifles that God can overlook. There are no trifles for God and He cannot overlook anything. For this reason the Sabbath command is a choking hand on man's throat. From the story in Matthew, we conclude that Jesus broke the Sabbath because of who He was. The Jews were right when they cried to Pilate: "We have a law, and according to that law he must die."³⁵⁷ The Pharisees' conclusion "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath," however, was wrong. But how could they have understood such a complicated mystery? To us it becomes clear at what cost Jesus performed this miracle. "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."³⁵⁸ This healing cost Jesus His life.

The fact that the Pharisees turned to the man who was healed to ask his opinion about Jesus indicates how much the miracle confused them. It meant a humiliation to them, which they could only amend by throwing the man out of the synagogue.

There was in the man there was a growing awareness about the person of the Lord brought about by this questioning. It seems that, initially, he saw little connection between his healing and the person of Christ. Sometimes outsiders have a clearer understanding of our circumstances than we do ourselves. The confusion that surrounds his healing brings this man to reflect. It makes him ripe for the moment when he falls at Jesus' feet to worship. Yet, he had overheard Jesus' words that told him why he had to be healed. Those were probably the last words he heard in his blind condition but he had not understood them. When he heard them he had little idea that a few minutes later his eyes would be opened and he would see light for the first time in his life. He had not expected the miracle and, consequently, Jesus' words had no significance for him. After he fell on his knees, those words must have flashed back on the screen of his memory. At that moment the pieces fitted together and Jesus' act of kindness to him would appear in perfect harmony. The cross-examination before the Pharisees was a necessary part of this ripening process.

³⁵⁶ See Matt. 12:1-8

³⁵⁷ ch. 19:7

³⁵⁸ Isa. 53:5

The Jews considered the possibility that the healing could be a fraudulent joke. Maybe the man had never been blind! For that reason they consulted the parents of the man, who kept themselves very carefully to the facts known to them. Amazingly, the parents were much better informed about the official position of the Jews than their son was. There is no indication that he was aware of the fact that he could be excommunicated if he said too much. According to the commentators, excommunication was done for a probation period of two weeks only. Complete excommunication could not be done for a first offense. From *Barnes' Notes* we copy: "[Put out of the synagogue] This took place in the temple, or near the temple. It does not refer, therefore, to any immediate and violent putting forth from the place where they were. It refers to excommunication from the synagogue. Among the Jews there were two grades of excommunication; the one for lighter offences, of which they mentioned 24 causes; the other for greater offences. The first excluded a man for 30 days from the privilege of entering a synagogue, and from coming nearer to his wife or friends than 4 cubits. The other was a solemn exclusion forever from the worship of the synagogue, attended with awful maledictions and curses, and an exclusion from all contact with the people. This was called the curse, and so thoroughly excluded the person from all communion whatever with his countrymen, that they were not allowed to sell to him anything, even the necessities of life (Buxtorf). It is probable that this latter punishment was what they intended to inflict if anyone should confess that Jesus was the Messiah: and it was the fear of this terrible punishment that deterred his parents from expressing their opinion."

Although the man tried to be careful in his answers, he did not succeed in avoiding all the cliffs. At the conclusion, he ends up being thrown out. This happened after a second hearing in which the moral courage of this man ripened. The opening words of the second interrogation: "Give glory to God" are the same Joshua used at the execution of Achan who had stolen items that were banned during the destruction of Jericho.³⁵⁹ The use of the words suggests that a confession of sin ought to be made, in the sense of "God is just and I am a sinner." In saying this, the Jews placed themselves on the side of God and they delegated the man who had been healed, together with Jesus, to the category of sinners. The man's answer is movingly simple: "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" He stuck to the facts. The Jews wanted him to say more than he knew. The man demonstrated his intelligence by not saying more than he knew but the Jews could not keep him from saying what he knew. His testimony: "I was blind but now I see!" has become, throughout the ages, the testimony of millions who have seen the light in the light of God. David's testimony was: "In your light we see light."³⁶⁰

Having said this, the man proceeded to attack. The Jews were desperately looking for a way out. They wanted to hear the whole story again from A to Z to see if there was anything in this man's testimony that could be shaken. But the man refused to sing the same song twice. He realized that what they wanted was not verification of the miracle but holes of escape. His answer: "I have told you already and you did not listen" is a correct analysis. They had listened for something else other than the facts of the healing. Their prejudice concerning the Sabbath prevented them from hearing the message of this man's testimony. The man's sarcasm ignited their fury. They appealed to the Scriptures by appealing to Moses. In other words, they said that Jesus could not compare to the written Word. In this comparison, again, they were correct in their method but wrong in their conclusions. It is fitting to compare every spiritual ministry to the standards of the Bible. Had they understood the testimony of the Scriptures, they would have recognized the Messiah in Jesus. The man who had been blind turned out to have a clearer understanding of the principles of righteousness and answered prayer than the doctors in theology who did not know where Jesus came from. According to the man, the fact that the scribes didn't know from where Jesus came was a serious neglect of their responsibility. They were under obligation to investigate carefully if this man Jesus was who He claimed to be. They superficially had drawn the conclusions, on the basis of the fact that Jesus came from Nazareth and that He did not keep the Sabbath, that He did not answer the prophetic image of the Messiah of the Old Testament. If they had had more intensely longed to see the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise, they would have been able to overcome the obstacles. The man who had been blind made it abundantly clear that the opening of his eyes ought to have opened theirs at the same time. Their blindness remained, as Jesus indicated at the end of this chapter, because it was a voluntary and deliberate blindness.

The relationship between holiness and answer to prayer is an Old Testament principle. David said: "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened."³⁶¹ This was one of the favorite verses of George Mueller. For us it means that we have to be cleansed from our unrighteousness before God can begin to answer our prayers. For Jesus it was a demonstration of His original purity.

The last words of the healed man were too much for the Pharisees and scribes. They firmly believed that the blindness of this man was proof of his being born in sin. To be lectured about inner purity by a man who was

³⁵⁹ See Joshua 7:19

³⁶⁰ Ps. 36:9

³⁶¹ Ps. 66:18

“steeped in sin at birth” was more than they could tolerate. In comparison with this man, they considered themselves to be much more advanced on the road of godliness. Unfortunately God did not agree with their standards.

As mentioned above, the expulsion of the man from the synagogue was probably a disciplinary action meant to be for a period of time. In that way, the man was temporarily excluded from the fellowship of the synagogue. It is not clear what exactly were the judicial grounds for this disciplinary action. The man had not said that Jesus was the Messiah. Even afterwards when he met the Lord, he had not yet come to that conviction. He had expressed himself prudently and accurately before the Jewish council. He confessed to the fact of being healed and, on the basis of that fact, he had concluded that Jesus enjoyed a special relationship with God since, otherwise, such a miracle would have been impossible. The Pharisees had been unable to refute his airtight reasoning. So he was not expelled on the basis of the criterion of vs. 22 but merely because the Pharisees felt they had been insulted. The man was disciplined because of something he had not done. This kind of preventive discipline gave to the man the final push needed for him to experience the second miracle.

The Lord found him and invited him to believe, (to trust, to lean upon) “the Son of Man.” The term refers to Daniel’s prophecy: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”³⁶² The man’s answer indicates how prudent and reserved he was: “Who is he, sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.” The notion that Jesus might be the Messiah must have come to him before. But this man was, obviously, never inclined to jump to conclusions. Fear for the consequences may have had something to do with this. Since the expulsion had now taken place there was no longer any reason for caution. At that point the floodgates opened and nothing could keep him back anymore.

The man’s reserved attitude throughout the whole story is typically human. No one gives himself to God immediately without any reservations. The Lord had purposely allowed him to pass through the trauma of the inquisition to bring him to the point where he would fall at His feet and worship Him. The miracle of the healing in itself was not enough to bring him to the surrender of his will and his personality to God. We can appreciate how much inner resistance has to be overcome in every man if we analyze our own struggle to surrender. The man’s problems seem to have been intellectual. His efforts to cling to the facts that could be proven testify to this. But in his personal encounter with the Lord, he accepts Jesus’ words without paying any further attention to his previous objections. He proved to know much more than he realized. It was a moving moment when he worshipped Jesus, saying: “Lord, I believe.” This was the hardest and simplest thing he had ever done in his life.

Jesus’ concluding words in this chapter connect to what He said in the beginning. He had stated in verses 4 and 5 that this healing was meant to prove the truth of His proclamation of being the light of the world. When the light is there, it is day, which means that work can be done. Light is always positive. God wants men to be able to see by it. It depends on man whether he will open his eyes or keep them shut. The blind man had little to do himself to bring about his healing. He could have refused to go to Siloam and wash himself. In that case he would probably have remained blind. But in the opening of the eyes of his soul, he played an active and decisive role. In spite of inner resistance, he reached out from the depth of his being with great longing to grasp eternal life. Whether we see God or not will depend ultimately upon our own choice. A choice against the light, that is not accepting Jesus as the Messiah, ultimately means a choice for darkness. This important theme runs all through John’s Gospel.³⁶³

Jesus speaks about Himself as the light in which we can walk. This means that we obtain spiritual insight in life. We do the walking; it is up to us to discern and to choose. The light allows us to make moral choices for holiness, choices to rid ourselves of sinful practices that cannot stand up in the light. The road to seeing God is holiness. In the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”³⁶⁴

In Jesus’ last words in this chapter, we see something of the mystery of the hardened heart. “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” The last word “see” is wrapped in irony. It refers to people who have no spiritual discernment but who have blown themselves up into thinking that they can see. The effect Jesus’ words has upon those people is that they move from alleged seeing to the deepest darkness. This progressive darkness is related to their inner rebellion against God. The apostle Paul, speaking about the pagans, expresses this in his Epistle to the Romans: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave

³⁶² Daniel 7:13-14

³⁶³ See ch.1:4-13; 3:19-21; 8:12

³⁶⁴ Heb. 12:14

thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”³⁶⁵ Their refusal to glorify God leads to the darkening of their foolish hearts. Man’s undoing is not his blindness but his unwillingness to acknowledge his blindness. Those who refuse to admit to being blind will not come to the light, which means that the road to healing is closed. The specific sin of the Pharisees was that, on the basis of their religious prejudices, they refused to acknowledge Jesus as the light of the world. The touchstone of all seeing is seeing Jesus. The blind man was only fully healed when he saw Jesus and when he knew that he had seen Him. That is the general principle of this story.

III. The Opposition at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem 7:1--10:21

6. The Good Shepherd 10:1-21

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary introduces this chapter with: “Our Lord introduces this discourse in a most solemn manner, Verily, verily!-Amen, amen!-it is true, it is true!-a Hebraism for, This is a most important and interesting truth; a truth of the utmost concern to mankind. At all times our Lord speaks what is infallibly true; but when he delivers any truths with this particular asseveration, it is either, 1. Because they are of greater importance; or, 2. because the mind of man is more averse from them; or, 3. because the small number of those who will practice them may render them incredible.”

It is difficult to date this chapter and the following section. The Feast of Dedication, mentioned in vs. 22, precedes the Feast of Tabernacles. This is the reason the Thompson Chain Reference Bible places this chapter before the seventh. It seems more logical that the sequence of events in John’s Gospel is the chronologically correct one. In that case, the feast mentioned here would have occurred approximately 9 months after the Feast of Tabernacles in chapter 7. It is also difficult to determine whether the first and the second part of this chapter belong together. The fact that Jesus speaks about sheep in both sections does not prove anything. We suppose that Jesus gave the discourse of verses 1-21 shortly after the healing of the man born blind, and that His last journey to Galilee took place between verses 21 and 22. There are sufficient points of comparison between this chapter and the previous one to justify the thought that they belong together. The last words of chapter 9 were spoken to the Pharisees; the first verses of this chapter give directives for leadership. In vs. 21, there is also a reference to the healing that took place in chapter 9.

The chapter begins with a parable, which is followed by a twofold explanation, the first in verses 7-9 and the second in verses 10-18. The last three verses of this section give the reaction of the people to Jesus’ words.

I have always found this parable of Jesus difficult to understand and I can appreciate why vs. 6 tells us that Jesus’ hearers “did not understand what he was telling them.” Jesus addressed those who called themselves shepherds, that is the Pharisees and the scribes. Ezekiel’s 34th chapter, undoubtedly, stood before Jesus’ eyes when He spoke those words. He was the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.”³⁶⁶

Jesus explained that the difference between the thief and the shepherd is in the way they enter the sheep pen. One is legal the other is illegal. It is not explained clearly what this means, but we can conclude that legality lies in the fact of being sent by the owner of the sheep. The thief enters to take that which does not belong to him. In that sense, the Lord has become the shepherd in a legal manner. In Ezekiel’s prophecy, His name is listed. The Father sent Him into the world to lead His sheep. The thief is the man who does not take God’s ownership into account. This presupposes that the thief never surrendered himself to God. His life is not based on service and submission to the will of God. In this parable, God demands that the so-called shepherds who “cared for themselves rather than for my flock,”³⁶⁷ return the sheep to their owner. In the light of the expulsion from the synagogue of the man born blind, this is a clear statement. The Pharisees and scribes cared for themselves rather than for the flock of God. Jesus calls them elsewhere “blind guides.”³⁶⁸ Matthew chapter 23 gives us a running commentary on that subject.

We have to remember that the first five verses of this chapter are a parable. This means that not every detail of the story contains a spiritual lesson. It would be farfetched to try to determine who the watchman is. If the Lord had not emphatically stated this, we would not know either what is meant by “the gate.” We must, however, not miss the important lessons of the parable, which is the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. It is

³⁶⁵ Rom. 1:20,21

³⁶⁶ Ezek. 34:23

³⁶⁷ See Ezek. 34:8

³⁶⁸ See Matt. 23:17

a lesson that is difficult to explain. In the context of the parable it is clear enough, since the shepherd is someone who enters the gate every day. In reality Jesus came as man into the world only once. Yet, the theme of recognition is found throughout the whole Bible. God had prepared all of humanity in general, and Israel in particular, in such a way that all could recognize the truth at first sight. John states with amazement in his Prologue: "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."³⁶⁹ Israel's reaction to the coming of the Messiah was unnatural.

This parable contains, therefore, a double reproach: to those who call themselves shepherds and do not keep the rules and to the sheep who do not recognize the voice of the shepherd. In all this, the tone of Jesus' story is not negative but positive; it is not set in a minor key but in a major one. The story is not about thieves, robbers, and lost sheep but about the real shepherd and the fact that there are sheep that recognize their shepherd and follow Him.

In a literary sense, this short parable is a miniature masterpiece. As mentioned above, Jesus begins His discourse with the typical opening: "Amen, amen..." The truth is introduced with a double oath. With those words Jesus accepts that task that belongs to Him. Matthew recounts earlier: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."³⁷⁰ Here, Jesus comes forward, according to the Ezekiel's prophecy, to look after the sheep Himself.³⁷¹ Following Him is based on the recognition of His voice. Those, who in the dispensation of the Old Covenant, earnestly tried to have fellowship with God, had no trouble recognizing their Messiah when He came. Simeon and Anna were "waiting for the consolation of Israel."³⁷² They received Him when He came.

The emphasis in the parable is on following. This is based, not only on recognition of the voice but also on trust. It is, in a way, blind faith because recognition rests only on one tangible observation: hearing. Hearing, believing, and acting in accordance with trust all belong together. With the sheep, trust is not generated by sight; they could just as well be in the dark. It is, in fact, blind faith. Paul writes to the Romans: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."³⁷³ And Jesus told Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."³⁷⁴

Following the well-known voice is preceded by being called. The Lord calls us by name. We are wakened from our inertia, from our "sheepishness," because the Lord gives us a name and calls us personally. The giving of a name presupposes personality. It means being human. It places us on equal footing with Him because He has come to be on equal footing with us. By entering the gate, the Lord made Himself one with us. He who leaves through the gate is the Lamb of God who literally "lays down his life for the sheep." Entering the gate is an image of the Incarnation. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."³⁷⁵

It is not clear why John uses the word "again" in vs. 7. It can either mean that Jesus will return to the subject at a later time, or that He repeats in other words what He has just said. This is probably the hardest part of the parable to interpret. In the first section, Jesus speaks of the door in relationship with the shepherd; in the second He uses the same figure of speech in relationship to the sheep. But in this second instance also there are shepherds who do not take the door seriously enough to pass through it. It is this double facet of the image that makes the interpretation so difficult. It is like the execution of a double fugue; the themes are related but they are developed independently. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The Lord explained the figure in terms of his own person and mission. The truth is greater than the forms through which it is conveyed. In real life the shepherd could not be identified with the door. But the thought is too valuable to let slip (cf. John 14:6)." It, evidently, represents a fundamental principle; it stands for the rules of the game. Without this door a man cannot be a shepherd, his brother's keeper. The fundamental principle, the foundation is Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."³⁷⁶ Jesus, not only, kept the rules, He *is* the rule.

³⁶⁹ ch. 1:11

³⁷⁰ Matt. 9:36

³⁷¹ Ezek. 34:11

³⁷² See Luke 2:25-38

³⁷³ Rom. 10:17

³⁷⁴ John 20:29

³⁷⁵ Heb. 2:10,11

³⁷⁶ I Cor. 3:11

If “the rule” stands for the Incarnation, we could see in climbing in by some other way, as an effort by Satan to take hold of human beings in an illegal manner, such as is the case in people who are demon possessed. The devil steals a human body with the intent to destroy. The Lord became man in order to redeem and give life to the lost by means of His own death and resurrection. The two ways of approaching the sheep are totally opposite. The climbing in of the Pharisees and their shepherding are a shadow of the works of the Prince of Darkness they imitate. In addressing the Pharisees, Jesus actually addresses the one who stands behind them, the real opponent. This leaves, at the same time, the door open for the Pharisees to become real shepherds through confession of sin, as Peter did in his encounter with Jesus at the shore of the Sea of Galilee, after Jesus’ resurrection.³⁷⁷ Peter himself would later write: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”³⁷⁸

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.” This simple sounding phrase is full of profound and glorious truths. Jesus is the entrance gate to the Father. This same truth is stated elsewhere in John’s Gospel: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”³⁷⁹ Since He is the perfect Son of God, He became the gate when He entered the gate. He became the rule for all men when He came and subjected Himself to the rule. He became a unique human being through His acknowledgment of God’s property rights and through His determination to respect God’s rights to the point that He was willing to give His life. For us, entering this gate means the acknowledgment of the same principles. For us also, this requires an act of the will.

The same thought is expressed in the brief parable Jesus gave in Matthew’s Gospel: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”³⁸⁰ The narrow gate is found at the beginning of the narrow road. This gate represents the first step we take in the direction of God. An act of the will always involves a narrowing of our field of vision. Choice means concentration on one point only. This is the reason the gate is called “the narrow gate.” When we speak of a great vision, we often do not realize that this can mean an evasion of choice. Not choosing is also a choice. We deceive ourselves if we think we can keep the middle of the road. For us who can see in one glance all the events of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension, entering through the gate means acknowledgment of the facts of salvation. In that way, we accept God’s guilty verdict over our life and the pardon as a result of Jesus’ substitution in our behalf. Accepting God’s grace means acknowledgment of the guilty verdict we deserved. When Richard Nixon accepted the pardon extended to him by President Ford, he silently acknowledged that he was guilty of the fact that was forgiven him. It is always hard for a man to admit guilt. In comparison, it is easy to accept forgiveness. Salvation consists of admission of guilt, accepting of forgiveness, and a binding act of the will.

The Lord then slightly changes the image so that it deviates from the narrow gate in Matthew’s parable. In Matthew’s Gospel the traffic is one way only. In this picture, Jesus speaks of coming in and going out. Going out in this parable does not mean going back to a former condition but progression toward fullness and ministry, although the latter is not included in this picture. The goal of a person who is saved is not merely his own salvation but also the salvation of others.

In Campbell Morgan’s commentary *The Gospel According to John*, we find an illustration that throws an interesting light on Jesus’ parable. A certain Sir George Smith recounts his travels in the Middle East. A shepherd showed him once a sheep pen with four walls and an opening but no gate. Sir George asked the shepherd about this and received the assurance that, although there was no gate, the sheep were perfectly safe inside. “But there is no gate!” retorted Sir George. “I am the gate,” answered the shepherd. “When daylight is gone and all the sheep are inside the pen, I lay myself in the opening and no sheep can go out than over my body. No wolf can come in than over my body. I am the gate!” In verses 1 and 2, the gate is the opening in the sheep pen; in verses 7 and 9 the gate is the body of our Lord Himself. This explains the double image with which Jesus describes Himself. In both images Jesus guarantees the safety of my life with His own life. The devil cannot touch me but over the body of Christ Himself.

³⁷⁷ See John 21:15-20

³⁷⁸ I Peter 5:1-4

³⁷⁹ ch. 14:6

³⁸⁰ Matt. 7:13,14

Jesus, not only, guarantees the safety of my life with His own life but also my sustenance. He says: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The KJV uses the word "abundantly." The Greek word *perissos* suggests something beyond abundance: superabundant. In the Twenty-Third Psalm we find the same thought expressed in images of green pastures, a prepared table, the anointing of the head, and the overflowing cup, which makes David exclaim: "I shall not be in want." This superabundance is, in the first place, spiritual in that God has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."³⁸¹ And Peter says: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."³⁸² In many instances, we also have more than we need materially. Most of us could live comfortably on half of what we possess. The Lord will also supply us with what we need emotionally. He is pleased to satisfy the deepest needs of our soul in our giving and receiving of love in our human relationships. The Psalmist notes that God is the one: "who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."³⁸³

In the light of the above, it is clear that the thief cannot be anyone else but the devil himself. Satan's only intent is to destroy, however beautiful and tempting he may camouflage his objective. In the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, he promised man knowledge but his goal is always the same. He is the murderer of men and the father of lies.³⁸⁴ In complete opposition to this stands that all the Lord does for us, with the intent to save us. Jesus condemns categorically all those who came before Him. Those are all who came in their own name, proclaiming to be the savior of the world, but who were nothing but instruments of the Evil One. All of God's servants came as pointers and shadows of Him to whom the promise pertained. This leaves little room for well-intended deviations.

Jesus is the door. This means that, via His body, we are saved, we go out into an abundance of life, which He wants us to experience. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes clear what this means: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."³⁸⁵ His body was torn like the tearing of the curtain in the temple, so that we could enter into the presence of God. Life and abundance are only found in fellowship with the Father. When the Lord offers us life and abundance in this parable, He does this, as always, on the basis of His own suffering and death.

The word abundance is typical for the Christian life. We find it over and over again in connection with God's care for us. David says: "I shall not be in want."³⁸⁶ Paul assures us: "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."³⁸⁷ This promise pertains both to material as to spiritual needs, as is clear from Paul's words: "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work."³⁸⁸ This is the reason we have to be careful not to worry because worry can choke the fruit of the heavenly life in us. Jesus says: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."³⁸⁹ And in the Parable of the Sower, He says: "The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful."³⁹⁰ If God allows us to go hungry in the physical sense of the word, it is always temporarily, to test us and to teach us things that we cannot learn with a full stomach. Moses expressed this: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."³⁹¹ God's love will never allow us to suffer want in the real sense of the word.

³⁸¹ Eph. 1:3

³⁸² II Peter 1:3

³⁸³ Ps. 103:5

³⁸⁴ See ch. 8:44

³⁸⁵ Heb. 10:19-22

³⁸⁶ Ps. 23:1

³⁸⁷ Phil. 4:19

³⁸⁸ II Cor. 9:8

³⁸⁹ Matt. 6:33,34

³⁹⁰ Matt. 13:22

³⁹¹ Deut. 8:3

One of the reasons God loved David was because he was called “a man after [God’s] own heart,”³⁹² and, undoubtedly, because David protected his flock with his own life.³⁹³ David reminded God in this of His own Son.

In the description of His relationship to His fellow Israelites and to the human race in general, the Lord refers back to this episode in David’s life. David played a role in a shadow play the reality of which was the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. The criterion for being a good shepherd is the willingness to give one’s life. It is impossible to be a good leader without the willingness to serve at the cost of one’s life. Leadership is not a matter of having authority over others but of serving to the point of ultimate sacrifice. Because Jesus had, at the beginning of His ministry, settled the matter of His suffering and death by thinking it through and accepting it, He could serve by giving it His all. Self-preservation can be a serious hindrance in being a good servant.

At this point, both themes of the image fuse together. The shepherd enters the sheep pen through the gate and the sheep go out and enter through the gate. Entering the gate is the first criterion for shepherding. The second (or is that the same?) is the willingness to give one’s life for the other. For the sheep, entering means life. We do not read in this context about the willingness of the sheep to sacrifice themselves but the rest of the Bible speaks clearly about this. After all, we only find life by losing it when we enter the gate. If we understand the motivations of the Shepherd we will feel urged to follow His example. John writes: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”³⁹⁴ The gate through which the Shepherd enters is the same through which the sheep go in; it stands for the same willingness to give one’s life. The difference between Him and us is that He did it first for us and we do it in Him.

A secondary but important theme in this section is the intimate relationship between the Shepherd and His sheep. The Shepherd knows every sheep by name and the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. This intimacy keeps the sheep from following the thief and the hired hand; which is their protection. Following the right path depends on our intimate relationship with the Lord. Jesus compares our knowledge of Him with His knowledge of the Father and the Father’s knowledge of Him. The comparison seems strange, since we find ourselves at the beginning of the way. There is no instant knowledge; it is rather a measureless and eternal process of knowing. The fact that we live not in eternity but in time does not change the character of knowledge.

Vs. 16 is the first indication in the New Testament that the church of Christ will not only consist of Jews; the sheep of another pen are the Gentiles who would be co-heirs, co-members, and co-sharers in the promise of Christ.³⁹⁵ In this prophecy, Jesus shows Himself to be an Israelite in the true sense of the word. Salvation is from the Jews but it is meant for the whole world. Jesus did not only give His life for Israel but for every human being.

Verses 17 and 18 allow us one of the rare glimpses into the intimate love relationship among the Persons of the Godhead. Another instance is found in Hebrews, where the author indicates how “The God of peace, ... through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.”³⁹⁶ This is exemplified also in the Burnt Offering³⁹⁷ and in David’s prophetic utterance: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, Here I am, I have come-- it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”³⁹⁸

The eternal love between the Father and the Son is crystallized in the covenant of which the author of the Hebrew Epistle speaks. On the basis of this covenant, the Son declared Himself willing to become man and to give His body as the ultimate sacrifice for sin. The Father pledged Himself to bring back His Son from death. Yet, Jesus speaks as a man when He says: “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-only to take it up again.” As the Son, He is the object of the Father’s love; as a man, the Father loves Him because of His obedience. In that respect, He is on the same level as we are. The difference between Him and us in this lies in His authority. He does not lose His life as we do; He lays it down majestically in order to take it up again. Jesus did not die because the Romans executed Him. At the moment of His death, He cried: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”³⁹⁹ Compared to His surrender, ours is a farce. I am reminded of an incident in the life of Dr. Jaffray. Robert Jaffray was a missionary in China when robbers attacked him. One of the robbers eyed his expensive Canadian hat. Before he had a chance to steal it, Jaffray offered it to him as a gift. Jaffray had little choice in the matter but he kept his

³⁹² See I Sam. 13:14

³⁹³ See I Sam. 17:34-36

³⁹⁴ I John 3:16

³⁹⁵ See Eph. 3:6

³⁹⁶ Heb. 13:20

³⁹⁷ See Lev. ch. 1; 6:8-13

³⁹⁸ Ps. 40:6-8

³⁹⁹ Luke 23:46

honor. This is an illustration of the way die. But Jesus did not die that way. The authority Jesus had over His own body is foreign to us. Yet, Jesus speaks again as a man when He adds: "This command I received from my Father." How small we are in comparison with His greatness! "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"⁴⁰⁰

The crowd reacted in two ways to Jesus' words. Some said: "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" Other felt some of the depth of His words without understanding exactly what He meant.

IV. The Opposition at the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem 10:22-42

There is probably a period of three months between verses 21 and 22 in this chapter; that is, if we assume that the section of ch. 7:11 through 10:21 is one single report about the same Feast of Tabernacles.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary explains about The Feast of the Dedication: "This was a feast instituted by Judas Maccabaeus, in commemoration of his purifying the temple after it had been defiled by Antiochus Epiphanes. This feast began on the twenty-fifth of the month Cisleu (which answers to the eighteenth of our December), and continued for eight days. When Antiochus had heard that the Jews had made great rejoicings, on account of a report that had been spread of his death, he hastened out of Egypt to Jerusalem, took the city by storm, and slew of the inhabitants in three days forty thousand persons; and forty thousand more he sold for slaves to the neighboring nations. Not contented with this, he sacrificed a great sow on the altar of burnt offerings; and, broth being made by his command of some of the flesh, he sprinkled it all over the temple, that he might defile it to the uttermost. ... After this, the whole of the temple service seems to have been suspended for three years, great dilapidations having taken place also in various parts of the buildings: see 1 Macc. 4:36, etc. As Judas Maccabaeus not only restored the temple service, and cleansed it from pollution, etc., but also repaired the ruins of it, the feast was called ... the renovation." This feast is better known as Hanukkah. According to Josephus, Solomon's Colonnade remained standing when Nebuchadnezzar had the temple destroyed.

The following discussion between the Jews and Jesus began with the question: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." The Jews insinuated that Jesus was acting secretly and didn't want to admit openly that He was the Messiah. They use this as an excuse for their unwillingness to believe in Him.

What causes man's unwillingness to believe? In some cases it is because of direct demonic oppression. As far as we know, Jesus never cast out any demons in Judea. All cases of demon possession seem to have occurred in the "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,"⁴⁰¹ which is Galilee. We understand from the Parable of the Sower that Satan uses three tactics to hinder the growth of the Word of God in man: tradition, superficiality, and materialism.⁴⁰² Those methods can be used separately or in combination with each other. In the case of the Jews in this chapter, their unwillingness to believe probably stemmed from their hanging on to tradition and disregarding the contents of it, and from materialism. Luke comments on the Pharisees that they loved money.⁴⁰³ The Jews' question tries to put the blame on Jesus.

Jesus curtly refutes their accusation. He had told them clearly that He was the One promised in the Old Testament. Quoting from Isaiah's prophecy in His sermon in the synagogue in Capernaum, He had said: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."⁴⁰⁴ In John's Gospel, He stated repeatedly that He was the Christ. He proclaimed: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."⁴⁰⁵ And: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."⁴⁰⁶ "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."⁴⁰⁷ "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁴⁰⁸ Those are just a few examples. He had also declared that the miracles He performed were no independent phenomena but proofs of the truth of His words. He had declared: "The very work that the

⁴⁰⁰ Ps. 8:1

⁴⁰¹ Matt. 4:15

⁴⁰² See Matt. 13:19-22

⁴⁰³ See Luke 16:14

⁴⁰⁴ Luke 4:21

⁴⁰⁵ ch. 5:39,40

⁴⁰⁶ ch. 6:35

⁴⁰⁷ ch. 6:51

⁴⁰⁸ ch. 8:12

Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.”⁴⁰⁹ But the truth was, in John’s words: “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”⁴¹⁰ The burden of proof was clearly on the shoulders of the Jews. They did not believe in Jesus because they never had a living relationship with the Father. They were Jews who kept the law, but this had never influenced their will. They had persevered in their rebellion, which is the attitude of every descendant of Adam who is born into this world. To say that Jesus kept them in suspense is pure hypocrisy. It is not true that they had expected their Messiah and had waited for His coming and that they wanted the proof for Jesus’ claims before they committed themselves to Him. They had received abundant and irrefutable proof. Often the Jewish leaders reacted to Jesus’ miracles with blind rage. Luke reports one instance: “They were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.”⁴¹¹ Their question, therefore, was nothing but a vile lie.

In the light of this it is amazing to see how uninhibited and kindly inviting Jesus responds to their question. He again invites those hardened sinners to accept that great salvation. He paints a tempting and enticing picture of the sheep. In doing so, Jesus shows that salvation is meant for them if they will only accept it. That implies that their falsehood is not incurable. The Lord continues to see in them human beings who are potential sheep. Their rebellion is accentuated by gloomy shadows of insecurity, vulnerability, and a lost condition. Jesus is willing to give His life for them also. Full of love and tenderness, He tries to make His voice penetrate their isolation. Yet, the demand for each lost human being remains the same: acknowledgment of guilt. Being a sheep always means to confess being lost. In Isaiah’s words: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”⁴¹² The deeper the confession the greater the pardon and grace. There is immediate deliverance from isolation in intimacy with the Lord. The load is lightened by obedience. “His yoke is easy and His burden is light.”⁴¹³ The Lord creates new life, which is not subject to the law of sin and death. There is complete safety in being hidden in the Father’s hand. Never such a peace offer was made to any enemy.

Our safety is guaranteed by the fact that we are in the care of the Almighty. We are kept safe, not only, from danger by outside enemies, but also by the dangers from within. We need as much protection against ourselves as against Satan. Eternal security is guaranteed to those who know and follow the voice of the Shepherd. There is safety against the foe outside and inside inasmuch as we allow ourselves to be protected. It is not impossible for mature Christians to fall into sin. The Holy Spirit within us will resist, so we cannot act in the same way as an unbeliever who wants to repent of his sin and will meet demonic resistance. But it would be a violation of the principle of personal liberty if a redeemed person couldn’t fall. God does not make us robots. We will eternally remain responsible for our acts. Even in heaven, we will only be saints by choice. As long as there is freedom there is danger!

Jesus states that our safety consists in the fact that we are in His hands and in the hands of the Father and that He and the Father are one. My theology teacher in Bible School explained this as meaning that being in the hollow of two hands that cover each other, the hands of Jesus and of the Father.

If any other person than Jesus would have made such a statement, it would have been preposterous boasting. What mortal human could guarantee the eternal security of someone else? Look at Jesus, standing there, outwardly not different from any other mortal, assuring us that, in unity with the Father, He is our surety! What He says is either one hundred percent true or it is nonsense. In his essay *God in the Dock*, C. S. Lewis states about Christ’s claims: “The idea of a great moral teacher saying what Christ said is out of the question. In my opinion, the only person who can say that sort of thing is either God or a complete lunatic suffering from that form of delusion which undermines the whole mind of man. If you think you are a poached egg, when you are looking for a piece of toast to suit you, you may be sane, but if you think you are God, there is no chance for you. We may note in passing that He was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval.” The only alternative to adoration of Christ is rejecting Him. There is no in-between.

Yet, I believe that, here also, Jesus spoke as a man. On a human level, He only knows by faith what He is saying. The Jews understood clearly what He said. They accused Him of blasphemy and they wanted to stone Him for that. They had a precedent in the case of the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father who during a fight “blasphemed the Name with a curse.” God had ordered Moses that the young man had to be stoned to death. So the law read: “If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD

⁴⁰⁹ ch. 5:36

⁴¹⁰ ch. 12:37

⁴¹¹ Luke 6:11

⁴¹² Isa. 53:6

⁴¹³ See Matt. 11: 30

must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.”⁴¹⁴

The question remains, of course, whether Jesus’ calling Himself the Son of God can be labeled blasphemy. In His ensuing defense, Jesus proves that this is not the case. What is blasphemy? *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines blasphemy as: “1: the act of expressing lack of reverence for God 2: irreverence toward something considered sacred.” To slander a person means to spread false information about someone with the intent of soiling his good name. Jesus never did this in His reference to God. He never said or did anything that diminished the honor or the Name of God. The Jews even admitted that Jesus had not done anything that merited the death penalty. The question is then whether a human being has the right to put himself on the same line with God. Ironically, that is the bait Satan put in front of Eve. We read in Genesis: “You will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁴¹⁵ Now, sinful man who embraced the devil’s lie says that it is wrong for man to think such thoughts! Man has come to believe, on the basis of the word of the devil, that he is a worthless creature and that God is out of reach. Jesus counters this by saying that the person to whom the Word of God has come has become a partaker in the divine nature to the point that the Bible addresses him as “god.” The quotation is from the Psalms: “I said, ‘You are ‘ ‘gods’ ’; you are all sons of the Most High.’ ”⁴¹⁶ In the context of that psalm, the meaning is rather negative. The subject is judges who have lost their integrity and who are dying in their sins. God calling them “gods” is more a revoking than a vocation. The coming of sin into the world disrupted God’s original plan with man that he would rule and have responsibility. Man is fallen. Jesus does much more than merely quoting a Bible verse. He picks up the thread of God’s plan that had been interrupted. He lifts up fallen man and restores the broken image. This He could only do by, again, reaching forward toward the redemption He would bring about in His own body. The Jews could only see the problem from their position of guilt; Jesus sees it from the perspective of atonement for sin. How unsearchable deep and glorious are Jesus’ words here!

The very fact that the Word of God comes to men makes them gods. The creative Word makes man what God wants him to be. Jesus says: “the Scripture cannot be broken.” God’s plans can be interrupted but they cannot be cancelled. It is the incarnated Word that brings about this new creation in man. I wonder if the Jews could have felt some of the three-dimensional depth of Jesus’ words.

Jesus’ line of reasoning that He is the Son of God is based here on His humanity, not on His divinity. If I understand this correctly, it is the fact that He is human and that the Scriptures call a man who answers to God’s purpose “gods” that Jesus calls Himself here “Son of God.” This does not make the mystery any clearer. It is obvious, however, that Jesus does not reason here along the line of John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John speaks about the uncreated God in His creative function. Here we see a creature, the only one who had ever said: “Here I am, I have come--it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”⁴¹⁷ It appears that both statement lead to the same goal. Yet, what Jesus says about the Father setting Him apart as His very own and sending Him into the world, far surpasses the rule that applies to man in general. This setting apart, this sanctifying and sending into the world are unique. The task that Jesus took upon Himself as Savior of the world far surpasses that of Adam as lord of God’s creation. So, Jesus does not speak here about Himself merely as a human being. He says to the Jews that even if He were nothing more than “a mere man,” as the Jews called Him, He would still have the right to call Himself “Son of God.” They themselves had that right inasmuch as they accepted the atonement for their sins. How much more did the man who brought about that atonement have that right! Jesus’ arguments are irrefutable.

It is astounding that so few people in Jesus’ day could bring themselves to look objectively at the proofs He gave. As G. Campbell Morgan, in his commentary *The Gospel According to John* says, they were so full of the fact that Jesus broke the Sabbath that they could not see the healed paralytic and the healed blind man. The seed of the Word “fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.”⁴¹⁸ The awesome demonstration of Jesus’ authority failed to make an impression upon these people. Jesus’ words express amazement about this. He tried to draw their attention to the facts, but their prejudice was so great that the facts could not make them change their opinion. This is proof of the fact that, if our hearts are not willing to listen in obedience to the Word of God, even the most sensational miracle will not make us change directions. As father Abraham said to the rich man in hell in regard to

⁴¹⁴ See Lev. 24:10-16

⁴¹⁵ Gen. 3:5

⁴¹⁶ Ps. 82:6

⁴¹⁷ Ps. 40:7,8

⁴¹⁸ See Matt. 13:4

the man's five brothers: "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."⁴¹⁹ Even the resurrection of Lazarus, which occurred only a few weeks after this discussion, failed to bring people to conversion. They react to Jesus' words with an effort to arrest Him. Here, as in Nazareth,⁴²⁰ Jesus binds "the strong man" and shows Himself immune to their threats.

V. The Opposition at Bethany

11:1--12:11

1. The Resurrection of Lazarus 11:1-44

In this chapter, John reports one of the most moving and most impressive events in the ministry of our Lord. In his book *Crime and Punishment*, Dostojewski brings the murderer, Raskolnikof, to the room of Sonya, the prostitute, where she read to him this chapter of John's Gospel. For one moment, the clear light of Lazarus' resurrection dispels the darkness of murder and immorality.

It is difficult to place this event in the chronology of the Synoptic Gospels. It is probable that Jesus, on His return from Galilee, received word of Lazarus' illness before He had reached Jerusalem. The sensational aspect of this miracle may have contributed to the enthusiastic reception He received upon entering the city.

The more or less clumsy style in which John describes the event contributes in a way to the captivating impression the story makes upon the readers. It seems that, writing the account many years later, John had never surmounted the emotions of the moment. It almost seems as if John wrote his words in a reversed order: "Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha." Such a sentence would not win a prize in a competition of compositions.

Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are introduced to us as if we know them already; yet this is the first time in this Gospel John mentions the circle of Jesus' intimate friends. Even more remarkable is that fact that John refers to Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet, an event that is only mentioned in the next chapter. Obviously, John purposely hooks on to facts that he assumes to be well known. Luke tells the story of Jesus' first contact with these people.⁴²¹ Jesus' profoundly human love for them dates from this first encounter when Mary "[chose] what is better, and [what] will not be taken away from her." The initiative the sisters display in this chapter is a clear demonstration of their deep faith in Jesus' power to heal. Their call for Jesus to come when Lazarus fell ill was a natural reaction. They expected Him to respond immediately. Jesus' delay must have been a severe test of their faith. This is the main theme of this part of the chapter. The Bible does not avoid this controversial point of "Disappointment with God," to borrow the title of Philip Yancey's book. Even if we pray in faith with complete conviction that God's acts are always motivated by His love, it can happen that the things we fear occur anyhow and that the deliverance we hope for does not arrive. Such was the experience of Mary and Martha.

In running ahead of the story to Mary's anointing of Jesus, John depicts the fruit that this painful disappointment would bear for Mary. It seems that, even before John begins his story, he wants to draw our attention to the goal God wanted to reach in Mary's life. It is often difficult for us to understand that there are things that are more real and valuable than the lives of our loved ones or than our own lives. God wants to bring us to the place where we love Him so deeply that we are willing to pour out our most precious possessions at His feet, as David did with the water from the well in Bethlehem.⁴²² This is what Jesus meant when He said: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." He, obviously, did not mean that Lazarus would not die as a result of his sickness but rather that this death was not the final end. Death is merely a link between two stages. Satan, in his propaganda, has inflated the significance of death out of proportion. A Dutch atheist of the nineteenth century, Multatuli, poked fun at some obituaries in newspapers that read: "We rests in God's will." Emphasizing the finality of death, he countered that he had never seen obituaries that read: "We wont put up with this!" In this chapter, however, Jesus contests Satan's claim. He does not put up with it, neither do the two sisters in their loving and trusting attitude. Jesus waited two more days before He moved because He "loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," but above all, He loved the Father.

A fleeting glance would make us think that the subject and highlight of this chapter is the resurrection of Lazarus. But that event presents the least difficulty for Jesus. The greatest space in this chapter is taken up by Jesus' intentional waiting, by the conversations with Martha and Mary as a preparation for the miracle, and by Jesus' own

⁴¹⁹ Luke 16:31

⁴²⁰ See Luke 4:30

⁴²¹ See Luke 10:38-42

⁴²² See I Chr. 11:17-19

deep emotions at the graveside. We should not consider those sections of this chapter to be mere incidental. One of the beautiful details in this story is John's remark: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus." On the basis of Luke's account, we would think that Mary would occupy the most prominent place but her name is not even mentioned. The emphasis here is on Martha who had not "chosen what is better."

There is a tender and naïve note in the message the sisters sent to Jesus: "Lord, the one you love is sick." It demonstrates a quiet and confident looking up to the Lord. A prayer for healing is not even verbalized. The sisters' message also conveys submission.

It is striking to see how love between individuals is emphasized in this chapter. "The one you love," "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," "See how he loved him!" It is against this background that we see Jesus' intentional delay of travel plans. God takes His time. He waits and He expects us to wait for Him. Waiting is for me the hardest part in my relationship with God. I have never reached the end of my impatience with God. I suspect that this is the greatest obstacle to intimacy with God for many people.

As with other healings, Jesus intends to perform a double miracle. The physical resurrection is not the most important one. What happened to Martha and Mary is a greater miracle than what happened to Lazarus. Jesus wants to heal my impatience because He loves me.

We don't know where Jesus was when word about Lazarus' illness reached Him. He was certainly not yet in Judea. If we suppose that Lazarus died shortly before Jesus announced the fact of his death, and if we suppose that the company set out immediately at that time, He must have been at least four days' travel from Bethany. When Jesus arrives at Bethany, Lazarus has already been four days in the grave.

Luke describes Jesus' departure for Jerusalem with the words: "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."⁴²³ And Mark tells us that Jesus made the third announcement of His approaching death at that point. We read: "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 'We are going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.'⁴²⁴ John does not mention any of this. This information makes the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' announcement of going to Bethany more understandable. Jesus takes a good deal of time to comfort and to prepare His disciples for an experience that will leave them perplexed. John does mention the incidents in which people wanted to stone Jesus in previous chapters.⁴²⁵

It could be that Jesus needed those two days of waiting, not just for the benefit of Martha and Mary, but also for Himself so that the Father could build up His faith. The resurrection of Lazarus is one of the greatest attacks Jesus launched upon the powers of the devil. In a way Lazarus' resurrection was more spectacular than His own resurrection would be. In this case, one of Satan's captives is freed before Jesus had taken the key of death and Hades from the one who had power over death. What Jesus does here is akin to His entering a room in which the doors and windows are closed. In this resurrection Jesus reaches forward, not only to His own death, but also to His own resurrection.

Jesus convinces His disciples of the necessity of a journey to Judea. They are emotionally upset by the threats that were made to Jesus' life. They remember their panic the last time when the Jews tried to stone Jesus and they thought that it was the end. Jesus had given the a third warning that things would indeed go wrong, worse than the previous times. The disciples, probably, felt sick to their stomachs. A physical reaction to panic can be a great hindrance to normal life. Jesus demonstrates that this kind of angst can only be overcome on a spiritual level. That is the purpose of the short parable He uses to comfort these men. The theme of the parable is borrowed from His own words in a previous chapter: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁴²⁶ Jesus does not mean to say that He Himself can see where He is going and that the disciples can see because they have the light of Jesus' presence that surrounds them. He had said before: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."⁴²⁷ The question: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight?" pertains, of course, to Israel's geographical location on the globe. As we saw earlier, physical light is an image of moral light. The former provides sight, the latter insight. Jesus speaks here of the light that shines in our hearts when we surrender to God and we

⁴²³ Luke 9:51

⁴²⁴ Mark 10:32-34

⁴²⁵ ch. 8:59; 10:31,32

⁴²⁶ ch. 8:12

⁴²⁷ ch. 9:4,5

begin to obey Him. God does not expect us to be heroes. He does not even expect us not to be afraid, but He wants us to obey Him.

It is important to note that obedience and insight are linked together. As we get into difficult and incomprehensible situations, God will give us enough light and show us enough of the logic of His dealings with us, that we can take the next step. It is true that God does not have to give us an account of what He does but, from the story of Job and also from the sufferings of our Lord Jesus, we receive enough light to understand the purpose of it all, which is “to bring many sons to glory.” Jesus Himself had enough light “for the joy set before him [to endure] the cross, scorning its shame.”⁴²⁸

The encouragement Jesus gives His disciples is not a cheap one. He does not say that nothing serious will happen and that everything will be all right. Everything will ultimately be all right, if we can use that term to describe the resurrection from the dead and the renewal of all things. But, first, there would be a struggle of life and death in which death would, temporarily, have the upper hand. The light of which Jesus speaks is the light of His presence. This is the only real comfort the Lord offers; it is the only warrantee of final victory. This is the deepest lesson for us in this part of the chapter. The determining factor in every situation is not whether conditions are favorable or unfavorable but whether God is present. As long as we know that God is in it, we know where we are going. We must study this chapter in that light. Jesus went up to Jerusalem to die a horrible death. Lazarus’ resurrection, which took place on the way up to Jerusalem, was meant to be an enormous encouragement, both for the disciples as for Jesus Himself. It is the warrantee of total victory over death after the struggle in which Jesus Himself would be defeated.

Everything Jesus has said up to this point refers to His death and resurrection. The disciples understood only that which pertained to death. Resurrection was beyond the horizon, yet invisible to them. When Jesus begins to speak about the death of Lazarus, He does not change the subject. Lazarus’ experience was a part of the greater experience of Jesus’ death and resurrection. God presents here a miniature of the greater event that would happen in the life of His Son. This is what Jesus wanted to tell His disciples. He knew what effect His own death would have on them. He knew it would overwhelm them completely. The faith of none of them would be great enough to withstand the shock. When Jesus died, they would all take to flight and they would spend the time Jesus was in the grave in the deepest darkness. In the months preceding His death, Jesus tried to prepare them carefully for the trauma of the cross. Three times He had announced the suffering and death that He would have to undergo. He had given them countless quotes from the Old Testament about this. This is followed by this “object lesson” of Lazarus’ death and resurrection. It seems that the strangest part of Jesus’ life is the fact that He failed completely on this point. When the disciples were placed before the facts of Jesus’ suffering and death, not a scrap remained of all that Jesus had explained and shown to them.

Jesus’ words, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up” cause misunderstanding. The disciples take this literally, as if Lazarus was sleeping and would wake up in a few hours. Jesus used the same expression at other occasions. In connection with the death of Jairus’ daughter, He said: “The girl is not dead but asleep.”⁴²⁹ In both cases the deceased would be resurrected. The words are evidently an expression of Jesus’ faith in the victory over death. Jesus wants to demonstrate that death is a temporal stage; that it is not the end of all things, as some people think. The misunderstanding, therefore, goes much deeper than a mere misapprehension of words. Jesus does not engage euphemistically in some play on words. He says what He means to say, that death is a sleep from which man will awake. In the case of the resurrection Jairus’ daughter, Luke tells us: “They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead.”⁴³⁰ They thought they knew the finality of death on the basis of their own experiences. But they had not seen it all yet. They laughed at Him, but Jesus laughed last. And He laughs best who laughs last!

The words “so that you may believe” must have made a strange impression upon the disciples. Is Jesus insinuating here that they do not yet believe in Him? Had Peter not spoken for all the other disciples when he exclaimed: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”⁴³¹ and: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God?”⁴³² Only a few days later, Jesus would say again to Peter: “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”⁴³³ Jesus knew, evidently, that the disciples’ faith would falter in the hour of crisis. When

⁴²⁸ Heb. 12:2

⁴²⁹ Matt. 9:24

⁴³⁰ Luke 8:53

⁴³¹ Matt. 16:16

⁴³² ch. 6:68,69

⁴³³ Luke 22:32

we see that Jesus failed to prepare His disciples for that fatal hour, we also realize that He must have known this fact ahead of time. The knowledge that His most intimate friends would abandon Him must have increased the measure of His suffering. Jesus had to die also to His cherished human relationships. That grain of wheat also had to fall in the ground and die in order to bear fruit. In preparing His disciples, Jesus not only envisioned the moment of His imprisonment and crucifixion but He also wanted to lay the foundation for them to believe in His resurrection. It would not have been sufficient for the disciples to see someone return from death, even if that one was their Lord Himself. They also needed "Moses and the Prophets"⁴³⁴ to surrender themselves in unlimited faith. In the resurrection of Lazarus, the Lord laid a foundation upon which their faith could rest. Jesus constructed a logically conceived and well-assembled building of which the resurrection from the dead would be the cornerstone. When Thomas, in a fit of pessimism, exclaimed: "Let us also go, that we may die with him," he said more than he himself understood. In a sense, every one of the disciples would die and be raised with Jesus, except "the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled."⁴³⁵ Jesus knew what He was saying.

Campbell Morgan, in his commentary *The Gospel According to John*, states that when Jesus received word of Lazarus' illness, He was approximately one day's travel from Bethany. This means that Lazarus was already dead when the word reached Him. But we read that Lazarus had lain in the grave for four days when Jesus arrived. One day's travel, plus two day's waiting makes three, plus another day's travel makes four. Lazarus must have died immediately after the messenger who brought the message, and who traveled one day to reach Jesus, had left. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* seems to have a more logical explanation: "Our Lord probably left Bethabara the day, or the day after, Lazarus died. He came to Bethany three days after; and it appears that Lazarus had been buried about four days, and consequently that he had been put in the grave the day or day after he died. Though it was the Jewish custom to embalm their dead, yet we find, from John 11:39, that he had not been embalmed; and God wisely ordered this, that the miracle might appear the more striking."

Campbell Morgan also believes that Martha broke with the tradition by leaving the house during the first day of mourning. The Jews who had come to comfort the sisters were probably hired mourners. Mourning was an elaborate ritual in Israel, as among most Oriental tribes. It can hardly be equated with the deep sorrow of the heart, which often refuses to express itself publicly. Yet, the public weeping and wailing was supposed to offer a measure of relief and comfort for the bereaved. We get the impression that a large crowd of friends who had come to sustain them in those difficult days surrounded Martha and Mary.

In verses 20-27 we read how Jesus first meets Martha. We ought to be careful in interpreting this encounter in the light of the information Luke has given us previously.⁴³⁶ The fact that Martha had at first not chosen "what is better" does not mean that she stuck to her first choice for the rest of her life. There is no hint of reproach in her words: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." She was right; Lazarus would not have died. This is implied in Jesus' own words addressed to the disciples earlier: "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus had purposely avoided being present because it would have been inconceivable that Lazarus would have died under Jesus' very eyes. The spontaneous conclusion of everyone involved was that the death of Lazarus and Jesus' presence were incompatible. This demonstrates a clear insight into the Lord's character. And what a deep trust and certain faith sounds in the words: "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask!" Martha demonstrates that she believes that it is not too late yet. She has the same faith that Abraham demonstrated when he laid his son Isaac on the altar and "reasoned that God could raise the dead."⁴³⁷ Martha expects the resurrection. She believes that death cannot stand up against the presence of the Lord. She may not have analyzed it, but she knew by intuition that death meant separation from God and separation from the truth. Death is a lie and no lie can hold up in the presence of God.

She also understands Jesus' relationship with the Father. She appeals to Him as the Son of Man, not as the Second Person of the Trinity. She believes that resurrection will come as an answer to Jesus' prayer as a human being. In this also she was right because, shortly before Jesus called Lazarus back, He spoke a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father. Jesus' answer justifies Martha's assumption. Strangely enough, it seems as if Martha retracts some of her words by putting the resurrection Jesus promises off to the end of time. It could be that she wants to leave room for the Lord's will. It is a normal phenomenon, however, that faith is not always produced in maximum strength; it is subject to changes. It is also true that Lazarus' immediate resurrection did not cancel out the ultimate resurrection at the last day. Lazarus' resurrection here was only a temporal event; he died again afterward. If there were no "last day" everything the Lord does here, however astonishing it may be, would be in vain. We take

⁴³⁴ See Luke 16:31

⁴³⁵ ch. 17:12

⁴³⁶ See Luke 10:38-42

⁴³⁷ See Heb. 11:19

Jesus' answer: "Your brother will rise again" to apply to both events, the immediate resurrection and the final one at the end of time.

With verses 25 and 26 we come to the climax of this chapter and of the whole New Testament. This is the fifth time Jesus uses the words "I AM"⁴³⁸ in John's Gospel; a total of seven times. Added to these, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "I am he"⁴³⁹ and the most astounding words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am."⁴⁴⁰ Those wonderful utterances form the essence of Jesus' revelation of Himself in this world. The Greek words "I am" are the same as the Hebrew words God used with Moses in Exodus, when He said: "I AM WHO I AM."⁴⁴¹ God reveals Himself like this in His Son. As John said in his prologue: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."⁴⁴² Without this revelation, there would have been no life for man. Woe to the man who breaks with this revelation as King Jeroboam did!⁴⁴³ The Book of Proverbs teaches: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law."⁴⁴⁴ Man lives by this Word of revelation.

What do Jesus' words here mean? First of all, Jesus makes a statement: "I am the resurrection and the life." Then He indicates what the effect this has upon man and, finally, He gives an invitation to believe.

It would have been sufficient for us if Jesus had said: "I give resurrection and life." But He says more than that. The truth that Jesus gives life and that He resurrection is contained in His words, but there is more. The apostle Paul explains it as follows: "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."⁴⁴⁵ The first meaning of Jesus' statement is that He is the means of our resurrection. Earlier in connection with the restoration of the true Sabbath, He had described His task with the words: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it."⁴⁴⁶ He had said: "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live,"⁴⁴⁷ and: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."⁴⁴⁸

Jesus is not only the means of our resurrection; He also takes the initiative for it. It is upon His Word that the dead will be raised. In order to fully comprehend this we have to realize what death has meant for man throughout the ages. The devil has used the fear of death to hold man in slavery. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."⁴⁴⁹ Death is the sole factor that robs man of the meaning of life. It is death that made Solomon exclaim: "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?"⁴⁵⁰ He also said that death made man equal to the animal: "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return."⁴⁵¹ Death makes everything we do useless. Death is our last enemy. The resurrection from the death changes all this. David said: "Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death."⁴⁵² Some escape!!

In chapter 5 of this Gospel, Jesus spoke about the resurrection on two different levels. The Father raises the dead in the physical sense of the word. The fact that Jesus said this in connection with the healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda indicates that He used the term "death" in the broadest sense of the word. When He said:

⁴³⁸ the others are ch. 6:35; 8:12; 10:7,10; 14:6; 15:1

⁴³⁹ ch. 4:26

⁴⁴⁰ ch. 8:58 (KJV)

⁴⁴¹ Ex. 3:14

⁴⁴² ch. 1:18

⁴⁴³ See I Kings 12:26-33

⁴⁴⁴ Prov. 29:18

⁴⁴⁵ I Cor. 15:21,22

⁴⁴⁶ ch. 5:21

⁴⁴⁷ ch. 5:25

⁴⁴⁸ ch. 5:28,29

⁴⁴⁹ Heb. 2:14,15

⁴⁵⁰ Eccl. 1:3

⁴⁵¹ Eccl. 3:19-20

⁴⁵² Ps. 68:20

“the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it,”⁴⁵³ He spoke of eternal life. He described eternal life as crossing over from death to life.⁴⁵⁴ In the same way as Jesus encompasses all the results of the fall in the term “death,” so He includes the whole complex of redemption in the term “resurrection and life.” Yet, Jesus uses two separate words for the process. “Resurrection” probably stands for the monumental transition from darkness into light, and “life” for the continuing process that begins at that moment. The words are parallel to the “gate” and the “path” in the short parable Jesus uses in Matthew’s Gospel.⁴⁵⁵

As we said, it would have been wonderful even if Jesus had merely said: “I give resurrection and life” but He says infinitely more. “I am the resurrection and the life” indicates that it is not a gift that is separate from His person. In a sense it is a byproduct of our fellowship with Him. It is difficult for us to imagine that there could be something more wonderful and greater than resurrection and life. The Giver is more than the gift. David said: “Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.”⁴⁵⁶ The Lord is greater than the blessing He gives. Jesus’ words place the divine majesty of His person in the limelight.

Jesus’ words mean that resurrection and life are an integral part of the Lord’s character. He is resurrection and life. Grammatically, “I” is identical to “resurrection and life.” “Resurrection and life” is the predicate of “I.” This means that in Him death and corruption are impossible factors. Jesus said elsewhere: “[God] is not the God of the dead but of the living.”⁴⁵⁷ As darkness cannot exist in the source of light, so death cannot exist in the source of life. Jesus’ words allow us a glance into the character of the eternal God, which fills us with deep awe and worship and which makes us bow down in adoration. Martha and Mary were correct: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

In order to understand this verse, we have to realize that, when Jesus speaks of resurrection and life, He takes together physical death with spiritual death and also physical life with spiritual life. We find both elements in the words: “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.” This speaks of living and dying on both levels. The first applies to Lazarus who had just died and who would return to the physical body he had left. It is obvious that when Jesus says: “Whoever lives and believes in me will never die” He does not mean that a believer will not die physically. Our everyday life proves that this is not so. This was a misunderstanding among some primitive tribal people in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, who thought that a baptized Christian could not die. When this turned out to be wrong, some Christians went back to their old beliefs. Jesus speaks here about death in the absolute sense of the word, the whole complex of breaking with God that begins with sin and ends in the pool of fire. Physical death is the second phase in this process. For the Christian, death becomes the transition to glory. Jesus had said earlier: “I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”⁴⁵⁸ When Jesus said that, the Jews thought He was crazy, because Abraham and the prophets had all died. The misunderstanding was due to the fact that Jesus and the Jews spoke about two different kinds of death. Satan has, for the purpose of propaganda, blown up out of proportion the dying of our bodies. He has brought people to believe that this part of death is the end of all existence. Jesus brings physical death back to the right proportions. Death is the next step either on the road to real life or to ultimate death. The Evil One has manipulated the facts of death in order to hide from his victims the full horror of being totally forsaken by God. Jesus, who knows what ultimate good and ultimate evil are, says that the one, who believes in Him, will never know this death of death.

Finally, we have to ponder the fact that, in everything Jesus says or does, He reaches forward to His own death and resurrection. Death had come as a result of man’s sin. God had said to Adam and Eve: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”⁴⁵⁹ On the day they sinned, they began to die. The spell of death could only be broken on the basis of purification of sin, which Jesus achieved in His death and resurrection. Jesus could only speak those words because He would make the legal payment in His own body. Jesus’ words were not cheap; they were the most expensive words that ever came from a human mouth. They cost Him everything. Faith in Him who paid for us will open for us the gate of life. The key to that gate is called Resurrection.

We do not know how much Martha understood of the depths of Jesus’ words. Even if she was unable to grasp all of it, she must have sensed the majesty of the statement. In C. S. Lewis’ book *Till We Have Faces*, the god who married Psyche addresses her sister, Orual. She confesses that it would have been impossible for her to

⁴⁵³ ch. 5:21

⁴⁵⁴ ch. 5:24

⁴⁵⁵ See Matt. 7:13,14

⁴⁵⁶ Ps. 63:3

⁴⁵⁷ Matt.22:32

⁴⁵⁸ ch. 8:51

⁴⁵⁹ Gen. 2:17

misunderstand the fact. If a god speaks to you, she says, you know it. That is the way Martha's whole being must have reacted to Jesus' declaration. Jesus, therefore, does not ask her if she understands but if she believes. What else is faith but the reaction of our whole person to the words of Jesus? Jesus' statement here has brought in me a more emotional reaction and a more complete answer than any other of His words. The answer Martha gives seems to differ from Jesus' proclamation. Yet, she expresses correctly what is meant. She confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. In saying that, she takes her place at Jesus' feet next to her sister Mary. That is what Jesus achieved in postponing His arrival because He loved.

Verses 28 through 32 describe Jesus' encounter with Mary. Mary only comes because Jesus calls her. I don't know if that is significant. It could be that Mary did not want to go against what was conventionally acceptable, as Campbell Morgan suggests. It could also be that Mary was more deeply wounded than Martha was and that she was not yet ready to meet Jesus with her sorrow. Such a thing would not be inconceivable in view of Mary's sensitive character. She reacted deeply to every situation. This is clear from her reaction to Jesus' words in the first meeting Luke describes and also in John's record of her anointing of Jesus.⁴⁶⁰ We increase our sorrows if we do not talk with Jesus about them.

Jesus' calling of Mary is as God's calling of Adam after he sinned. The Genesis account tells us: "But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'"⁴⁶¹ God knew, of course, where Adam was, but He wanted Adam to discover himself where he was. There is a fine line between being deeply wounded and feeling oneself wounded and blaming God for the injustice of it. This is what Naomi did when she returned to Bethlehem. We read that she said: "'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'" ⁴⁶² It is not our fault if we are wounded but it is up to us if we want to "lick our wounds." Although Mary says the same things her sister said, there is a tone of reproach in them more than in Martha's words. We cannot judge her on the basis of what she does not say but we do not see any sign of Martha's deep faith that Jesus would still do something for them. We also get the impression that Mary's exuberant demonstration of gratitude in the next chapter is based on the fact that to whom much has been forgiven she will show much love.⁴⁶³

Verse 33 and following give a moving account of Jesus' sentiments at that moment. Vs. 35, "Jesus wept" is the shortest verse in the Bible; it is also the most moving one. It is easy for us to misunderstand why Jesus was so deeply moved and vexed. We read the same combination of distressed and anger in Jesus' heart at the healing of the man with the shriveled hand. Mark tells us that when Jesus realized the opposition from the side of the Pharisees: "He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts..."⁴⁶⁴ In his book *The God Who Is There*, Francis Schaeffer elaborates on Jesus' reaction at Lazarus' grave. He contrasts Jesus' attitude with that of Father Paneloup in Albert Camus' book *The Plague*. The priest believes that, if he takes measures to fight the plague, he goes against God who sent the plague as a punishment for man's sin. Jesus' sorrow and anger in the face of death is completely opposite to that attitude. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* beautifully observes: "Is it for nothing that the Evangelist, some sixty years after it occurred, holds up to all ages with such touching brevity the sublime spectacle of the Son of God in tears? What a seal of His perfect oneness with us in the most redeeming feature of our stricken humanity! But was there nothing in those tears beyond sorrow for human suffering and death? Could these effects move Him without suggesting the cause? Who can doubt that in His ear every feature of the scene proclaimed that stern law of the Kingdom, 'The wages of sin is death,' and that this element in His visible emotion underlay all the rest?"

Before recording Jesus' tears, John states that Jesus "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled." The KJV reads: "he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." The Greek word used is *embrimaomai*, which literally means, "to snort with anger." It is an expression of indignation. It is an almost animal like reaction of deep anger. Jesus' tears here are the fruit of the conflicting emotions of anger and love. Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and the people who surrounded the grave and who indulged in unbridled wailing. How easy it would have been for our Lord to close His heart to these demonstrations of sorrow. After all, He knew that, in just a few minutes, their weeping would change into ecstatic joy at the resurrection of Lazarus. But Jesus joins in their sorrow. He, who had been suspected of not caring for His intimate friends when He waited two days before coming, turns out to be more deeply touched than any of the others present. Here too, His tears are bigger than ours. He, who thinks that we are alone in our sorrow

⁴⁶⁰ See Luke 10:39; John 12:3

⁴⁶¹ Gen. 3:9

⁴⁶² Ruth 1:20,21

⁴⁶³ See Luke 7:47

⁴⁶⁴ Mark 3:5

and that God forgets, believes the devil's lie. God does not always show us why He does not remove the cause of our grief, but by showing us His own sadness, we are encouraged to put our trust in Him. His tears are not only bigger but also more real than ours.

The Jews wrongly interpreted Jesus' sadness. They thought that He wept because Lazarus, whom He loved, had died. In the light of the following resurrection that would not have been a logical reaction. The immediate cause, according to vs. 33, is the fact that the people He loved, were subject to such a deep sorrow. But here again, we reverse the issues. We do as if our pain tenderizes the Lord to the point that He breaks out in tears. Since we are created in God's image, our emotions are also an image of His emotions. In our reaction to death, we experience on a smaller scale, what the eternal God experiences in an infinite way. He does not cry with us, we cry with Him. That is why we can only be comforted with the same comfort with which God Himself is comforted, that is the death and resurrection of His Son.

Jesus' sorrow is not limited to the perimeter; it penetrates to the core. This is the reason He is not only sad but also indignant. Imagine that one of our loved ones were brutally and cruelly killed by someone and that, at the funeral, the murderer comes to the grave and with a sad smile place a wreath on the coffin. How would we react? The enemy, the murderer from the beginning, the father of lies, he who is responsible for all human sin, and suffering, and separation from God, was present at Lazarus' tomb. He tried to distract our Lord's attention with the deep sorrow and lack of understanding of all those whom Jesus loves. At this moment Jesus' full anger turns towards him.

There is with us a great deal of misunderstanding on the point of anger. We are told that anger is merely a psychological phenomenon, an instinctive defense we display because of emotions not understood and undigested in our past. We often forget that there is also divine anger, which is a righteous reaction to injustice and corruption. He who does not strongly react to crimes committed against humanity is not a living person. God expects His children to flare up in righteous indignation at the sight of unrighteousness. The demonstration of Jesus' anger is proof of His genuine humanity. The balance, however, consists in a combination of anger and sadness upon a basis of love.

As we said, Jesus penetrates to the core of the matter. Man's problem in connection with suffering is demonstrated in Job's experience. Job believed that it was God who caused his suffering. He had never read the first two chapters of his own biography. Jesus knew that God never tempts anyone. He knew that all suffering is the result of the great controversy between God and Satan, which is being fought out in the life of each individual. God permitted the existence of pain and death, but He did not initiate them in the form we know them now. In our struggle with suffering and death, God is on our side in Jesus Christ. It affects Him in an eternal way, which is incomprehensible to us. How this fits into the truth of His omnipotence, that is in what He can do about it, I don't understand. Jesus' tears, however, are proof of the fact that this is the only way a perfect and holy God can go and that it costs Him more than it costs us.

In vs. 38, we read how Jesus finally reaches the tomb, after asking where it was. We wonder why Jesus made this inquiry. The most logical answer is: because He wanted to know. None of the commentaries I read pay much attention to this question. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "Jesus spoke as a man. In all this transaction he manifested the deep sympathies of a man; and though he who could raise the dead man up could also know where he was, yet he chose to lead them to the grave by inducing them to point the way, and hence, he asked this question." It is generally supposed that Jesus, while ministering on earth, was omniscient. This section of Scripture seems to correct this supposition.

We mentioned already that John had good reasons for the slow progression of his story. We would have missed much if he had come immediately to the point. From the viewpoint of drama, we reach the climax here. There is one more problem to be solved; there is a stone that closes the opening of the grave. Jesus needs Martha's consent for the stone to be rolled away. If Martha had said "no," Lazarus would have remained dead. Martha could not bring her brother back to life but she could prevent his resurrection. How awfully great is the power man can exercise in a negative way! Martha was right in stating that Lazarus' body had already begun to decompose and emit a bad odor. We all have good reasons to leave our stones where they are. We know that there are areas in our life of which we would be ashamed if the lid were lifted. We act as if God would not be able to smell the bad odors that are covered by stones. We do not read that Martha specifically consented for the stone to be removed but such must have been the case. Martha's consent was a genuine act of faith. We understand that Jesus treats death in its totality, as the separation from God, and resurrection as the whole sum of atonement, which leads to restoration of fellowship with God.

The spiritual application of what happened at Lazarus' grave is far reaching. The removal of the stone is, at the same time, a confession of sin and a confession of faith. No one can bring himself to such a confession without the deep certainty of forgiveness. The connection between the miracle and faith is not emphasized so strongly here as it is elsewhere in the Gospels. In other instances, Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the miracles He performed

were the result of His faith in the Father. It is the same faith we are supposed to exercise. Jesus reproached Peter for his lack of faith when he began to sink while walking on the water.⁴⁶⁵ To His disciples, He explained that the withering of the fig tree was the answer to a prayer of faith.⁴⁶⁶ Consequently, we understand that Jesus did not perform the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection as the Second Person of the Trinity but as a man, standing among man, on the same ground we stand on. His faith, in combination with ours, opens the way for the Father to reveal His glory. It is obvious that the resurrection of Lazarus is the answer to Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving. And the fact that He thanks the Father is an expression of faith. Jesus practiced what He preached to the disciples when He said: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."⁴⁶⁷ The apostle Paul admonishes us to do likewise. He wrote to the Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."⁴⁶⁸ In a sense, Lazarus' resurrection is not a glorification of Jesus, or a revelation of His divine majesty, because the resurrection was the Father's answer to the prayer of His Son. But it does give proof of the fact that Jesus is who He claims to be: the Son of God who came into the world. Who else could stand before an open grave and present a prayer of thanksgiving for a dead body that would come back to life?

This partly answers the question: What is the glory of God? It is difficult to define glory; yet we all know what glory is. We cannot imagine what God's glory is like; yet we know that we will recognize it when we see it. What God said to Moses remains true: "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."⁴⁶⁹ What Moses saw was not God's glory but the result of God's glory after it had passed him. Moses stood in a cleft of the rock covered by the hand of God until He had passed. The rock in which Moses hid was Christ, to use Paul's words.⁴⁷⁰ So it was at the tomb of Lazarus. God hid His glory in Christ and when He had passed, Lazarus had come back to life. The people saw the result of God's glory. So we can say that God either revealed His glory or that He hid it. If the hiding of glory is so moving and life giving, what will the revelation of glory be? John tries to describe glory in Revelation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.' ... 'They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.'" ⁴⁷¹ "No one may see me and live." I would rather see Him and die than live and not see Him!

Jesus' words to Martha: "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" imply that seeing God's glory can be hindered by unbelief. Seeing the resurrection of Lazarus is only the beginning of seeing the glory of God. It is a vague shadow of the real resurrection that began on Easter morning and that will end when the last enemy, death, will be destroyed. Lazarus' resurrection gives a foretaste of the hour "when all who are in their graves will hear [Jesus'] voice and come out." Lazarus' resurrection was only temporal. Only a few years later, people had to lay him in his grave again and he is now waiting to hear the voice of the Lord, which will raise his incorruptible body. This resurrection was not advantageous for Lazarus, although we do not know what the exact condition of the Old Testament dead was like. Yet being taken away from Abraham's bosom probably was not an enjoyable experience for him. The Lord asked a sacrifice from Lazarus which I hope He will never ask from me. C. S. Lewis calls Lazarus the first martyr in the New Testament. In his book *A Grief Observed*, he comments on the death of his wife, saying: "Having got once through death, to come back and then, at some later date, have all her dying to do over again? They call Stephen the first martyr. Hadn't Lazarus the rawer deal?"

I try to imagine the tone of Jesus' voice when He called Lazarus back to life. It must have had the same power as the first divine call in the Bible: "Let there be light!" Lazarus' dead body obeyed this call to life. How

⁴⁶⁵ See Matt. 14:31

⁴⁶⁶ See Matt. 21:21,22

⁴⁶⁷ Mark 11:24

⁴⁶⁸ Phil. 4:6

⁴⁶⁹ Ex. 33:20

⁴⁷⁰ See I Cor 10:4

⁴⁷¹ Rev. 21:1-7; 22:4

could it be that people who witnessed this miracle would not have concluded that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God? And yet some people went to the Pharisees to report what Jesus had done.

The resurrection of Lazarus is the most spectacular miracle Jesus performed. It is the most impossible of all the seven miracles John reports in his Gospel. The dead man came out. Jesus did nothing else but calling him back to life. He did not take the grave cloths off. The poor man must have struggled with his hands and feet bound, unable to free himself. The spectators were probably so baffled that they forgot to come to his rescue. Jesus' laconic command to help him unwrap almost sounds humorous. There may have been a twinkle in the Lord's eyes. The crowd's reaction must have swung from astonishment to ecstasy. They probably all began to run to and fro; everybody shouted at the same time. They shed more tears of joy for Lazarus alive than tears of sorrow for his death.

This miracle was Jesus' proof of the fact that He is the resurrection and the life. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus proved that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins by saying to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."⁴⁷² In healing the man born blind, He lent authority to His claim of being the light of the world.⁴⁷³ In the same way, Lazarus' resurrection serves as proof of the authenticity of His claim. C. S. Lewis is right when he says that Jesus cannot be accepted merely as a great moral teacher. To the person who says: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God," Lewis retorts in his book *Mere Christianity*: "That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to." Lunatics don't raise people from the dead.

2. The Decision to Kill Jesus 11:45-47

John is very sober in his description of the reaction of the people who were eyewitnesses of Lazarus' resurrection. He only states: "Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him." It ought to amaze us that there were some who did not believe. As Pharaoh hardened his heart to the miracles Moses and Aaron performed, so this unbelief also can only be explained by hardening of the heart. People could, of course, not deny that the miracle had occurred; that would have been impossible since it happened in front of their eyes. Even the Sanhedrin accepted that Jesus performed miracles. Their unbelief pertained to the relationship between Jesus' words and His miracles. They did not accept Jesus' acts as proof of His claims. They stuck to the theory the Pharisees had introduced in Matthew's Gospel: "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."⁴⁷⁴ Man, created in the image of God, has the ability to recognize the power of his Creator when he sees it. The one who doesn't deny his origin and harms himself. Jesus calls that "blasphemy against the Spirit."⁴⁷⁵ Consequently, unbelief is not an intellectual problem but a moral one.

Lazarus' resurrection forces the Sanhedrin to gather in an emergency session. As we said earlier, they acted on the presumption that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah was false. Their prejudice is based on their faulty interpretation of parts of the Old Testament. Their greatest hindrance was Jesus' birthplace.⁴⁷⁶ It is amazing to see that this point is the only argument presented to deny the truth of Jesus' claim about Himself; the more so, since an intensive investigation into the truth of this argument would have revealed that it was wrong. It is difficult to accept that the massive massacre of the children of Bethlehem would have been completely forgotten by the older members of the council. The majority of the member must have been twenty or thirty years of age when this madness took place. Man never has any trouble forgetting what he wants to forget.

The council members exclaim: "What shall we do?"⁴⁷⁷ The question is the same as the one asked Peter during the Feast of Pentecost, but the meaning is completely opposite.⁴⁷⁸ There, it was the cry of men who understood, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, that they were lost. Here it is a cunning counsel to strengthen a position of rebellion towards God. They understood very well that a victory by Jesus would mean that they would lose their position of leadership. We ought to remember, however, that they believed Jesus to be a deceiver. Paul,

⁴⁷² See Mark 2:10,11

⁴⁷³ See ch. 9

⁴⁷⁴ Matt. 12:24

⁴⁷⁵ See Matt. 12:31

⁴⁷⁶ See ch. 7:52; 9:29

⁴⁷⁷ NKJV

⁴⁷⁸ See Acts 2:37

who for a while belonged to this group, testifies that theirs was a lack of “God’s secret wisdom.” To the Corinthians he wrote: “We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”⁴⁷⁹ Everything turned out to be so different from what they expected. Their prejudice became their undoing.

Caiaphas was the high priest that year. The Roman government, who had deposed Annas, had appointed him. But Annas had obviously still a finger in the pie, which is evidenced by the fact that, at His arrest, Jesus, before being taken to Caiaphas, was first taken to Annas when He was arrested.⁴⁸⁰ But Caiaphas was the one who officially occupied the office of high priest. The words of Caiaphas are inspired by purely human considerations. He is convinced that the messianic movement under Jesus would disturb the carefully maintained balance of political tensions and that this would evoke a massive reaction from the side of Rome. This could mean the end of Israel as a nation. We have to admit that there is logic in Caiaphas’ reasoning. If Jesus were in fact not the Messiah sent by God, Caiaphas was right. The amazing fact is that a man without God can be both right and wrong at the same time. The mistake of the human viewpoint, however, was that the people who condemned Jesus were not convinced that He was guilty. Caiaphas’ words indicate that Jesus had to be sacrificed innocently for the benefit of the people. “The end justifies the means.” At this point the devil shows his real nature.

It also becomes clear how far the leaders of the people had strayed from the theocratic principles and how little they believed in the history of God’s revelation to Israel. There were examples in abundance of instances when God had protected His people from extermination by foreign powers when the people and its leaders had sought the Lord with all of their heart. At Ebenezer, the Philistines were defeated by an unusually heavy thunderstorm.⁴⁸¹ King Jehoshaphat’s victory over the Moabites and Ammonites⁴⁸² and Assyria’s failed campaign against Jerusalem⁴⁸³ are some examples of divine deliverance. From a human viewpoint, Caiaphas was right. But he failed completely to take God into account, and for a high priest that is an unpardonable mistake.

Caiaphas’ words have a double meaning, an evil one and a holy one. What he meant to say was that Jesus had to be sacrificed so that he himself, and the other members of the council, could maintain their position of power and continue to live for themselves. He was motivated by self-preservation. Whether Jesus was innocent or not was none of his concern. “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish,” sounds noble, but those words are based on the lowest kind of egoism possible. We are used to the fact that evil people desecrate words and hollow them out in order to achieve their wicked goals. In Caiaphas’ case, the Holy Spirit turns this around. He takes the vulgar rhetoric of a power-hungry egoist and forges it into a prophecy that gives meaning to all times and eternity.

Caiaphas had broken the bond with revelation long before. He may never have been a high priest who stood before God in behalf of the people. He merely stood before the Sanhedrin in behalf of himself. At this point, however, the real High Priest, of whom Caiaphas ought to have been the image, takes his place. Without his consent, the Holy Spirit put this man on his feet and he makes the official announcement which elevates his office to the highest rank and which ushers in the priesthood of our Lord. Every word this man says is pure gold: “You do not realize that it is better for you” Amen and amen!

What would have happened if they had realized that? We don’t know; we can only say that God used their blindness and hardness of heart to reveal a greater glory than would have been had their eyes been open and their hearts receptive. Our resistance and obstinacy never hinder the Lord in achieving His goal. The obstacles we put up become God’s steppingstones for His glorification. God uses Caiaphas as He used Pharaoh. We wonder if Caiaphas ever found out later how true his prophecy had been. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, John put his finger on the spot by saying: “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.”

Three years earlier, John the Baptist had introduced Jesus’ ministry with the words: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”⁴⁸⁴ What he meant was that the goat that carried away the sin of the people on the Day of Atonement had been a shadow of what Jesus Christ would do in His own body.⁴⁸⁵ Jesus is the

⁴⁷⁹ I Cor. 2:7,8

⁴⁸⁰ See ch. 18:12,13

⁴⁸¹ See I Sam. 7:2-13

⁴⁸² See II Chr. 20

⁴⁸³ See II Chr. 32:1-23

⁴⁸⁴ See ch. 1:29

⁴⁸⁵ See Lev. 16:20,21

scapegoat. According to Caiaphas' prophecy, He is also the goat "for the LORD" whose blood was brought into the sanctuary to atone for the sins of the people.

Since Caiaphas was Israel's high priest, his prophecy pertained to the people whose representative he was. Jesus died, first of all, so that Israel might live. But, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and on the basis of his personal experience, John adds to this: "not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one." When John wrote these words, he had been, together with Peter, witness of the conversion of the Samaritans. Peter had also led Cornelius to Jesus. The apostles had gone into all the world to bring the Gospel, in accordance with Jesus' command. That is why I am a Christian today.

The way John speaks about the gentiles is striking. He calls them "the scattered children of God," as if they were Israelites who had never returned from their captivity. In a sense, that is true. Adam's great fall into sin in the Garden of Eden and the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity are of the same kind. Ever since Eden, God's children are scattered. Only God's revelation to Israel in the Old Testament and in Jesus Christ in the New Testament brings people together. The interesting part, however, is that people who have not yet come to faith in Christ are already called "children of God." What is meant is probably that they have not heard yet but they will believe when they hear the Gospel. The expression refers to God's foreknowledge. In the parable of the weeds in the field, Jesus speaks of: "the sons of the kingdom" and "the sons of the evil one."⁴⁸⁶

The bringing together is also a reference to "the church," the "ecclesia," the ones who are called out of this world. The death of Jesus Christ not only makes people into children of God, it also brings them together and makes them one. The scattering separated man from God; it also separated man from man. The separation in all of its phases is brought to an end in the death of our Lord. The fruit of Jesus' sacrifice is love, love for God and for our fellowmen. Fellowship with God is foremost demonstrated in an ever-growing intimacy. But there is no sweeter demonstration of our love for God than when it is expressed in fellowship and unity with the other members of the body of Christ. David articulates this in one of the psalms: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"⁴⁸⁷ The atonement of my sins will ultimately mean that I am rehabilitated and healed and made into a person who bears the image of God in all its completeness. If only Caiaphas had understood that! But then, how else could the Scriptures be fulfilled?

John states: "So from that day on they plotted to take his life." This was not the first time they plotted to kill Jesus. It began earlier in Jesus' ministry, already in Capernaum. After Jesus had healed the man with the shriveled hand, we read: "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus."⁴⁸⁸ Here the plotting is done, not by a group of Pharisees and Herodians in Galilee but by the Jewish Supreme Court in Jerusalem. The judges would have to do a lot of plotting because there were no legal grounds for Jesus' execution. Against this background, we have to see the different time when the Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trick Jesus with dubious question, hoping that He would give them the wrong answer and that they would have a proof of blasphemy. The great miracle of Lazarus' resurrection made the matter very urgent; Jesus' ministry had to be stopped.

It amazes us to see how these hostilities influence Jesus' actions. We would have expected Jesus to be immune to those threats. The fact that "Jesus no longer moved about publicly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew to a region near the desert, to a village called Ephraim, where he stayed with his disciples" indicates that this was not the case. Jesus reacted as David, who fled from Saul, did. Jesus knew, of course, that He had to die during the Passover Feast. He was aware of the time and the place of His dying. Waiting for the right time was not a thing that He could endure passively. There was the urgency of the hour of His crisis in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus felt the increasing attempts of the enemy to kill Him prematurely. His trust in the Father's protection did not make Him act recklessly. As David went to hide among the Philistines,⁴⁸⁹ so Jesus takes precautionary measures. The Father shows Him that He ought to go in hiding and so He obeys.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary explains about Ephraim: "[A city called Ephraim] Various written in the MSS., Ephraim, Ephrem, Ephram, and Ephratha. This was a little village, situated in the neighborhood of Bethel; for the scripture, 2 Chron 13:19, and Josephus, War, b. 4 c. 8. s. 9, join them both together. Many believe that this city or village was the same with that mentioned, 1 Macc. 5:46; 2 Macc. 12:27. Joshua gave it to the tribe of Judah, Josh 15:9; and Eusebius and Jerome say it was about twenty miles north of Jerusalem." This may have been the same place where Satan tempted Jesus at the beginning of His ministry. We don't know exactly how much time Jesus spent there. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* writes: "Calmet says, following Toynard, that he stayed there two

⁴⁸⁶ See Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43

⁴⁸⁷ Ps. 133:1

⁴⁸⁸ Mark 3:6

⁴⁸⁹ See I Sam. 27:1

months, from the 24th of January until the 24th of March.” The fact that John elaborates on the preparations of the Passover Feast makes us believe that it may not have been that long. John’s description also suggests that his Gospel was not written primarily for Jews.

This particular Passover was to be the fulfillment of all Passovers since the day Israel had left Egypt. But the people’s anticipation of Jesus’ coming to the feast had nothing to do with the reality of its fulfillment. Theirs was a mixture of murderous desires, sensation, curiosity, or amazement for those who believed the miracles. It was not the expectation of the fulfillment of God’s promise. This is one of the clearest indications that, by falling into sin, man has lost his fellowship with God. His expectations no longer coincide with God’s expectations. He no longer knows what reality is.

It sounds ludicrous that people would ask, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the Feast at all?” The Feast was all about Him. When the feast was first inaugurated, the Father had the Son in mind. The apostle Paul says: “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”⁴⁹⁰ Even the Pharisees were looking for the Passover Lamb. They put up posters all over the city, so to speak, so that the people would look for Him. They were willing to pay money to find Him. They were just as eager to find the Lamb as God Himself was. They too wanted that “one man die for the people [rather] than that the whole nation perish.” What a unity between God’s purpose and man’s purpose!

3. The Anointing at Bethany 12:1-11

The anointing of Jesus is also recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.⁴⁹¹ There are, however, some seeming discrepancies between John’s account and the other two. From the synoptic Gospels we get the impression that the anointing took place after Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. John seems to correct this. The synoptics place the incident at the house of a certain Simon the leper. John does not mention the place but merely observes that Martha was serving. There is also a seemingly contradictory pinpointing of the time. John mentions that Jesus arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover and Mark states: “the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away.”⁴⁹² It is likely that John’s date is the time Jesus arrived at Bethany and that Mark specifies the day of the meal. The other evangelists do not mention the name of the woman who performed the anointing.

The law on the Passover stipulated that the Passover lamb had to be identified four days before the celebration.⁴⁹³ This means that Jesus, as the real Passover Lamb, would have had to show Himself in Jerusalem four days before the feast. This may have coincided with His triumphal entry into the city, but the Bible does not specify this. If Jesus arrived at Bethany six days before the feast, and the meal during which the anointing took place occurred two days before, the triumphal entry must have taken place in between, on the fourth day.

Part of the seeming confusion about the time may be due to the fact that certain groups in Israel celebrated the Passover Feast at different dates. There was a traditional date, and another date which was set according to a more accurate calculation of the exact time Israel left Egypt.

The meal during which Jesus was anointed took place, not at Lazarus’ house but at Simon’s. We suppose that, just as Lazarus had reasons to be grateful to Jesus, Simon, the leper, also owed his healing to the Lord. Simon must have been a member of the early church, which came into being on the Day of Pentecost; otherwise, the mention of his name would not make much sense. The woman remains anonymous in the Synoptic Gospels, but John indicates that the anointing was related to Lazarus’ resurrection. Mary may have had other reasons for her act of gratitude besides the resurrection of her brother. We suggested earlier that Mary was more deeply wounded by Lazarus’ death. The coming back to life of her brother meant for her not only the healing of her wounds but also pardon of her guilt, which she had incurred by her self-pity. As the other woman who anointed Jesus’ feet,⁴⁹⁴ Mary had a deep sense of being forgiven. Life from death and forgiveness of guilt always go together. Mary may have had trouble putting her feelings into words, but her anointing leaves nothing unsaid. A person can always find ways to express himself before God, either with words or without. A more precious way of expressing gratitude than to pour out what we have does not exist.

The scene is set in the same way as when we met the family of Lazarus the first time in Luke’s Gospel.⁴⁹⁵ Lazarus is at the table, Martha serves, and Mary gives herself to Jesus. But here we have come much further than

⁴⁹⁰ 1 Cor 5:7

⁴⁹¹ Matt. 26:3-13; Mark 14:3-9

⁴⁹² Mark 14:1

⁴⁹³ See Ex. 12:3,6

⁴⁹⁴ See Luke 7:36-50

⁴⁹⁵ See Luke 10:38-42

that first time. Martha no longer serves herself; she serves her Lord. Mary no longer only receives; she also gives. Grace expresses itself triumphantly in a different way for each of those three persons.

A significant difference between the Synoptic record on the one hand, and John's on the other is that Matthew and Mark mention that the myrrh was poured over Jesus' head, and John mentions the feet. This, of course, is no contradiction. Mary, obviously, anointed both Jesus' head and feet. The difference is a difference in emphasis the three Gospel writers place on Jesus' ministry. Matthew pictures Jesus as King; he therefore mentions the head. Mary's act means Jesus' crowning as King. Mark, who depicts Jesus as the perfect servant, sees in the anointed the reward for His labor. Jesus' head is lifted up. To John, who emphasizes Jesus' divinity, the anointing of the feet is a form of worship that can only be given to God. The different perspectives the Gospels give to us correspond also to Mary's motivation in performing this double anointing. She must have asked herself the question David asked: "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?"⁴⁹⁶ She took her most precious possession, that of which she was proud, that which was her treasure, and she offered that to the Lord. In Mark's eyes, it was not so much a payment to Jesus (after all, how much can one pay for the resurrection of a brother) but a token of deep appreciation for what Jesus had done for her and the family. John pictures Mary who bows down over Jesus' feet and dries them with her hair. She had received forgiveness from her God and she bows down in worship and surrender before the throne of the universe.

Matthew and Mark inform us that the nard was in an alabaster jar. The container itself was an expensive item. We would have expected that Mary would merely have taken off the cork instead of breaking the neck of the bottle. The scholars do not agree on what happened exactly. *Barnes' Notes* observes about the breaking of the bottle: "This may mean no more than that she broke the 'seal' of the box, so that it could be poured out. Boxes of perfumes are often sealed or made fast with wax, to prevent the perfume from escaping. It was not likely that she would break the box itself when it was unnecessary, and when the unguent, being liquid, would have been wasted; nor from a broken box or vial could she easily have 'poured it' on his head." John does not even mention this detail. He tells us that a quantity of one pound was used, obviously much more than what was needed for a normal anointing.

One of the beautiful details in John's story is the mention that "the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." This is the second time Jesus is anointed by a woman; the first time, by a woman who had received forgiveness for her sins, the second time by a woman who had received back her brother from the dead. The first human being who sinned was a woman. Two women anointed the Anointed One. Mary's anointing of Jesus signifies the actual setting apart of the Passover Lamb. The sweet fragrance of this act fills not only the house of Simon, but also the House of the Lord, the heavens itself. The Father in heaven smelled the fragrance and it was a pleasing aroma to Him. If we allow our human imagination to roam, we could say that the Father in heaven smelled the fragrance and said, "Where does this come from?" He looked and found that it came from the house of Simon in Bethany. What happened in that room was more important to Him than anything else on earth.

John doesn't mention the indignant reaction of the other disciples about this "waste." He zooms in on Judas. Judas may have been the only one who spoke up; he may have been the one who incited the others. For Judas, this incident was a watershed. To him, the aroma of Christ was the smell of death. Mary's act of surrender and worship makes him realize how far removed he himself is from Christ. In a way, Judas understood more about Jesus and about himself than the other disciples did. The realizations that no compromise was possible made him decide to make the final break.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with the help of hindsight, John concludes that this was the decisive moment in Judas' life. Judas uses pious words to cover up his intentions. There must have been a moment, earlier in Judas' life, when he felt enough drawn to Jesus to leave everything and follow Him. But the seed that was sown in his heart never began to grow and bear fruit. We don't know where the turning point took occurred. Since Judas took money from the communal cashbox for his own purposes, it may have been the first time he stole. He probably did not say to himself at that point: "Now I am a thief." He probably used some excuse for what he did. He thought he borrowed it and planned to repay later, or he used it for the benefit of someone else who was in need. After that moment it became easier. This was only possible because, although he was in the presence of the Lord, he had shut himself off from having fellowship with Him. It is difficult to imagine how he could have silenced the voice of his conscience under such conditions, but he did it.

Another mystery is how this could have happened under the very eyes of Jesus, who, of course, knew what was taking place. Did this mean that Jesus was a poor administrator of the money of the Kingdom? We would have fired Judas on the spot. Does love for a thief and a traitor mean that we should let him continue till he gets bogged down?

⁴⁹⁶ Ps. 116:12

Jesus defends Mary's behavior. He does not allow the devil to attack her. When we pour out before the Lord of glory what is most precious to us, we immediately come to dwell in the shelter of the Most High and we will rest in the shadow of the Almighty."⁴⁹⁷

The emphasis in Jesus' answer is on the urgency of the moment. "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me" does not deny the needs of the poor, but poverty is a lasting condition in this world. We can do good to the poor whenever we want to. Judas' sudden concern for the poor was meant to avoid the opportunity to do good to Jesus. Such opportunities are not dependent on our goodwill; they are unique occasions of which the Lord allows us to avail ourselves. The words "Leave her alone, [it was intended] that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial" do not mean that Jesus wanted the anointing to be postponed. The Greek is somewhat confusing. We read literally: "Let her alone, against the day of my burying has she kept this." The NASU translates this: "Let her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of My burial." The KJV reads: "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this." John says here in condensed form what Matthew and Mark state more elaborately. We read Jesus' words in Mark: "She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial." Evidently, Jesus fully approved of Mary's act. We read in Mark that He says: "She has done a beautiful thing to me."⁴⁹⁸

In referring to His death, Jesus places Mary's act in the right perspective. Her deed was meaningful because the love that inspired her made her understand intuitively what would happen. Love always gives meaning to our acts, and loveless acts are always meaningless. Meaning, however, does not lie in the sentiment of love, but in love's ability to recognize the facts. Mary's intuitive love provided her with understanding of the facts that were about to happen. She was familiar with Jesus' announcements of His suffering and death, as were the disciples. She was the only person who took Jesus' words seriously. In her gratitude for her brother's resurrection, she understood something of the price Jesus would have to pay for this. The nard she poured over her Lord was representative of both the life of Lazarus and of Jesus. Every life that is reclaimed from death has to be poured out at Jesus' feet. This, however, is only possible because Jesus poured out His life at our feet. There is a close connection between the acts performed at the burnt offering altar and those performed at the altar of incense. Every sweet odor of unselfish and loving surrender is related to the fact that Jesus Himself "poured out his life unto death"⁴⁹⁹ for us. Without the shedding of His blood, our sacrifices would be unacceptable and impossible. Without forgiveness of sin, no one can be released from the bonds of sin and selfishness. It is tremendous when we can look upon what the Lord has done for us so that we can come to the point of pouring ourselves out before Him. How much more wonderful it is that Mary did such a thing, not by looking back but by looking forward!

In Jesus' instant analysis of the situation, we see again His gift for placing every circumstance in the light of eternity and His ability to pass an immediate and unfailing judgment upon it. Jesus' prophecy pertains, not only to His own future, but also to Mary's. God honors those who honor Him; He elevates us in the measure that we bow down before Him. The Lord connects the person and the act of Mary indelibly to the preaching of the Gospel. If we remember that here, as in the other anointing by the woman to whom much had been forgiven,⁵⁰⁰ Jesus' words apply to the forgiveness of sin, Jesus' answer to the disciples acquires a deeper meaning. The preaching of the Gospel will always be accompanied by examples of those in whose heart fell the seed of the Word and bore fruit. Mary's act sets a standard. She demonstrates how the Word of God ought to be received in the life of a person and how it ought to grow.

If it is true that the people observed the Passover on two separate dates, Mary's anointing of Jesus could have taken place four days before the actual feast. That would then be the day when the Passover lamb was set apart. Mary's act acquires then the meaning of God's selection of the Lamb that would take away the sins of the world. This gives to Jesus' words about the preparation an even deeper meaning than the embalment of a dead body.

Mark records Jesus' words as "She did what she could."⁵⁰¹ We usually say that when a person fulfills his duty; here it is meant to refer to an act of supreme love. She loved Jesus with everything in her power. In those days, there were things people could do for Jesus on a physical level that can no longer be done now. Jesus' words: "You will not always have me" speak of a transition from one phase to another. It almost seems as if it were difficult for the Lord to break with the physical contact. The thought that Jesus would find this difficult comforts me. This does not mean that the spiritual phase in which we live at present, the condition in which Christ is in us by the Holy Spirit, would be of less importance. It is in fact more important and more valuable, but it differs from a physical

⁴⁹⁷ See Ps. 91:1

⁴⁹⁸ See Mark 14:6,7

⁴⁹⁹ See Isa. 53:12

⁵⁰⁰ See Luke 7:36-47

⁵⁰¹ Mark 14:8

contact. Our spiritual life also expresses itself in physical actions. For this reason, we miss something in the present that will be completed only at the resurrection of our body.

John proceeds to tell us that Jesus' return to Bethany, where Lazarus was raised from the dead, drew large crowds, which was a cause for concern to the Pharisees and priests. The fact that Lazarus who had been dead was sitting at a table with Jesus (actually, he was reclining) is an undeniable proof of the truth of Jesus' words and deeds. The priests and leaders of the people, therefore, seriously consider the option of murdering Lazarus also. Jesus' crime of raising Lazarus from the dead could not be left unpunished! What legal grounds they would have to carry out this plan, I don't know. The plan to kill Lazarus, actually, exposes their real motives of wanting to maintain their positions of power, more than the crucifixion of Jesus.

4. The Triumphal Entry in Jerusalem 12:12-19

Jesus' entry in Jerusalem is recorded in all four Gospels. John gives us the shortest account of the event, but he indicates that the enthusiasm of the crowd is due to the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection. Luke introduces the event with the words: "After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem."⁵⁰² There seems to have been the same fear among the pilgrims as Mark recorded at an earlier stage. We read: "They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid."⁵⁰³ Jesus takes the initiative to demonstrate that there is an invisible resistance that had to be overcome.

It should be observed that Jesus knew the relative value of the occurrence, yet He makes elaborate preparations for the event. Nowhere else do we see that the Lord took so much pain to bring about the literal fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. His purposeful preparations give us the key to the understanding of the event. Jesus did not intend to realize His ascension to the throne of the kingdom of Israel at this time; He rather wanted to demonstrate to the nation that He was the fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy.

In order to fulfill the prophecy, Jesus had to borrow a donkey. John's quote of Zechariah's prophecy differs from the original. We read in his Gospel: "Do not be afraid, O Daughter of Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey's colt." The original reads: "Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."⁵⁰⁴

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary has a lengthy comment on the event, which is worth copying: "Matthew here notes the well-known prophecy which was fulfilled in all this, on which we must pause for a little: 'All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet (Zech 9:9), saying, Tell ye (or, 'Say ye to') the daughter of Zion'-quoting here another bright Messianic prophecy (Isa 62:11) in place of Zechariah's opening words, 'Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee.' Here the prophet adds, 'He is just, and having salvation' or 'helped'... but the Evangelist omits these, passing on to what relates to the lowly character of His royalty: 'meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.' It was upon the foal that our Lord sat, as Mark and Luke expressly state. While the horse was an animal of war, the donkey was used for purposes of peace. In the times of the Judges, and for a considerable time afterward, horses were not used at all by the Israelites, and so even distinguished persons rode on donkeys (Judg 5:10; 10:4; 12:14)-but not from any nobleness in that animal, or its being an emblem of royalty, as some say. 'Nor,' to use the words of Hengstenberg, 'in all our accounts of the donkeys of the East, of which we have a great abundance, is there a single example of an donkey being ridden by a king, or even a distinguished officer, on any state occasion; whereas here it is expressly in His royal capacity that the prophet says Jerusalem's King is to ride upon an ass.' And there are not wanting proofs, adduced by this able critic, that in the East the donkey was and is regarded with a measure of contempt.

And does not the fulfillment of the prophecy which we behold here itself show that lowliness was stamped upon the act, royal though it was? 'Into the same city,' adds the critic just quoted, 'which David and Solomon had so frequently entered on mules or horses richly caparisoned, and with a company of proud horsemen as their attendants, the Lord rode on a borrowed ass, which had never been broken in; the wretched clothing of His disciples supplying the place of a saddlecloth, and His attendants consisting of people, whom the world would regard as a mob and rabble.' This critic also, by an examination of the phrase used by the prophet, 'the foal of asses,' infers that it means a donkey still mostly dependent upon its mother, and regards the use of this as a mark of yet greater humiliation in a King. In short, it was the meekness of majesty which was thus manifested, entering the city with royal authority, yet waiving, during His humbled state, all the external grandeur that shall yet accompany that authority.

⁵⁰² Luke 19:28

⁵⁰³ Mark 10:32

⁵⁰⁴ Zech. 9:9

On this remarkable prophecy, so remarkably fulfilled, we notice two other points. First, the familiar and delightful name given to the chosen people, 'The daughter of Zion,' or, as we might conceive of it, 'the offspring of Zion's ordinances,' born and nursed amid its sanctities-deriving all their spiritual life from the Religion which had its center and seat in Zion; next, the prophetic call to the chosen people to 'Rejoice greatly' at this coming of their King to His own proper city. And the joy with which Jesus was welcomed on this occasion into Jerusalem was all the more striking a fulfillment of this prophecy, that it was far from being that intelligent, deep, and exultant welcome which the prophetic Spirit would have had Zion's daughter to give to her King. For if it was so superficial and fickle a thing as we know that it was, all the more does one wonder that it was so immense in its reach and volume; nor is it possible to account for it except by a wave of feeling-a mysterious impulse-sweeping over the mighty mass from above, in conformity with high arrangements, to give the King of Israel for once a visible, audible, glad welcome to His Own regal City."

Commenting on the parallel passage in Matthew, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "This entry into Jerusalem has been termed the triumph of Christ. It was indeed the triumph of humility over pride and worldly grandeur; of poverty over affluence; and of meekness and gentleness over rage and malice. He is coming now meek, full of kindness and compassion to those who were plotting his destruction! He comes to deliver up himself into their hands; their king comes to be murdered by his subjects, and to make his death a ransom price for their souls!"

In their quotation of Zechariah's prophecy, neither Matthew nor John intone the jubilation of the original invitation to rejoice. Yet in Zechariah's prophecy God had prepared the scene for great rejoicing. Evidently, the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not ready to receive their King. Luke emphasizes this by recording Jesus' weeping over the city. We read: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes.'"⁵⁰⁵ The people ought to have prepared Jesus' entry into the city with repentance and weeping, with sackcloth and ashes. There would have been joy in heaven had this occurred. Now, Jesus weeps while the people shouted for joy. Woe to him who laughs when God weeps! Zechariah's prophecy was evidently only partially fulfilled at this time.

The King of the universe entered Jerusalem on a borrowed foal in order to perform the greatest act that would ever be performed, making payment for the sin of mankind. The Roman generals who returned to Rome after a great victory made a very impressive display of might. But Jesus' entry is not a victory parade. Or is it? Never a greater victory was won than in the battle of Golgotha. God mocks our ideas of triumph, our demonstrations of might and glory. He mocks our parade horses by riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, a beast of burden. He again demonstrates that "the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."⁵⁰⁶

John only paints the scene in rough lines. He does not give us the details of Jesus' preparations for borrowing the animal as the other evangelists do. He does not even pay close attention to the sequence of events. Reading his account, we get the impression that it all started with the crowd's enthusiasm. The Synoptics correct this. They record that Jesus sent His disciples ahead to get a colt and that they took off their cloaks first to put them on the donkey. Jesus' borrowing of the foal, which John does not mention, is part of His humiliation. The Creator of heaven and earth had all the animals of the world at His disposal if He wished. The whole of creations belongs to Him. He is the owner, we are the borrowers. Our Lord shows in this His respect and love for mankind. He does not requisition, He asks.

A sudden and spontaneous change takes place in the disciples. As if touched by a magic wand they demonstrate a contagious enthusiasm. They put their cloaks not only on the donkey but also on the road on which Jesus will pass. Mark the contrast. The mother donkey walks ahead, according to Matthew's version,⁵⁰⁷ followed by the colt on which Jesus rides, as Zechariah predicted: "See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."⁵⁰⁸ The crowd confessed that He had performed the greatest miracles the world had ever seen. This scene is in essence not different from what John would later see in Revelation: "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this

⁵⁰⁵ Luke 19:41,42

⁵⁰⁶ I Cor. 1:25

⁵⁰⁷ Matt. 21:7

⁵⁰⁸ Zech. 9:9

name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁵⁰⁹ The form there is different but the content is the same.

We assume that the joy that was expressed by the crowd was not phony but genuine. The fact that Jesus’ triumphal entry turned out to be different from what the people expected does not mean that they misjudged Jesus. The people did not know themselves and they did not recognize the power of the adversary. They did not realize that there was an enormous obstacle between them and God that had to be removed first. The price of atonement had not yet been paid. Their joy may have been premature; it was not misplaced.

The shouts of joy are partially quotations from the Book of Psalms. In Psalm 118 we read: “O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.”⁵¹⁰ (The Hebrew, translated here “Save us” is *howshiy`aah naa`*). The evangelists each report a slightly different text for the shouts of the crowd. When we put together the pieces of the puzzle each of the evangelists gives us, we probably get the whole picture like this: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! Blessed is the King of Israel!” The complete text shows an amazing insight in the truth concerning the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The use of the word “blessed” is an indication that the crowd knew more about themselves than they were aware of. According to the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “the lesser person is blessed by the greater.”⁵¹¹ We see here how earth-bound creatures handle heavenly things by putting the blessing upon the head of Him to whom everything belongs. Man possessed this kind of authority before he fell into sin. But here the hands of sinful men stretch out to that which had been taken away from them. The influence of heaven upon earth is, at this moment, so great that fallen man suddenly becomes aware who he is. For one moment the grip of Satan is broken and man becomes what he is meant to be.

John observes that the disciples did not understand what actually happened at that moment. They did not link Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem to Zechariah’s prophecy. It was not until after Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit that things fell in place for them. By then they knew that Jesus had not come to Jerusalem to ascend the throne but to ascend the cross. They did not understand either the importance of Jesus’ entering the temple, which John does not mention. The glory of the Lord entered the house of the Lord, but the reaction of the Pharisees was: “See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!” No truer word was ever spoken by them!

5. Jesus’ Interview with the Greeks

12:20-36

The reason for the Father’s speaking from heaven in this section was an interview Jesus gave to some Greeks who had come to worship in Jerusalem. A superficial glance would make us think that Jesus refused to speak to those people, but a closer look convinces us that Jesus’ words about the grain of wheat that falls in the ground to die and bear fruit is directed at them. *Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament* gives the following elucidating explanation: “The selection of the ‘corn of wheat’ as an illustration acquires a peculiar interest from the fact of its being addressed to Greeks, familiar with the Eleusinian mysteries celebrated in their own country. These mysteries were based on the legend of Dionysus (Bacchus). According to the legend his original name was Zagreus. He was the son of Zeus (Jupiter) by his own daughter Persephone (Proserpina), and was destined to succeed to supreme dominion and to the wielding of the thunderbolt. The jealousy of Here (Juno), the wife of Zeus, incited the Titans against him; who killed him while he was contemplating his face in a mirror, cut up his body, and boiled it in a caldron, leaving only the heart. Zeus, in his wrath, hurled the Titans to Tartarus, and Apollo collected the remains of Zagreus and buried them. The heart was given to Semele, and Zagreus was born again from her under the form of Dionysus. The mysteries represented the original birth from the serpent, the murder and dismemberment of the child, and the revenge inflicted by Zeus; and the symbols exhibited—the dice, ball, top, mirror, and apple—signified the toys with which the Titans allured the child into their power. Then followed the restoration to life; Demeter (Ceres) the goddess of agriculture, the mother of food, putting the limbs together, and giving her maternal breasts to the child. All this was preparatory to the great Eleusinia, in which the risen Dionysus in the freshness of his second life was conducted from Athens to Eleusis in joyful procession. An ear of corn (grain), plucked in solemn silence, was exhibited to the initiated as the object of mystical contemplation, as the symbol of the god, prematurely killed, but, like the ear enclosing the seed-corn, bearing within himself the germ of a second life.”

Related to the above mysteries, was another one that *Vincent’s Word Studies* explains: “With this mingled the legend of Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, who was carried off by Pluto to the infernal world. The mother

⁵⁰⁹ Rev. 19:11-16

⁵¹⁰ Ps. 118:25

⁵¹¹ Heb. 7:7

wandered over the earth seeking her daughter, and having found her, applied to Zeus, through whose intervention Persephone, while condemned to Hades for a part of the year, was allowed to remain upon earth during the other part. Thus the story became the symbol of vegetation, which shoots forth in spring, and the power of which withdraws into the earth at other seasons of the year. These features of the mysteries set forth, and with the same symbol as that employed by Christ here, the crude pagan conception of life rising out of death.” The fact that Jesus used His knowledge of these “mysteries” to explain the Gospel to some pagans is especially interesting. It is amazing to see how our Lord clarifies His own death and resurrection to these Greeks who, by their association with Judaism lived in two separate worlds at the same time. He does this with a few words in such a way that they can understand it immediately. Speak about contextualisation!

These people were not Greek-speaking Jews but Greeks. This is obvious from the word *Hellenés* John uses to describe them. Since they had come up to Jerusalem to worship, we understand that they were proselytes. It is quite understandable why these Greeks wanted to meet Jesus. His popularity at this point was so immense that the Sanhedrin didn't know what to do with Him. A desire for sensation may also possibly have had something to do with this. If these people took Judaism seriously, they probably believed in the Judaist expectation of a Messiah as well. The polite manner in which they request an audience via Philip, would indicate that they had higher expectations than merely wanting to talk to a popular figure. G. Campbell Morgan, contrary to Vincent's opinion, believes that Jesus refused the interview. Some versions introduce Jesus' answer with “but.” The Greek uses the word *de*, which can mean either “but,” or “and.” What Jesus says to those people was meant for all to hear.

Philip seems to have hesitated introducing the Greeks to Jesus. The incident with the Greek, Syro-Phoenician woman may still have been fresh in his mind.⁵¹² The realization that Jesus “was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel”⁵¹³ stood clearly before his eyes. But Jesus made it clear that, in His death, He would draw all men unto Himself. With this statement, the limitation of salvation to the Jews is broken. The fact that Jesus stated that the true manner to see Him would be through His death and resurrection does not mean that these Greeks could not have seen Him in a physical way and that they would not have talked with Him.

Jesus introduces His statement with the words “The hour has come...” Jesus had mentioned the hour earlier, both in a positive and in a negative sense. This is the first time Jesus actually announces the hour. The Gospel makes mention of this twice again. We read: “It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.”⁵¹⁴ And as Jesus prayed His last prayer with the disciples, we read that He says: “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.”⁵¹⁵ It is the hour for which Jesus had come into this world. This was the most important reason for God's creation of time. It is, what the apostle Paul calls, “the fullness of the time.”⁵¹⁶

Jesus always speaks about His death, His resurrection, and His ascension as “The hour for the Son of Man to be glorified.” There is no trace of any negative feeling, even in the face of the deepest pain and suffering He would experience. He would even partake in our “Why?” when He knew Himself to be forsaken by the Father. Even His despair was part of His being glorified. Jesus' perfectly balanced attitude toward what awaited Him shows us the Perfect Man. Never do we see Him lightheartedly optimistic, as if He believed that He could take the reality of suffering in stride. He shuddered and recoiled before the precipice, but He never lost track of the balance between present suffering and future glory. He accepted, as the apostle Paul would write later, “that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”⁵¹⁷ He knew which weight would be the heavier.

Those were the words of Jesus the Greeks first heard. Whether Jesus addressed them directly, or whether they heard Him from a distance, or whether an intermediary passed on the words to them makes no difference. In saying those words, Jesus not only lifted the barrier death had placed between heaven and earth but also the barrier man had put up between himself and his fellowmen. Seeing Jesus, or getting to know Him under those circumstances, as the Greeks intended, would only have been partial and superficial. There would have been the same barrier that limits every man's field of vision. Because of sin, man can only incompletely know God and his fellowmen. Paul states correctly: “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”⁵¹⁸ In His death, Jesus opened the way to know fully and to be fully known. Paul contrasts knowing “according to the flesh” with being “a new creation.” We

⁵¹² Mark 7:24-30

⁵¹³ See Matt. 15:24

⁵¹⁴ ch. 13:1

⁵¹⁵ ch. 17:1

⁵¹⁶ Gal. 4:4 (NKJV)

⁵¹⁷ Rom. 8:18

⁵¹⁸ I Cor. 13:12

read: "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."⁵¹⁹ This means a breakthrough in our own life when we identify ourselves with the death of our Lord. The fact that those Greeks cannot have understood the depth of Jesus' words did not prevent Him from saying them. For them also it would be the Holy Spirit who would remind them of Jesus' words and who would guide them into all truth. Jesus addresses the Greeks as potential new creations.

Jesus had used the image of the grain of wheat in the Parable of the Sower, but there He had not clarified how the process of fruit bearing comes about. The fact that the kernel of wheat has to die in order to bear fruit is the key to the understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. Because Jesus gave Himself voluntarily into death, fruit is produced, not only in His own resurrection but also in the willingness of other people who follow Him in this act of surrender. It is only possible for us to give our lives for the Lord because He gave His life for us.

In the picture of the grain of wheat, Jesus speaks about Himself, first of all, as a human being. As God, He could not die, but as a man He could. Also in saying "The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life," He speaks primarily of Himself. As a man, He makes up the balance of His life. He had the choice to cling to His own life or to give it up. In all this, Jesus is not different from any of us. Every man is placed before that kind of choice in his life at some time. It is the most important choice we can ever make in life. As a matter of fact, it is the only real choice we ever make. The Lord involves us immediately in this crisis in which He finds Himself. The invitation: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be" is addressed, over the heads of these Greeks, to all of humanity. Following Jesus, in this context, means being willing to lose one's life in the process. "Where I am, my servant also will be" involves both His death and His resurrection. Serving Christ means following Him, it means putting ourselves at His disposal in all circumstances. This can only happen if we have discovered what it means that the Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us. As David says: "O LORD, truly I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant; you have freed me from my chains."⁵²⁰

The second part of vs. 26 "My Father will honor the one who serves me" is one of the most astounding statements in the whole New Testament. We are often so much influenced by demonic propaganda that we cannot picture man other than lying down in the mud. The fact that God would honor such a creature goes against the grain of our entire philosophy. If God honors us, He does nothing that is contrary to His own nature. In this also, God obeys His own laws. A human being who demonstrates love in giving his life for the Lord is an honorable human being. This norm is an objective one. The fact that such love can only be the result of God's grace in the life of a child of Adam does not diminish the value of that principle. Yet, it is difficult for us to imagine that the eternal God, who has the appearance of jasper and carnelian, would rise from His throne to greet and honor a mortal human being. The more we understand of the mystery of the Godhead, the more it will be a mystery to us.

At this moment, Jesus is overcome by a deep emotion. The mention of His death disturbs Him deeply. He is perfect man and His reaction of recoiling is perfectly human. Only a person who does not understand or one who is emotionally sick would react differently. Jesus' emotions do in no way diminish His heroism. He is no fearless hero but one who fears and yet acts. Jesus recoils both from the physical and the spiritual suffering that awaits Him. He knew that this world's godforsaken curse would be laid upon Him. He who thinks that such a feat would not affect him is a fool.

There is a parallel between the crisis Jesus experiences here and the one that would befall Him in Gethsemane. I am convinced that His prayer in Gethsemane was not to be released from the death on the cross that awaited Him but from the danger of a physical and emotional collapse before He would be able to take up the cross. At this point, it is the whole complex of suffering and death that faces Him. People who have ever experienced a clinical depression can understand some of the darkness that Jesus saw approaching. Everyone's prayer in such a condition is: "Father, save me from this hour!" Jesus considers the possibility of such a prayer and then decides against it. The prayer that leaves His lips is the only prayer that every suffering soul ought to say: "Father, glorify your name!" This prayer is heard immediately. The prayer itself is part of the answer. Jesus' attitude is not a listless acceptance of the unavoidable but a positive acknowledgment of that which the Father gives Him. Such an attitude always glorifies God. Jesus' resurrection is in part the result of the victory that is embodied in this prayer.

For the third time in our Lord's life, the Father answers the Son in public in the form of an audible voice from heaven. At His baptism, we read: "A voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am

⁵¹⁹ II Cor. 5:16,17 (NKJV)

⁵²⁰ Ps. 116:16

well pleased.’ ⁵²¹ And on the Mount of Transfiguration, we read: “While [Peter] was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!’” ⁵²² It is difficult to correctly interpret the importance of this event. A similar revelation took place only once in the Old Testament, when Israel was at the foot of Mount Sinai. The hearing of this voice here could have been a life changing experience for the people who heard it, but it was not. Only a few days later they would crucify the One to whom God had thus spoken.

The Father’s voice said: “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” The prevailing thought is that the Father had glorified His Name, first of all in creation. David says in the Psalms: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” ⁵²³ And, “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.” ⁵²⁴ And Paul concurs with this in Romans by stating: “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.” ⁵²⁵ “I will glorify it again” pertains to what the Son is about to achieve in His death and resurrection. This second glorification surpasses the first. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” ⁵²⁶

In the first glorification of His Name, God demonstrated His power and His majesty, in the second His love and His holiness. He demonstrates His holiness in that sin is taken care of in man. Love is demonstrated in the fact that this man in whom sin is eliminated is God Himself. The death of Jesus Christ glorifies God. Every person who surrenders himself in death for His sake, glorifies the Father, how much more then would the death of Him who “did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,” ⁵²⁷ bring glory to the Father. The Father is proud of His Son. In the light of the pressure Jesus experienced, both in being overwhelmed by this emotion and as well as being attacked by the Evil One, this prayer, “Father, glorify your name!” is particularly moving.

God spoke to and through His Son but most of the people present did not hear what was said. They thought it had thundered. Even if it had only been thunder, it ought to have made those people think. Jesus states specifically that the voice was not for His benefit but for the audience. This does not mean that Jesus did not benefit from the Father’s speaking. For Him, it was a confirmation of His faith and an answer to His prayer. His faith probably did not need confirmation. That is most likely what Jesus means when He says: “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.” The Father’s testimony was meant to convince the Jews that their Messiah had come. The very fact that God spoke thus is proof that the people’s hardening of heart, which resulted in Jesus’ rejection, was not God’s plan, although He worked it into His plan. The voice was primarily meant to convince the bystanders of the fact that Jesus was who He said to be: the Messiah. The scribes ought to have understood immediately that this voice was the fulfillment of what God had announced to Moses: “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.” ⁵²⁸ This is the reason the Lord says that it is the time for judgment on this world and that the devil who kept people from hearing would be driven out. After Jesus’ death, at which Satan made so much noise, he was driven out and it became quiet enough in the hearts of men to hear the voice of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Until that time, man could not even hear what the thunderclap said.

It is amazing to see again how infallibly Jesus analyzes the situation here. There is no trace with Him of bewilderment, of not knowing what to do. He is completely master of the state of affairs. Any other human being would have been completely stunned when God spoke.

The expression “when I am lifted up from the earth” must be understood as a euphemism for the crucifixion. That is the way John comprehended it, as did the bystanders. In more than one sense this deepest humiliation was an elevation for our Lord. It stands for the most impressive demonstration of obedience and for the uttermost expression of love. It also makes us surmise that it means that God is holy. The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of world history in which all the lines converge. When the Lord says that He will draw all men to Himself in His death on the cross, it does not mean that all will be saved, whether they want to be or not. Those who came to see the crucifixion when it took place came more because of a hunger for sensation than for any other reason. The attraction of the cross does not mean that it is attractive. Jesus’ drawing of man is, first of all, a

⁵²¹ Matt. 3:17

⁵²² Matt. 17:5

⁵²³ Ps. 19:1

⁵²⁴ Ps. 8:1

⁵²⁵ Rom. 1:20

⁵²⁶ I Cor. 2:9

⁵²⁷ See Phil. 2:6

⁵²⁸ Ex. 19:9

placing of man before his own responsibility to choose. We are all included in His death because He died as the representative of all men. As Adam represented all of mankind when he sinned, so Jesus makes the payment for all.

Secondly, He drew the load of sin each individual carries upon Himself. In the words of Isaiah: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."⁵²⁹ When Jesus went down into the deepest depths, all the trash of the world was dumped upon Him.

Then there is the subjective attraction for the individual who understands that Jesus died out of love, but we cannot say that every individual is attracted to this aspect.

John's comment that those words referred to Jesus' crucifixion are more than an explanation of what it means to be lifted up. He means to show the real meaning of Jesus' death in that it would draw all men to Himself. There will come a moment in the history of this world when, in Paul's words, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."⁵³⁰ At that time, Jesus' prophecy will be completely fulfilled. That final victory can then be traced back to the few hours during which Jesus hung between heaven and earth. That will be the real elevation. The confession of every tongue, which Paul mentions, will be a spontaneous conclusion of all free individuals who have come to the discovery of the reality. God will not use puppets for the glorification of His Son.

The reaction of Jesus' audience is amazing. They evidently understood that Jesus spoke about a crucifixion. Their problem was that they did not understand the Word of God. They believed to have the correct interpretation of the law, but their own sinful condition prevented them from seeing their own desperate condition which screamed for a solution. They never saw the Messiah as a Lamb that was led to the slaughterer. They acted as if they did not understand about whom Jesus was talking, as if there could be some misunderstanding. Part of the irony of the situation is that the audience uses the expression "this Son of Man" as synonymous with "the Christ." What they literally ask is, "doesn't 'Son of Man' mean 'son of Adam?'" They all were Adam's descendants and they ask the question who is this "Son of Adam?" At the same time, this confusion demonstrates the depth of the expression Jesus uses. They look for a man who is more man than they are.

Jesus does not answer their question; that would not have been necessary. They could just as well have asked where the sun was. A few months earlier, Jesus had answered the same question. The Jews had asked the question: "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.'⁵³¹ Such answer would have had no effect in this situation. Here Jesus only issues the warning that the time is short and that soon He will no longer be with them. Then they will be left alone in their darkness.

This is the fourth time in John's Gospel that Jesus presents Himself as the light. The first time, in chapter 8, we read that He said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."⁵³² The second time, at the healing of the man born blind, we read: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world," and " 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.' Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?' Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.' "⁵³³ The third time, Jesus used the same words in connection with the resurrection of Lazarus. We read: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world's light. It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light."⁵³⁴ It was on the basis of these pronouncements that John could write in his prologue: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it... The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world."⁵³⁵ In every instance the darkness rejected the light. On this occasion also, Jesus' words failed to have any effect upon the people. Jesus gives to them the only advice that could be given. Only a few hours remained before His crucifixion. He advises them to benefit from His presence by exposing themselves to the light that could reveal their sin that ought to be confessed and from which they ought to turn. Jesus' words were a call for these people to come to themselves before they arrive at the point where they no longer know what they are doing.

⁵²⁹ Isa. 53:6

⁵³⁰ Phil. 2:10,11

⁵³¹ See ch. 10:24-26

⁵³² ch. 8:12

⁵³³ ch. 9:4,5,39-41

⁵³⁴ ch. 11:9-10

⁵³⁵ ch. 1:3-5, 9

Becoming “sons of light” does not only mean to be shined upon by the light but also to experience the lasting transformation that the light brings about in one’s life. We read in the Prologue that light brings forth life. Light produces a transformation, a transition from death into life. Paul writes to the Ephesians: “All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.’”⁵³⁶ Jesus issues this call before the coming of the Holy Spirit who would make this arising from the dead possible.

Again we have to say that we don’t know what would have happened, had the people accepted Jesus’ invitation. It is sure that something would have happened because Jesus’ words did not constitute an empty gesture. We only know that their rejection increased their moral and legal guilt. This rejection removed the last obstacle before the crucifixion.

For us, who live on the other side of Pentecost, Jesus’ words have an especially deep meaning. We are now in His presence and we have to let His light shine upon our lives and we must walk in the light. Paul admonishes us to “put on the armor of light.” In Romans, we read: “And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”⁵³⁷

As in chapter 8, where Jesus presented Himself as the light of the world, so here this section ends with the mention that He hid himself from them. The light that was rejected, that was not perceived by man, now becomes invisible to man. The Gospel does not mention here that Jesus’ life was in danger, as it was in chapter eight.⁵³⁸ Jesus’ hiding himself leaves the people in the dark. This is part of God’s silence in this world, which John mentions in the last verses of this chapter.

6. John’s Comment on the Reaction of the People to Jesus’ Ministry

12:37-43

John’s amazed comment on the people’s reaction to Jesus’ ministry is: “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.” Out of the overwhelming number of miracles Jesus performed, John had only selected eight miraculous signs to include in his Gospel. Each of those miracles provided enough material proof of the truth of Jesus’ claims about Himself. The Pharisees rejected, not some of those miracles, but all of them.

John sees in the attitude of the Jews a fulfillment of two prophecies uttered by Isaiah. The first one is from chapter 53, in which the prophet foretold the Messiah’s suffering and death: “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”⁵³⁹ The second from the chapter that reports Isaiah’s call, where God gives him the message to pass on to the people: “Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”⁵⁴⁰ The difference between the original text in Isaiah and John’s quotation of the first part is probably due to the fact that John quoted the Greek text from the Septuagint. The second quote is more a paraphrase than a literal quote.

We find Isaiah’s words: “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed”; also in Matthew’s Gospel in connection with Jesus’ use of parables, Jesus says: “In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”⁵⁴¹ The words “this people’s heart has become calloused” clearly put the blame on the people. In Isaiah’s text, we read: “Make the heart of this people calloused,” putting the brunt on Isaiah. But in John’s quotation it is presented to us as an act of God: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts...” This does not imply that God took the initiative for the hardening of the people’s heart. As in the classic example of Pharaoh, God makes irreversible what

⁵³⁶ Eph. 5:13,14 (NKJV)

⁵³⁷ Rom. 13:11-14

⁵³⁸ See ch. 8:59

⁵³⁹ Isa. 53:1

⁵⁴⁰ Isa. 6:9,10

⁵⁴¹ Matt. 13:14,15

man has begun himself. This is illustrated in the experience of King Jeroboam of whom we read: "When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, 'Seize him!' But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back."⁵⁴² Isaiah's words also imply that, if people would really repent, healing would be unavoidable. We gather this from the words: "Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

The words from the chapter of Isaiah's call form the core of the message the prophet received in his vision of God in the temple. John explains that the glory Isaiah saw was the glory of Jesus Christ before His incarnation. John's personal comment on Isaiah's prophecy reveals his profound spiritual insight into the message of the Old Testament, as well as in the person of Jesus Christ. Nobody experience Jesus' love so personally, and knew our Lord so intimately as the apostle John. He testified: "We have seen his glory."⁵⁴³ John said this, not only about the supernatural manifestation in Jesus' life, as Peter referred to,⁵⁴⁴ but also in regard to Jesus' girding Himself with a towel to wash the disciples' feet, in regard to His breaking of the bread. How it is possible that one person sees glory in everyday events and another doesn't is something that is beyond my comprehension.

John analyzes the attitude of his contemporaries quite acutely. There were among the leaders of the people some who believed in Jesus; it was quite a good number actually. But they considered the price that had to be paid when following Jesus too high. They knew who He was and they knew what it would cost them, but in their shortsightedness, they refused the offer. They had been conditioned for instant success. Peer pressure can be an enormous obstacle for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. John's comment that "they loved praise from men more than praise from God" is based on Jesus' own words earlier: "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?"⁵⁴⁵ We are also reminded of Paul's words: "If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."⁵⁴⁶ Receiving peer approval is important in the life of every person. Only the understanding of the reality of God's presence, which is more real than the presence of men, can free us from the need of seeking approval from our fellowmen. It is only in the light of God that we can see that the majority can be wrong. Asaph came to that conclusion in the psalms and he said: "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."⁵⁴⁷ God's presence will change our perspectives.

It is possible that Jesus' words in verses 44 and 45 were not uttered at the moment John just described but that they form a compilation of Jesus' most important utterances. As such they would form part of John's comment on the situation. G. Campbell Morgan's commentary *The Gospel According to John and Vincent's New Testament Word Study* agree with this. A large portion of the prologue of this Gospel is based on these words. If these words are in fact a compilation of Jesus' sayings, they may have been uttered at various occasions, and thus they became engraved in John's memory.

Jesus not only identifies Himself with the Father but also the Father with Himself. Jesus would address the disciples a few days later in the same way: "Trust in God; trust also in me" and "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."⁵⁴⁸ Even from our distance, we can imagine what consternation those words must have caused. To those who draw a line of absolute separation between God and creation, such words form an insurmountable obstacle. What Jesus says here means that we can recognize God in His creation. But He says much more. His eternal power and divine character are revealed in the man Jesus Christ but also His love and grace.

We will never be able to behold God in a physical manner, not even in heaven. God is Spirit, and we can only approach Him spiritually. But in Jesus Christ, God reveals Himself in a way that is accessible to our senses. There is something of God visible in every human being. In that sense, Jesus showed more of the Father because He is more fully man. But He reveals much more since He is God revealed in the flesh. There is, in our comprehension, a danger that our concept of Christ's humanity suffers under our notion of His divinity. We do this automatically, because we have thus been conditioned by sin. We make progress if we can distinguish a balance between His two natures and if we let God's revelation of Himself in the perfect man Jesus be what it is.

⁵⁴² I Kings 13:4

⁵⁴³ ch. 1:14

⁵⁴⁴ See II Peter 1:16-18

⁵⁴⁵ ch. 5:44

⁵⁴⁶ Gal. 1:10

⁵⁴⁷ Ps. 73:16, 17

⁵⁴⁸ ch. 14:1, 9

It is significant that, in Jesus' words, seeing follows believing. We need a certain amount of "seeing" in order to believe, or better a certain amount of "hearing." There has to be enough perception to gain insight. The hearing of God's Word works confidence in God. Faith, after all, means entrusting oneself to God, placing oneself under His protection. It is absolutely not true that faith would be a leap in the dark, contrary to the logical testimony of our senses. I am grateful to Francis Schaeffer who unmasked this deception of our time. The Word of God is a logical and reasonable basis for our faith. Jesus' call for the faith of the people of His time was not illogical or unreasonable. Every one could have understood that a man who heals people that are born blind and who raises people from the dead, speaks the truth when He claims to be sent by God.

With those words Jesus leads us further than the undeniable truth about His mission; He allows us to take steps that increase the light for us. Faith comes from insight. In as much as we entrust ourselves to Him, the scales will fall from our eyes. Suspicion makes a person blind. If the Jews had not been so suspicious, they would have had no difficulty in accepting Jesus for what He claimed to be. The basis for their suspicion was their own unreliability. The person who, on the basis of his faith in God, puts his trust in Jesus, will perceive that faith goes in two directions. It goes from us via the Father to the Son and via the Son to the Father. In that manner our understanding of the Father's character will increase.

We can imagine what those words must have meant for those who saw Jesus before their eyes. For those who believed, they were the deepest truth ever expressed in human language. What do they mean for us, who having not seen, yet believe? For us who can reconstruct the images of Christ from the Gospel records, we not only clearly hear the words but we also add glory to them. Our Lord is now the risen Savior, as John saw Him at Patmos. Maybe the softer light that shines here from Jesus' perfect humanity speaks more clearly than the blinding light of His glorious resurrection.

Jesus shows us here the application of the whole complex of God's revelation. The light that shines directs its beam upon the world; it is meant for men. God's self revelation has, of course, value in its own right, regardless of whether people believe in it or not. The person who believes draws value from it and becomes more valuable himself. The person who does not believe loses his own value. Yet, God's revelation of Himself cannot be separated from mankind. In Jesus Christ, God has addressed mankind. The light shines into this world for the purpose of redeeming man from his darkness. Peter states that God called us "out of darkness into his wonderful light."⁵⁴⁹

This light means redemption. It is not a cold, analytical light, but a warm glow that produces life because it springs from Life itself. "That life was the light of men."⁵⁵⁰ The light came for the purpose of drawing every person who believes out of the darkness. The primary goal is to draw believers, not unbelievers. The light penetrates the heart of the believer and accomplishes its work of delivering man from the power of the devil. Jesus told Nicodemus: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."⁵⁵¹ Jesus was always conscious of this fact that His ministry was not a ministry of condemnation but of redemption. He did not come as an accuser; that is the role Satan plays. The sender of the Paraklete is on our side. When I turned to the Lord for the first time in my life, He lifted the load of guilt from my shoulders and made clear to me that He was not willing to talk about it any longer. It is true that, in Paul's words "God is for us."⁵⁵² God does not condemn us because we are human beings. Whether we accept Him or not, He will never condemn us. On the Day of Judgment man will condemn himself by means of the Word of God he has heard. In order to understand what Jesus says here, we have to go back to chapter 5 of this Gospel. There He said: "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"⁵⁵³ Jesus does not speak there to irreligious people but to Jews who claim to maintain a positive attitude toward the Word of God. Jesus' oral statements are not different from the written Word of the Old Testament.

Jesus identifies Himself with the Father. Believing in Him means believing in the Father, seeing Him means seeing the Father. He also identifies His words with the Word of God, which the Jews confessed to adhere to. He also identifies Himself with man in His complete dependence upon God. He came into this world as a man in complete obedience to the Creator. In rejecting Jesus, the Jews rejected all three facets of the testimony Jesus had confirmed irrefutably by providing and abundance of the most astounding miracles. This concludes Jesus' public ministry. The rest of this Gospel deals with His sacrificial death.

⁵⁴⁹ I Peter 2:9

⁵⁵⁰ ch. 1:4

⁵⁵¹ ch. 3:17

⁵⁵² See Rom. 8:31

⁵⁵³ ch. 5:45-47

Part Four: The Preparation of the Disciples**(13:1--17:26)****I. The Preparation in the Upper Room (a)**

13:1-38

John gives us the most complete description of this part of Jesus' suffering. He does not mention the actual Passover meal, but he offers us the moving account of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, and in the following chapters 14-17, a rather complete account of the table conversation and the exchange on the way to Gethsemane as well as Jesus' last prayer. In the early stages of my Christian life, these chapters were for me the most important parts of the whole Bible.

One problem here is that John opens this chapter with the words: "It was just before the Passover Feast." There can be no doubt about it but the meal John describes is the same Last Supper that is mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on this: "[Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.] Or, as some translate, Now Jesus having known, before the feast of the Passover, that his hour was come, etc. The supper mentioned in John 13:2 is supposed to have been that on the Thursday evening, when the feast of the Passover began; and though, in our common translation, this passage seems to place the supper before that feast, yet, according to the amended translation, what is here said is consistent with what we read in the other evangelists. See Matt 26:2; John 12:1." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "This raises questions. Was the meal in the upper room a fellowship meal, or was it truly the Passover? In two other passages John seems to say that the Passover had not yet come (John 13:29; 18:28). It is clear from the Synoptics that Jesus and the disciples did eat the Passover. This dating in John may represent a protest against the official Jewish observance of the day, on the ground of following a different calendar, in line with the practice of the Qumran sect... Another possibility is that the Passover as still future are to be explained as references to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was sometimes called the Passover (Luke 22:1). This began immediately after Passover and continued for a week. Even so, the meal referred to here seems to have been held before the Passover, whether it be regarded as a proper observance of the annual feast or not." It is also quite possible that John followed the Roman calculation of time, which would consider the evening to precede the next day, instead of the Jewish reckoning of the day beginning at sunset.

The Greek text in *The Interlinear Transliterated Bible* reads literally: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when knew Jesus that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved which were his own in the world, unto the end he loved them." This sounds clumsier to us than the more polished rendering of the NIV. John's more or less awkward style conveys a sense of emotion that is lost in more modern translations. It was obviously Jesus' knowing that the hour of His death had come, which made well up in Him this extreme love for His disciples. This is a very human reaction. A man who knows he is going to die is freed from all dullness in his look upon life. The fog lifts and the focus becomes clear. Although Jesus had always reacted unerringly to every situation in His life, this sharpening of the senses in the hour of death occurred in Him also. The words "He loved them to the end" indicate not a measure of time but of degree. The NIV brings this out more clearly with: "he now showed them the full extent of his love." The French translation of Louis Segond reads: "He demonstrated the extreme measure of His love."⁵⁵⁴ *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* does not agree with this interpretation. We read: "The phrase may mean at last, and so is rendered by many here, as Meyer, Lange, Thayer (Lexicon). 'At last He loved them;' that is, 'showed them the last proof of His love.' ... But I am inclined, with Meyer, to shrink from the 'inappropriate gradation' which is thus implied, as though Jesus' love now reached a higher degree than before... Hence, I prefer the rendering 'at last, or finally He loved them,' taking *eegapeesen* ...), loved, in the sense of the 'manifestation' of His love. This sense frequently attaches to the verb." In the context of Jesus' humanity, however, it seems logical to suppose that His love was subject to fluctuation, as was His foreknowledge.

What Jesus does here for His disciples is a demonstration of the full measure of His love for them, including Judas. This becomes even more meaningful as we consider Jesus' act of washing the disciples' feet to be symbolic of the total of the surrender of Himself in His suffering and death.

John expresses the depth of Jesus' suffering and death positively with the words: "the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father." Our Lord could have recoiled in terror before what awaited Him, but He did not cede one inch of ground to the devil. The way Jesus approaches His death is part of the victory. This is the real *Power of Positive Thinking*.

⁵⁵⁴ Il a mis le comble a son amour.

Jesus did not only have to gain the victory in His death and suffering, He also had to face the immediate circumstances. Satan had already put his hand on Judas as well as on the other disciples. He “had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.” As far as the other disciples are concerned, Luke tells us: “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.”⁵⁵⁵ The upper room in which the Last Supper was about to be celebrated was filled with darkness. There was the darkness of demons and the darkness of the flesh. The angel of death who had done his rounds in Egypt on the night of the first Passover had entered the room and the blood had to be applied to the doorposts with haste. The next day the true Passover Lamb would be killed but something had to be done immediately to stem the flood of evil. Jesus did this a little later in the evening in the celebration of the Last Supper, but first He opposed the devil and the flesh by taking a towel and a basin with water. Both are symbolic of His death.

Without any further explanation, John states that Jesus got up from the meal. We are not told what meal was being served. Evidently, John supposes that this is understood. The other Gospels inform us of the fact that Judas had already conceived the plan to deliver Jesus in the hands of His enemies a few days earlier in the house of Simon the leper.⁵⁵⁶ When John states that “the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus,” it doesn’t mean that Judas received that inspiration during the Passover celebration.

John’s sentence construction accentuates the greatness of Jesus’ act. Jesus knew what Judas planned to do. Yet, there are no negative thoughts in Jesus’ mind. John puts the positive emphasis on Jesus’ relationship with the Father. The words “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God” almost read as if Jesus needed to put some heart into Himself. This may actually have been the case. In the confused atmosphere caused by the presence of Satan himself and by the carnal attitude of the disciples, our Lord had to define sharply His own position in order not to fall under the ban of evil. He says again to Himself: “I know who I am; I know from where I came and where I am going.” Thus Jesus lays the foundation for His own humiliation.

It is impossible for a lowly person to humble himself. Humility does not merely mean occupying a lowly position but purposely giving up a high position. The nobility of humility lies in the giving up of nobility. The way John describes the scene, “he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” This converts these everyday acts into a sacrament. Strangely enough, except for some isolated cases, this act of Jesus never maintained its place among the sacraments of the church. Jesus’ intent was obviously not in the first place to clean the disciples’ feet, but to teach them to humble themselves before one another. If the ritual had become a sacrament, it would soon have lost its value. Maybe we should say that Jesus, not so much elevated the act from its everyday level to a height of eternity, but rather that He demonstrated the value of everyday acts of humility. Sin makes us get into a rut. We have to understand that the rut is within us, not in the acts we perform. To our Lord, every act was meaningful and holy because all He did was to focus on the Father. In principle, we can all do what Jesus did here. In the words of the apostle Paul: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”⁵⁵⁷

It is difficult to determine where Luke’s version of the conversation among the disciples fits in this Passover celebration. It is possible that the washing of the disciples’ feet was the answer to their question “as to which of them was considered to be greatest.”⁵⁵⁸ But their quarrel may also have been the result of Jesus’ act. The disciples will have looked at each other to see who of them would be a suitable candidate for the task that normally only a slave would perform. This would automatically elevate the others to a higher rank.

We get the impression that the disciples were so flabbergasted that they were unable to say a word and they let Jesus go on with His task. How many disciples’ feet Jesus washed until He got to Peter, we don’t know. But obviously Peter is the only one who remonstrates. Whatever Peter may have thought earlier about himself and the others, he is convinced that Jesus is not the least of all of them. He loves Jesus and he is embarrassed by the fact that Jesus kneels before him and humbles Himself. That is praiseworthy in Peter’s reaction. But he understands little of the depth of Jesus’ act and of the background of Jesus’ attitude. To Jesus, this washing of the disciples’ feet is inseparable with His dying for mankind. That deepest humiliation is the basis of all other humiliations. Although Peter could not see this relationship, he understands intuitively that what Jesus does for him does not do him any credit. In a way it is easier for a person to give his life for someone else than to have someone give his life for him. How is it possible to accept that and then look yourself in the eyes without realizing that all your human dignity is

⁵⁵⁵ Luke 22:24

⁵⁵⁶ See Matt. 26:1-16

⁵⁵⁷ I Cor. 10:31

⁵⁵⁸ See Luke 22:24

gone? Jesus' humility is much more humiliating for us than we realize. We rebel against it. It reduces our ego to nothing. That is the reason for Peter's rebellion and for ours also.

Jesus tries to explain to Peter that he will understand it later, appealing to Peter's trust in Him. Jesus' words: "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" could be written above the lives of each of us. The only reasonable attitude we can maintain before God is that His plan for our life is good and that we can put our trust in Him, whether we understand what He does with us or not. The promise that one day we will understand is more than we could hope for. It is often difficult for man who is born and raised in an atmosphere of sin, to trust that what God does for him is the unfolding of a well-conceived plan. Two factors work together in this: our faulty interpretation of our circumstances and our suspicion of God's motives. The two are closely related, but the latter is the worst of the two. There is no in-between position in our relationship with God; either we fully trust Him or we believe that God has ulterior motives.

Peter may not have been aware of his suspicion. He was temporarily blinded by what he saw. But wrong interpretations are always based on a lack of trust. Thus sin enters our thoughts.

The only answer Jesus could give Peter was that, without the washing of his feet, Peter would have no part of Jesus, because the foot washing was part of the whole complex of what Jesus did in atoning for Peter's sin. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁵⁵⁹ Serving and giving His life is mentioned in the same breath. We cannot accept the price Jesus paid for our salvation without daily accepting that He serves us and provides for our needs. It may take time before we understand the depth of Jesus' words: "Apart from me you can do nothing."⁵⁶⁰ It is important to realize, not only that God "did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us," but also that "along with him, [He will] graciously give us all things."⁵⁶¹ We ought to accept both part of our salvation consistently. Peter did not understand what Jesus did for him at that moment, but he would understand it later.

He also understood little of Jesus' play on words. When Peter began to exaggerate by insisting that Jesus wash him from top to toe, Jesus answered: "That I did already." This is not what we read literally, but that is what is meant with the words: "you are clean." Later in the evening, Jesus will say: "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you."⁵⁶² Although Jesus had not died yet physically, spiritually the fact had been established in eternity. "The Lamb was slain from the creation of the world."⁵⁶³ We cannot say that Jesus' death at Golgotha was merely a shadow of what happened in heaven. It was, however, more than anything else that happens in this world, a physical expression of a heavenly reality. In this case, the shadow and the reality coincide. Everything that happens in this life is a shadow of a spiritual invisible reality, but in most cases the spiritual part could exist, even though there were no earthly shadow. This cannot be said about Jesus' death on the cross. In this, the heavenly reality and the earthly event were fused in one. Our Lord could, on the basis of the fact that the Lamb was slain from the creation of the world, always reach forward to the work to be finished on earth. This is what He does here also; He says: "you are clean."

Before we have a closer look at this tremendous statement, we have to examine Jesus' play-on-words. In the sentence, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean" two Greek words are used. The first, *louo*, means, "to bathe (the whole person); whereas the second, *nipto* means, "to cleanse," "to wet a part only (especially the hands or the feet or the face)." There is a short parable hidden in Jesus' words. In the atonement through Jesus Christ, we receive a complete cleansing. The apostle Paul calls this "the washing of regeneration." We read in his Epistle to Titus: "According to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁶⁴ Following this complete cleansing comes our living by grace, in which we allow the Lord to daily serve and cleans us. This is the part that is hardest to accept for our human pride. This short parable emphasizes how much Jesus' act of humbling Himself is part of His complete sacrifice on the cross. If we refuse this part of Jesus' work for us, we refuse it all. Living by grace is a humbling experience for us; it is crushing for our human disposition. This implies that, not only the great facts of our eternal salvation and justification are immediately related to Jesus' death, but also the smaller things, the answers to our daily prayers are. The second minute of patience we may display, our suddenly paying attention to a need before us, our going the second mile all consist by the grace of the cross. This makes our daily prayers for the smaller things in life an awesome, but also a secure matter.

⁵⁵⁹ Matt. 20:28

⁵⁶⁰ ch. 15:5

⁵⁶¹ Rom. 8:32

⁵⁶² ch. 15:3

⁵⁶³ Rev. 13:8

⁵⁶⁴ Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

In His explanation of the event, the Lord emphasizes that His act of humility is closely related to the fact that He is "Lord and Teacher." That is what gives this foot washing its value. If it were not the Lord of glory who stooped down here, we would have passed the event without paying attention. It seems unfitting that Jesus says: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." In saying this, Jesus elevates His disciples to knighthood. The very fact that Jesus expects us to perform acts of humility places us on the highest level. We encounter the same miracle in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."⁵⁶⁵ The Lord places us on the level of Adam when God first created him in His image and likeness. He leads us beyond that because we will bear the image of the glorified Lord. Nobility will demonstrate itself, both for us as for Him, in acts of humble and loving service for others to the point of being ready to give our lives for our fellowmen. Everyone who gives his life for the other merits a crown.

When Jesus says: "No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" He does, of course, not refer to the rank. The idea is that the servant will not be exempt from the things that overcome the master. If the Master is crucified, the servants cannot expect to go scot-free. Jesus says the same here as what He had said when He sent the disciples out as witnesses for the Gospel. We read in Matthew: "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."⁵⁶⁶ We will share in His humiliation. The words "It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master" refer not only to humiliation but also to elevation. Knowing this is not enough; doing them is important. "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." Let us not miss the blessing.

The conversation Luke records in his Gospel fits in somewhere at this point.⁵⁶⁷ Jesus probably got up to perform the foot washing when the disciples began to dispute among themselves, and the rest of the conversation evolved after the Lord got back to the table. Jesus contrasts the mentality of the Kingdom of Heaven with that of the kingdom of men. Human power is based on self-assertion; the power of the Kingdom of God rests on self-denial. In the first parable about the Kingdom of Heaven, the grain of wheat falls in the ground and dies in order to bring forth fruit. The principle of the human potentate is to claim the lives of his subjects for himself. God's Kingdom is founded on the basis that the King gives His life for His subjects. Serving and self-sacrifice belong together. The principle of leadership is serving. One cannot lead without serving. This is all expressed more clearly in Luke's record of the conversation.

We indicated above that humility presupposes a high rank. This is very clear in Luke's version, in which Jesus says: "And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." No higher office exists than what our Lord offers here to His disciples. It is that position that allows us to be humble.

Judas was still present when Jesus spoke those words. John quotes Jesus' warning to Judas more completely than the other Gospel writers. Matthew records Jesus' words as: "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."⁵⁶⁸ In John's Gospel, Jesus confirms this with quotations from the Psalms: "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."⁵⁶⁹ It sounds as if Jesus' foreknowledge of Judas' betrayal rested mainly on His insight in that prophecy. Jesus' words convey a deep sense of disappointment in Judas. It is true that Jesus did not trust human nature. John had recorded earlier that "Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man."⁵⁷⁰ That does not mean that Jesus did not seek to have fellowship with his fellowmen. Judas had been included in the circle of Jesus' disciples. Our Lord had given His love to him as He had to John. They had shared together the hardships and joys of those three years of itinerant ministry. Judas was no stranger; he had been one of Jesus' intimate friends. But at the moment that they ate and drank together, he planned Jesus' murder. We hear it presented sometimes as if, because of some weak spot in Judas' character, a misunderstanding had arisen in Judas' heart about Jesus' political role, which made Judas falter. But we shouldn't try to smooth over Judas' crime. He intended to murder Jesus and he covered this up with a cloak of benevolence, accepting the piece of bread Jesus gave him and

⁵⁶⁵ Matt. 5:3

⁵⁶⁶ Matt. 10:24-26

⁵⁶⁷ See Luke 22:24-38

⁵⁶⁸ Matt. 26:21

⁵⁶⁹ Ps. 41:9

⁵⁷⁰ ch. 2:24,25

giving Him the kiss of death. Judas' borrowing of elements of love to cover a complex of hatred must have hurt Jesus deeply.

Jesus' warning to him was obviously intended to make Judas change his mind. We should not suppose for one moment that Jesus was not sincere in issuing his warning. His deep emotion is proof of the fact that He honestly wanted Judas to change. The warning is also meant to prepare the other disciples for the great trauma that awaited them. The statement: "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He" is proof of this.

It would be useless to speculate what would have happened if Judas had changed his mind. According to Matthew, Jesus said: "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him."⁵⁷¹ But this does not necessarily mean that the fulfillment of the Scriptures was unavoidable, as if Judas had no personal responsibility in the matter.

The reaction of the disciples to Jesus' announcement is very moving. They are deeply shocked in their self-confidence. They all believe themselves to be capable of doing this. Strangely enough Peter considers himself to be capable of betraying Jesus, but he does not believe his Master when he is told that he will deny Jesus. Such inconsistencies are not uncommon to our human nature. From the disciples' reaction we see that they do not exactly understand what Jesus means with betrayal. They had no idea that Judas could already have received thirty pieces of silver. Judas' question, Surely not I, Rabbi?⁵⁷² was, of course, pure hypocrisy.

John does not mention the disciples' questioning of Jesus but he relates the fact that Peter nudges him to use his influence with the Master to find out who is meant. The dipping in of the bread in the dish was not necessarily an indication who the betrayer was. There is a seeming discrepancy between the synoptic account and John's version. Matthew merely states that Judas dipped his hand into the bowl in which Jesus also dipped His piece of bread.⁵⁷³ Jesus' dipping the bread in the dish and handing it to Judas was in response to John's question. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The act of Jesus was almost contemporaneous with the 'Thou sayest it' of the synoptists. It was twofold in meaning, explaining to John what he wished to know for Peter's sake, and giving Judas one more gracious chance to repent and believe in the Divinity of love rather than that of display, power, and pomp." Obviously, none of the disciples had heard Jesus' reply to Judas, otherwise John's inquiry would make no sense. John records his very personal recollection of the moment. He was the one positioned closed to Jesus at the table. The NIV reads: "reclining next to him." The KJV reads: "leaning on Jesus' bosom." This is the first time in this Gospel John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved."⁵⁷⁴ When Peter hints to John to ask Jesus, John puts his head on Jesus breast and whispers the question in His ear. Jesus must have whispered back His answer, because from the rest of the story we gather that the other disciples never noticed the unmasking of Judas. When Judas finally gets up and leaves, the others think that he goes to buy something for the feast or that he is going out to give alms to the poor. Only John knows the truth. In his commentary *The Gospel According to Matthew*, C. Campbell Morgan suggests that Jesus' revealing of Judas' plan forces the Jews to immediately execute their plot, which insures that the crucifixion took place during the Passover feast instead of later, as they had hoped.

We notice that there are stages in Judas' surrender of himself to Satan. In the beginning of this chapter, we read that the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus. From the Synoptics, we learn that this actually began in Bethany, when Mary anointed Jesus. Judas strengthened his intention to betray Jesus by accepting the money for his plans. But he reached the point of no return when he accepted the piece of bread from Jesus' hand. If we suppose that this bread was the bread of the Last Supper, Jesus must have pronounced the words: "This is my body." Judas was the only one who could have understood some of the deeper meaning of those words. He was the one who had conceived the plan for the murder. Whether he comprehended that Jesus meant to say that He also wanted to give His life for Judas, is doubtful. But in accepting Jesus' offer without repenting of his sin, he surrenders himself completely to the adversary. From that moment on, he has no longer control of himself. The piece of bread becomes the symbol of Satan's' victory in the death of Jesus. We can hear the demonic burst of laughter. He came to "give his life as a ransom for many!"⁵⁷⁵ See the results!

Yet, Judas must have experienced as a defeat the fact that Jesus sends him away to put into operation his evil plot of betrayal. How terrible it must have been for Judas not to be able to look himself in the eyes because of the darkness in his heart and then to discover that Jesus had seen through him. John's description of the event is very powerful and moving. "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." With sentences like these, he could have won the Nobel prize for literature. As "the path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn,

⁵⁷¹ Matt. 26:24

⁵⁷² See Matt. 26:25

⁵⁷³ See Matt. 26:23

⁵⁷⁴ The other references are ch. 21:7; 21:20

⁵⁷⁵ Matt. 20:28

shining ever brighter till the full light of day,"⁵⁷⁶ so the path of the wicked is a return to darkness, till the uttermost darkness is reached.

At this point begins Jesus' conversation with the disciples, which ends with His prayer for them in chapter 17. Nobody ever left this earth in such a glorious manner as our Lord. When we realize that Jesus knew what awaited Him and we observe His attitude toward those facts and toward His disciples, we have to exclaim with the Roman centurion: "Surely he was the Son of God!"⁵⁷⁷ When we read these chapters, we feel the full light of Jesus' warmth and love fall upon us. This is the final part of Jesus' efforts to prepare His disciples for the tremendous shock that awaited them, that would make the world of each one of them collapse totally. Jesus shows more compassion for His friends than fear for His own suffering. He knows that His words would be, in a sense, in vain. Their value consisted in the fact that the Holy Spirit would preserve them in the minds of the disciples till after the resurrection.

After Judas has left the company defeated, Jesus remains as victor. Nowhere else in the Gospel records Jesus reaches out more in faith to the fulfillment than here. The words: "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him" are pronounced as if they were already an accomplished fact. This is no future tense. The decision has been made. God has been glorified. It would still take about three days until man would be able to see it, but it had already happened in the world of spiritual reality, which determines what takes place on earth. Yet, it is also what happens on earth that influences the heavenly reality. Those two levels on which things happen are revealed in the fact that Jesus speaks about a glorification that has already taken place and about one that is still to happen. All Jesus' words are marked by the words: "His hour had come."⁵⁷⁸ It is the intersection of time and eternity. This must be the main reason that God created time, so that Jesus could fulfill His heavenly mission on earth. It is part of the glory of this hour that time obeys her "raison d'être."

Jesus speaks about two kinds of glory, the glory of God in Him and His glory in God. As Satan took possession of Judas when Judas accepted the piece of bread, so the Holy Spirit takes here possession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus experiences this filling as glory. As far as the human eye could see there was no visible glorification. Think of the moment when Jesus stands before Pilate after the scourging. We read: "Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, 'Behold the Man!'"⁵⁷⁹ We think of Isaiah's words: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."⁵⁸⁰ All this proves how little of what we see is reality. He who trusts his own eyes is a fool! This is God's glory and God's wisdom.

The glorification had taken place in the heavenly places. Soon the blood of Jesus would be poured out on the basis of an eternal covenant. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes: "The God of peace, ... through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep."⁵⁸¹ This covenant took effect the moment Judas left the upper room. Jesus' obedience to death, even death on the cross, is a demonstration of the fact that the glory of God had taken possession of our Lord.

The second glorification Jesus speaks about in the future tense obviously refers to His resurrection and subsequent ascension. After having basked Himself for one moment in the sunshine of God's glory, Jesus immediately turns His attention to the disciples. He knows what will happen to them. Matthew tells us that Jesus told them: "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"⁵⁸² The quotation is a free rendering of Zechariah's prophecy: "'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!' declares the LORD Almighty. 'Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.'"⁵⁸³ A feeling of deep compassion with the fate of "the little ones" against whom the Lord will turn His hand, wells up in Jesus' heart. It is the same compassion of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep in order to seek the one that is lost. No one can follow Him in this search. Jesus knows that He will be completely alone in this. Even the last thread of human fellowship will snap in the hour of crisis.

⁵⁷⁶ Prov. 4:18

⁵⁷⁷ Matt. 27:54

⁵⁷⁸ NKJV

⁵⁷⁹ John 19:5 (NKJV)

⁵⁸⁰ Isa. 53:2

⁵⁸¹ Heb. 13:20

⁵⁸² Matt. 26:31

⁵⁸³ Zech. 13:7

Jesus had earlier said to the Jews: "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."⁵⁸⁴ Here He speaks to people whose sin has been atoned for. The words: "You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come" do not pertain to a physical search, as if the disciples would not know where their Master was buried, but it is a matter of losing Jesus spiritually. They would experience an inner struggle because they could no longer see any sense in what would happen in Jesus' capture and execution.

There is a sense in which Jesus answers the disciples' question with the command to love one another. Love is the answer to their search because love is the reason Jesus would leave them. Jesus dies out of love. When the human mind loses its way, the heart takes over and follows. Jesus leaves His disciples because of His love for them. How could Peter ever understand this when his own world and that of the others collapsed? Yet, we see here demonstrated the same principle as in the resurrection of Lazarus; Jesus waited two days before doing anything because He loved Lazarus, Mary, and Martha.⁵⁸⁵ Love's logic is infallible. The disciples ought to love one another, not only because they were Christ's followers, but also because they needed balm for their wounded souls. Many people who are broken and deeply wounded find healing in a fellowship where "brothers live together in unity."⁵⁸⁶ With the exception of Thomas, the disciples obeyed Jesus' command immediately following the crucifixion. They stuck together for support, comfort, and encouragement.

Jesus calls the command to love one another "a new command." The Old Testament also gave the command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."⁵⁸⁷ The newness of the command is not in the love to the neighbor but in the measure of it. It is no longer: "Love your neighbor as yourself," but "as I have loved you, so you must love one another." This means loving the neighbor more than oneself. John gives the following definition of this love in his epistle: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."⁵⁸⁸ It is the love that is willing to give its life.

The Bible makes a distinction between brotherly love, that is mutual love among believers, and love for fellowmen. Peter suggests that love for our fellowmen grows out of brotherly love. We read: "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."⁵⁸⁹ The Greek word for "brotherly love" is *philadelphia*, but the word Jesus uses here is *agapao*. Yet, it is clear that Jesus limits Himself here to the intimate circle of the disciples. Paul clarifies that our relationship to our brothers and sisters in Christ supersedes our bond with mankind in general. We read in his Epistle to the Galatians: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."⁵⁹⁰ It is particularly in our relationship with our brothers and sisters that we have to be willing to give our life.

Our love for the members of the body of Christ is also a testimony that cannot be misunderstood by the outside world. Jesus says: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." In his description of the early church in Jerusalem, Luke does not use the word "love," but it is written all over the page. We read: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."⁵⁹¹ There is no other explanation for this love than in being a disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ. There is in the whole universe no other source of love than that which God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Somewhere at this time, Jesus and the disciples must have left the upper room. Matthew records: "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."⁵⁹² John also states at the end of the next chapter that

⁵⁸⁴ ch. 8:21

⁵⁸⁵ ch. 11:5,6

⁵⁸⁶ Ps. 133:1

⁵⁸⁷ Lev. 19:18

⁵⁸⁸ I John 3:16

⁵⁸⁹ II Peter 1:5-7

⁵⁹⁰ Gal. 6:10

⁵⁹¹ Acts 2:41-47

⁵⁹² Matt. 26:30

Jesus said: "Come now; let us leave," but he does not clarify from where they departed. It could be that the group had already left the room and had lingered somewhere along the road. John does not mention the singing of the Hallel, which was part of the Passover celebration.

Evidently, Jesus and the disciples did not head straight to the garden of Gethsemane but they first spent some time on the Mount of Olives. The whole conversation John records, beginning with vs. 31 in this chapter and through the next chapter, probably took place on the Mount of Olives. The words recorded in the chapters 15-17 were probably spoken on the way from the Mount of Olives to Gethsemane.

Peter's question: "Lord, where are you going?" obviously pertained not to the road the group was following at that moment, since we understand that they followed a customary route; the question was prompted by what Jesus had said: "Where I am going, you cannot come."

When Jesus answers Peter, Luke adds some words that were addressed to all the disciples: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."⁵⁹³ Satan's intention was, obviously, not to separate the wheat from the chaff but to prove that everything there was was chaff. The devil does not believe in wheat. The positive way in which Jesus presents the problem is again a victory in itself. Had Peter and the other disciples understood that, when they were so deeply wounded, God was looking for the grains of wheat in their lives, it would have protected them from despair. Peter's self-assurance at that moment was just as much an empty hull as was the piety of Job. Scenes from Job's experience are played again here before our eyes, but with different characters. Peter's denial of Jesus must have meant the loss of his self-respect, which caused his world to collapse. For the Lord, it was a part of the process of purification which prepared Peter for the throne. Once again, God took the evil Satan had intended for destruction and used it to produce greater glory. Because of his misplaced self-confidence, Satan had enough ground to stand on in Peter's life. Peter's loss of confidence in himself also meant a loss of ground for the devil, which is ultimately God's gain.

Yet here also, it is Jesus who pays the real price for it all. Peter's denial must have hurt Peter more than the scourging by the Roman soldiers. Jesus pays for every spiritual experience that enriches us. His prayer for Peter and the disciples was part of this payment because it was based on the sacrifice of His life. All this is part of His dying for us. As the miracles He performed were an advance on the price He would pay in His death on the cross, so in praying for Peter, Jesus again reached out to the final victory in the same way as His intercessory prayer for us in heaven at present means a reaching back to His death on the cross. Our prayer in Jesus' Name is in principle the same.

The other Gospel writers indicate that in addressing Peter, Jesus spoke to all the disciples.

I. The Preparation in the Upper Room (b)

14:1-31

In the early stages of my Christian life, when I was experiencing many ups and downs (more downs than ups), these chapters in John's Gospel strongly appealed to me and I often read them through in one sitting. This was always a great encouragement to me.

It is difficult to pinpoint where the words recorded in this chapter were actually spoken. The Synoptics give us the impression that, when Jesus issued His warning to Peter, the party had already left the upper room. At one point, Luke mentions that Jesus left the city. We read: "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him."⁵⁹⁴ It is, therefore, quite possible that the conversation written down here by John took place between the upper room and the city wall.

Immediately following the announcement of Peter's denial, Jesus says: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me." The connection between the two sayings should not escape us. The discovery of their lack of loyalty to Christ would mean a deep shock to each of the disciples. We tend to believe that a troubled heart would be a healthy reaction for those men. Why would Jesus want to protect His disciples (and us) from such a reaction?

There is a difference between a shock that makes our house-of-cards crumble and a shock that destroys the foundation of our life. Peter's disenchantment with himself, ultimately, made him a better person. But there was a possibility, at least theoretically, that Peter would have chosen the same way out as Judas did. Jesus' prayer for Peter prevented him from choosing that option. "Do not let your hearts be troubled" does not mean that those things that cut so deeply in our lives should leave us unmoved, but it does mean that they would not bring us to despair.

⁵⁹³ Luke 22:31,32

⁵⁹⁴ Luke 22:39

“Trouble” pertains to both what preceded and to what follows; actually, it is all one part. Without Jesus’ leaving, there would have been no denial by Peter. The troubled heart refers, not only to what happens with Jesus, but also to our reaction to it. It is the effect of the cross upon our lives. Jesus pleads with His disciples that, when they enter the darkness that is ahead of them, they would not abandon their trust in Him. Abandoning trust equals suspicion. Our circumstances can lead us to a point where we mistrust God. We do this more often than we realize. As the Israelites in the desert, we tend to believe that God has ulterior motives. Yet, logic teaches us that the universe would explode into smithereens if God would no longer be the source and standard of truth.

The great importance of Jesus’ statement here is that our Lord equates trust in God with trust in Him. We can hardly image what it must have meant to the disciples to hear such words come from a human mouth. To us who possess the Apostolic Creed and the Creed of Nicea, this presents less of a problem than it did to the disciples whose faith had not been reduced to a certain formula. Jesus puts Himself completely on the same line as God. The reason He states this so emphatically to the disciples is because He will lower Himself lower than any man every has. No one has ever been so Godforsaken as He. Jesus wants His disciples to continue to see the unity between the Father and Himself in this deepest point of history, so that their faith in both the Father and the Son will not falter.

This admonition to have faith is an introduction to everything that follows in these chapters. The important part is the unity between the Father and Jesus and our accepting this in faith. This is the only comfort for troubled hearts, and it forms the sole basis for the coming of the Holy Spirit in our lives with all its renewing results. It is the key to understanding the meaning of the verses about living in the Father’s house. We usually fail to fully understand this less as we take these words literally. It is true, of course, that even if heaven is a geographic location, this is not what our Lord is talking about here. How would mortal men know the way to it? Truth and life could hardly transport us somewhere to a locality in space. The place Jesus speaks about is the relationship to the Father. We could express the same image by saying: “The Father has a great heart with lots of space.” The Father’s house is the house of God’s love. Actually, it is not a house but a home. Jesus goes into the presence of the Father with His blood that takes away sin which hindered fellowship with God. The point is fellowship with the Father. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrew expresses it as follows: “When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”⁵⁹⁵ The purpose of this is that, as Jesus enjoys an uninterrupted and unlimited fellowship with the Father, we will be able to experience the same. This is the meaning of the words: “that you also may be where I am.” Since, during His three-and-a-half years of public ministry, Jesus had consistently presented this truth to His disciples, He could honestly say here: “You know the way to the place where I am going.” Those words would make no sense at all if they referred to a physical road leading to a tangible place.

As in all other conversations recorded in John’s Gospel, the misunderstanding arises because the disciples confuse the spiritual reality with the physical. Thomas in his reaction, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” speaks about a way that can be detected by the senses. He may even have referred to Jesus’ death here. That was the way Peter interpreted Jesus’ words in the previous chapter. Jesus’ death, however, is only a small part of His going away. From this part of the conversation, we may deduct that Jesus believed that He had a right to expect that the disciples would have understood what the purpose of His coming into the world and of His leaving it was. The fact that He met with such a lack of understanding must have aggravated His suffering. It was as if the devil emphasized the fact that this part of Jesus’ ministry had failed also: that Jesus had failed as a teacher. It would only become clear later that the law of the grain of wheat operated here also. As it turns out, after Pentecost, none of Jesus’ words had been lost on the Apostles.

The disciples could have understood the mystery of Jesus’ coming and going from two sources: the ceremonial temple services and Jesus’ own words. Nothing expressed the essence of Jesus’ work as the picture of the high priest who entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement with a bowl of blood in order to effectuate atonement of the sin of the people, and who came out afterward to bless the people. The disciples could have recognized the reality from this picture. The photo showed a good resemblance of the person.

The greatest difference between Jesus and His disciples here lies in a difference of understanding of reality. People rarely understand the importance and the consequences of their acts because their vision of the Father is blocked. Jesus never knew that problem. Because of His unhindered vision of the throne of God, He always saw things in their right perspective. In that sense, Thomas was right when he asked the Lord what was actually going on.

⁵⁹⁵ Heb. 9:11,12

In His answer, Jesus makes it clear that He does not only live in this reality for His own sake but also for ours. He not only has a clear and full vision on the Father's glory but He also has that vision for us, in our behalf. He becomes this vision for us. That is the meaning of the words: "I am the way." As in all the other "I AMs," it means here also that taking that way and progressing on it are a byproduct of our fellowship with Him. We will only advance in the right direction inasmuch as we have fellowship with Jesus.

As we have seen already, fellowship with the Father is the subject of these chapters. This is the purpose of all of creation; it is the essence of love. When Jesus identifies Himself with the way, it doesn't mean that He does not speak of an objective reality. Everything that pertains to God is objective. Truth and life are objective entities. Only that which is related to God is true; there is no truth or life that is not related to God. Jesus had said earlier: "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life."⁵⁹⁶ The way Jesus speaks about here is the same way but the emphasis is different. In Matthew's Gospel the context is lostness and salvation. Here it is fellowship or no fellowship. In the first instance, it is life as opposite to death; here it is the difference between the spirit and the flesh, to borrow Paul's expression. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus speaks to people who had not yet come to life; here He speaks to the disciples who are "clean because of the word [He had] spoken to [them]." The way is the same but we see it at another point.

For these words also, Jesus would have to pay the price Himself. He is the way, because He pays with His blood to restore the broken fellowship with the Father. Walking on that way means accepting the fact that Jesus paid that price for us.

Jesus' statement is exclusive. There is no other way. "No one comes to the Father except through me." "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."⁵⁹⁷ Denial of the value of Jesus' shed blood, as a payment for our sin, as some do, is a rejection of Jesus' claim here. A Dutch liberal theologian once spoke the horrible words: "The blood of Jesus; give my share to pooch." We cannot reduce the absolute character of Jesus' words by saying that they were spoken in the context of the period in which He lived. These words span the ages.

It is the exclusiveness of the way that makes it narrow. But there is for the redeemed more freedom of movement and joy of living than on the broad road that leads to destruction.

Everything we can say about Jesus' identification of Himself with the way can also be said about the truth. The truth is exclusive and absolute and it can only be experienced in fellowship with Him.

Jesus uses the concept of truth several times in the Scriptures. To the Samaritan woman He said: "The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."⁵⁹⁸ We could add to this that God is truth. The Greek word rendered truth is *aletheia*, which *The Souter Lexicon* defines as: "Truth, but not merely truth as spoken; truth of idea, reality, sincerity, truth in the moral sphere, straightforwardness." Truth is reality without the deceptive appearance sin gives to it. That is why truth is akin to holiness; it is related both to the character and the expression of that character. David called God: "LORD, the God of truth."⁵⁹⁹ TLB emphasizes God's reliability with the paraphrase: "O God who keeps his promises." We can interpret Jesus' words here as: "I am reliable," but also as: "I am genuine." This is also the reason Jesus must have had such an attraction to people on the psychological level. In a book *Games People Play*, the author describes how a person, in his relationship with others, uses a series of rather complicated formulas in conversation and body language to either hide or reveal his real motives. We assume that Jesus did not manipulate people this way. In His appearance in Nazareth, for instance, the people reproached Him that He did not play the role of the famous son of Joseph the carpenter. They were repulsed by His lack of style. Someone who is genuine forces others to be genuine also and people tend to become defensive. Hiding oneself is an immediate result of sin. As soon as sin entered the human heart, we read: "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."⁶⁰⁰

Truth also has the meaning here of reality. What we see happen on earth is the shadow of a reality to come. The body that casts that shadow is our Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking about the Old Testament ceremonies, Paul writes: "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."⁶⁰¹ This has nothing to do with sin that distorts our view of reality. This shadow is part of creation itself, because all that is

⁵⁹⁶ Matt. 7:14

⁵⁹⁷ Acts 4:12

⁵⁹⁸ ch. 4:23,24

⁵⁹⁹ Ps. 31:5

⁶⁰⁰ Gen. 3:8

⁶⁰¹ Col. 2:17

created reflects a spiritual reality. We could say that Jesus is the truth in the sense that He is the meaning and content of all that is created. Truth is also the opposite of everything in this world that is under the dominion of the devil. This is the reason Jesus, while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,⁶⁰² could say: "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."⁶⁰³ And in His prayer for the disciples, He said: "Your word is truth."⁶⁰⁴

It is about the fundamental difference between truth and the lie. God spoke, and the devil said: "Did God really say...?" Truth is what things are; the lie is what they seem to be to us. C. S. Lewis illustrates this beautifully in his book *The Silver Chair*, in the series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The green witch keeps two children and a marshwiggle, who have come to liberate prince Rilian, under her spell by sprinkling some green powder on the open fire, which dulls their sense of perception, and she softly drums her guitar, singing: "There is no Narnia."

Truth is life; the lie is death. The first two words Jesus speaks are "the way" and "the truth," which leads to "the life." What a statement: "I am the life!" How is it possible for an existentialist to pass this up? At Lazarus' tomb, Jesus used the same words: "I am the resurrection and the life."⁶⁰⁵ There, life is placed in opposition to death; here life is found contrasting with the lie and with being lost. We see that life is the answer to all the complications of sin. In the Prologue, John wrote: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."⁶⁰⁶ There, life is the answer to darkness. In His great discourse about the bread of life, Jesus said: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."⁶⁰⁷ David sings in one of the psalms: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light."⁶⁰⁸ Life is a diamond with many facets, each of which gives an answer to the problems of sin. Because sin means separation from God, life means fellowship with the Father. The reason Jesus, as a man, calls Himself "the Life" is because He is for all men the sole entrance to the Father. Jesus did not make this declaration here as the Second Person of the Trinity. That would not fit into the context of this passage. The very fact that Jesus speaks here as a man gives to His Word such vital importance for us. It also makes it so breathtakingly great.

The words: "If you really knew me" express a condition. Jesus is conscious of the fact that His disciples do not really know Him. The words also mark the announcement of a crisis with: "From now on, you do know him and have seen him." The transition from not knowing to knowing is brought about by the death and resurrection of our Lord. Before atonement was an accomplished fact, there could be no question of real intimate knowing.

It is interesting to observe what this "From now on" meant in the experience of the disciples. The new relationship with the Father Jesus introduces here must have seem a catastrophe to them. When the shepherd was stricken, the sheep were scattered. This appears to be a pattern in the life of human beings. Labor pains always accompany God's revelation of Himself. When God began to deliver Israel from Egypt, the burden of their slave labor increased. It is usually only in retrospect that we can say that the moment our world collapsed was "His Finest Hour."⁶⁰⁹ When we are at such a point, the Lord wants us to look ahead in faith and to begin praising Him as the difficulties come our way. James says: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."⁶¹⁰ It is so difficult for us to see in the pain we suffer the labor pains that will result in our seeing the glory of the Lord. The disciples saw the Father in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is what Jesus says in His answer to Philip: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

The full depth of Jesus' statement often escapes us because we think of this in terms of the Second Person of the Trinity. What the disciples saw in Jesus, however, was not an unlimited demonstration of omnipotence and divine glory. They saw a man like themselves in whom the Father revealed Himself in a human, but complete fashion. In Jesus, we do not see only a glimpse of the Father; "Anyone who has seen [Jesus] has seen the Father."

Jesus is amazed that the disciples did not recognize this in spite of the fact that they were with Him and intimately involved with Him for three-and-a-half years. In their intimacy with Him they had discovered segments, which were expressed in some of Peter's confessions as: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,"⁶¹¹ and: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of

⁶⁰² See I Tim. 6:13

⁶⁰³ ch. 18:37

⁶⁰⁴ ch. 17:17

⁶⁰⁵ ch. 11:25

⁶⁰⁶ ch. 1:4

⁶⁰⁷ ch. 6:63

⁶⁰⁸ Ps. 36:9

⁶⁰⁹ Title of a book by Winston Churchill about the London Blitz

⁶¹⁰ James 1:2

⁶¹¹ Matt. 16:16

God.”⁶¹² But none of them had ever penetrated to the core of the matter. From all the disciples and Gospel writers only John was the disciple who was so overwhelmed by Jesus’ love for him, that he remembered these words and wrote them down. The disciples’ self-love was an enormous obstacle to the discovery of what their fellowship with the Lord actually was. We rarely realize how deeply tragic this is. There will never be another factor added to the knowledge of the Father, neither for the disciples, nor for us. In heaven, our knowledge of God will be built out of the same elements as here on earth. Only then the inner obstacles will have been removed. We will have to give up our self-love. Most obstacles will only disappear when we surrender them in death.

It is difficult to analyze Jesus’ oneness with the Father in a manner that can be verified by our senses, although this is not completely impossible. Sin has caused its greatest damage in the domain of our spirit; at least that is where it is the most noticeable. Our hearts have become calloused and our ears dull.⁶¹³ The Lord breaks through by appealing to our faith. In verses 10-12, Jesus uses the words “believe,” or “faith” four times. The first time, “Don’t you believe” is a general appeal; it pertains to Jesus’ oneness with the Father. The second “believe” refers to Jesus’ words, the third to “the evidence of the miracles,” and the fourth to the effect of the first three upon him who believes.

In our complicated western society, there are always many things we accept on the authority of others. It is therefore not unreasonable that Jesus appeals to our faith. We have every reason to consider Him reliable. Without any false humility or pride, Jesus declares that, as a human being, He lives in perfect unity with the Father.

Adam had never come to the point of perfect unity with God in his life. By sinning, he closed the door to this perfect fellowship with God. Before he sinned, he had obviously never surrendered himself to God in loving obedience; otherwise Satan would not have had such an easy time in tempting the first human couple. What Adam failed to achieve, we see here fully demonstrated in Christ as a human being. This should touch us in the depth of our soul. This is what has slumbered in our souls since the beginning of creation. Jesus Christ appeals here to something in us that is deeply human. This is the “raison d’être” of our humanity, which is here fully revealed in Christ.

The way this was revealed was in Jesus’ words and acts. We see how Jesus constantly proved the truth of His words by the works He performed. Especially in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ acts are presented as signs of the truth of the statements He made about Himself. In the beginning of His ministry, Jesus stated: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”⁶¹⁴ Here, the Lord goes a step further by saying: “It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”

The greatest surprise in this chapter is in vs. 12. The Lord introduces His words with: “I tell you the truth.” This is a rather weak rendering of the Greek “Amen, amen.” KJV sounds so much more powerful with: “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” The expression is typical for John’s Gospel, or rather it is typical for Jesus’ way of speaking. John is the only one of the Gospel writers who quotes Jesus’ words literally. The expression is used at least 21 times in John’s Gospel. Jesus uses this solemn oath, “so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.”⁶¹⁵

We do well to concentrate upon the hope offered in Jesus’ statement because what is said opens horizons before us that make us dizzy to the point where we believe that this cannot be possible. Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

The first truth we must grasp is the purpose of it all: “that the Son may bring glory to the Father.” In connection with this I am thinking of some of the great monuments of faith that have been erected, for instance by George Mueller in the orphanages of Bristol and in the work of the China Inland Mission by Hudson Taylor. Yet, we have to admit that none of those achievements ever surpassed the things Christ Himself performed. The problem of this text is not that believers will perform miracles but that those miracles will surpass the miracles Christ performed, such as the resurrection of Lazarus. I wonder if that kind of demonstration of power would ever be possible for men who possess a sinful nature and who breathe in the air polluted by the sin of this world. I realize that Jesus always speaks from the position of victory. He never looks upon man in his present weakened condition of sinfulness, but as what he will be when God’s sanctification is accomplished. It is therefore possible that, with these words, Jesus reaches beyond the limitations of this life into the age to come. What we can experience here and now is a foretaste of the fullness of things to come.

⁶¹² ch. 6:68,69

⁶¹³ See Isa. 6:9,10

⁶¹⁴ ch. 5:19

⁶¹⁵ Heb. 6:18

The limit to the answer of our prayers is the will of God. John expresses this in his epistle: "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."⁶¹⁶ The words: "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" presuppose a will that is surrendered and sanctified. It is true that then there are no limitations to answered prayers. If we set our hearts upon seeking God and glorifying Him in our life and work, difficulties will melt like snow before the sun. Even if "greater things than these" is an unreachable ideal for the present, it will be a great stimulus to our faith. We may not go beyond Christ, but we will certainly go beyond our own abilities.

It is important to observe that Jesus did not only address Philip or Thomas but all of the eleven disciples. It is the unity of faith of all the believers that made the crippled man at the temple gate jump to his feet,⁶¹⁷ and that opened the prison gates for Peter.⁶¹⁸ This condition for limitless answers to prayer, the unity of believers, is far gone from Christianity at the present time.

Without further elaborating on this, the Lord gives, in a few words only, the deepest reason for this release of power to perform miracles: "Because I am going to the Father." Later in the conversation, it becomes evident that His going to the Father would open the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit. All Jesus' promises are related to the Spirit's coming. When we realize under what circumstances a man who was facing the most cruel torture and death spoke these words, the content becomes even more glorious. Jesus talked as if everything were already behind Him. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that Jesus "for the joy set before him endured the cross."⁶¹⁹ Jesus' hope was a living reality to Him; it can be the same to us.

I know of a man who had harbored a British pilot who was shot down over Holland during World War II. The Nazis captured him and as they led him away to be shot by a firing squad, he sang the psalm verse, "Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight."⁶²⁰ What Jesus said to His disciples was much more meant to be a comfort for them than for Himself. He gave this promise to men who, within the hour, would deny and forsake Him. Their collapse was unavoidable. But the Lord often uses the ruins of our lives as building stones for His new creation.

The premise of the preceding verses was "If you really knew me" (vs.7). The basis of the following verses is "If you love me" (vs. 15). This also is not presented as an accomplished fact but as a condition. Knowledge is the basis for understanding and power; love produces obedience and fellowship. It is obvious that those two lines are closely connected; they run parallel and they cannot be separated without causing eternal damage. The power to perform miracles is the Holy Spirit and the coming of the Spirit is dependant upon love and obedience. This sequence is important. Faith is never blind; it is based upon insight, and love without obedience is dead. The line, therefore, runs from insight to faith, to love, to obedience, and to power.

Jesus has no illusions about the disciples' love for Him, because in vs. 28 He says: "If you loved me...." He sees that, at that moment, their love left much to be desired. This also would change at the coming of the Holy Spirit. When, after His resurrection, Jesus puts Peter to the test by asking: "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"⁶²¹ Peter cannot yet answer his Lord by using the same Greek word *agapao*. Both faith and love are fruits of the Spirit.

In vs. 16, Jesus gives the actual reason for His going to the Father that was omitted in vs. 12. He says: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever." The coming of the Holy Spirit is the answer to Jesus' prayer to the Father. The Greek word *parakletos*, Counselor, is only found in John's Gospel and in his First Epistle.⁶²² In John's Epistle, the name *parakletos* is used for Christ Himself. Most translations render it there with "advocate." *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains *parakletos* as someone: "called to one's side." We read: "[It] suggests the capability or adaptability for giving aid. It was used in a court of justice to denote a legal assistant, counsel for the defense, an advocate; then, generally, one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, advocate, as in 1 John 2:1, of the Lord Jesus." In the Hellenistic interpretation it acquired the sense of "comforter." This is a permissible use of the word, as long as we remember that the basis for the comfort is not merely emotional but legal. This consolation rests upon certain unshakable facts, not on the smoothing of certain wrinkles in our soul. This is the tangible comfort the Holy Spirit provides for us. We read about Isaac: "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her;

⁶¹⁶ I John 5:14

⁶¹⁷ See Acts 3:1-8

⁶¹⁸ See Acts 12:1-19

⁶¹⁹ Heb. 12:2

⁶²⁰ Taken from Ps. 43:4

⁶²¹ ch. 21:15

⁶²² ch. 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7; I John 2:1

and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."⁶²³ Mary and Martha were comforted by the resurrection of Lazarus. The disciples were comforted in the resurrection of their Lord.

The legal aspect of our comfort is based on the pardon of the sins of which the devil accuses us. We see this illustrated in Zechariah's vision. We read: "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?' Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' Then he said to Joshua, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.' Then I said, 'Put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by."⁶²⁴ Even before the disciples' souls were wounded by the crucifixion of their Lord, Jesus prepared for them the comfort that would heal them.

We cannot separate this comfort from the controversy between God and Satan that spans the ages. The Holy Spirit leads to the victory of justice over the accuser of the brothers. This victory consists of the blood of the Lamb, the application of this blood upon the life of the believer, and the proof of our love for Christ in our willingness of bringing the ultimate sacrifice for Him. We read in Revelation: "The accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."⁶²⁵

The first comfort of this victory, the blood of the Lamb, consists of the application of Jesus' death upon our lives. This destroyed the proof of our guilt and stripped the accusation of the Evil One of its validity. Paul writes to the Colossians: "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."⁶²⁶

The second part of the comfort is in "the word of their testimony." This is the open declaration of what took place. It is the report of the experience of knowing that one's sins have been forgiven.

The third proof is the demonstration of the fruit of love. "They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" is the ultimate proof that this love has reached its perfection in a human life. The test of love, after all, is the willingness to give one's life for a brother. The essence of the comfort is the reality of the work of God in our lives.

"The world" in vs. 17 is that segment of humanity that remains outside the realm of atonement. Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will remain with us forever. Since the world does not exist forever, the world cannot receive the Spirit of God. We are so used to looking at death as at a wall that we can hardly imagine what life in eternity will be like. This is the reason we tend to think that we will only need the Holy Spirit to assist us in our weakness while we live in this world. The fact that the Holy Spirit will remain with us forever implies that, for our fellowship with the Father and the Son throughout eternity, we will also be dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

The title "the Spirit of truth" draws a parallel with what Jesus had said about Himself earlier: "I am the truth." We have already seen that truth is an important element on the road to fellowship with the Father. This element is the Holy Spirit. All wrong appearance, all vagueness, all distortion that are the result of sin and that hinder fellowship with God because they warp His image for us, are removed by the Holy Spirit. We cannot possibly have fellowship with God if we live in a world of illusions. This is another reason why a person who is outside the atonement cannot receive the Holy Spirit because he can neither see his own sin, nor the atonement. But for the redeemed person this knowledge is the most intimate form of knowledge that is possible. Jesus says: "You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." Jesus fully emphasizes the lasting character of this relationship. Our knowledge of the Holy Spirit is introspective. We have to look into our own heart in order to see Him. Jesus had said to Nicodemus about the Holy Spirit: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going."⁶²⁷ This implies that we know the Holy Spirit by the effect He has upon our life. The Spirit Himself will remain invisible to us. In this also, the genuine and pure knowledge is something that is still to come for us.

Even though Jesus said: "I will not leave you as orphans," the effect His departure had upon the disciples was like the death of a father who leaves his children behind as orphans. The coming of the Holy Spirit annuls this effect. Strangely enough, the Lord does not distinguish between the coming of the Spirit and His own coming.

⁶²³ Gen. 24:67

⁶²⁴ Zech. 3:1-5

⁶²⁵ Rev. 12:10,11

⁶²⁶ Col. 2:13-15

⁶²⁷ ch. 3:8

Obvious, the words "I will come to you" do not refer to the Second Coming. Even for God, a period of approximately 2000 years can hardly euphemistically be described with the words "before long." Jesus' speedy return, which would be the consolation of the disciples, occurred on the day of Pentecost. Jesus' appearances during the forty days following His resurrection would form the preparation, not the essence of this consolation. Jesus' return would take place on a much higher level than that which can be observed by the senses. This is evident from the words "the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me," and from the fundamental condition "because I live, you also will live."

The words "I live" undoubtedly refer to Jesus' own resurrection. His resurrection united physical life and spiritual existence. It was because Jesus possesses "the power of an indestructible life,"⁶²⁸ "it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."⁶²⁹ It is the same for us; our life begins with our conversion and the new birth. That is real life. Our bodies will eventually obey the same law as the one to which the body of Christ responded. "[God] is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁶³⁰ This applies not only to the Son but also to the sons. For us also, real life, which will result in Jesus' resurrection, is the basis of our knowing of the Father through the new life in the Holy Spirit. It is thus that we can see our Lord Jesus Christ, know the Holy Spirit, and understand the inner relationship between the Father, the Son, and ourselves. John said in the Prologue: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."⁶³¹ Our knowledge is based on the life we received at the new birth.

At the moment Jesus spoke these words, the disciples did not understand anything about these relationships. This is obvious from the questions Philip and Thomas asked. Jesus answered their questions here. Understanding of the relationship is, of course, necessary for the experience of it. Jesus said all this to people who did not understand. Humanly speaking, this must have been difficult for our Lord. It was, in a sense, an act of faith for Him. Jesus reached out to the day when the Holy Spirit would recall these non-understood words back in their memory and bring them to life. At the moment Jesus spoke them the disciples could do no better than obey without understanding.

Vs. 21 adds that obedience is the proof of love. The difference between "love" in vs. 15 and in vs. 21 is that, initially, Jesus spoke about a condition that was not yet present among the disciples. They did not yet love Christ in that manner. In vs. 21, Jesus reaches ahead to the day when that love would become a fact. When they would love God more than men, they would also obey God more than men. As disobedience was the beginning of all sin, hatred, and death, so obedience is the key to the deepest fellowship of love for which man was created. In saying: "He who loves me will be loved by my Father," Jesus refers not to the objective love of God but to the subjective experience of this love. God's love is not dependant upon our obedience, nor does God's love find a sounding board in a disobedient heart. God's love is only a reality for those who obey Him. We cannot overemphasize the relationship between obedience and love. If we pledge obedience to God we pledge love, as in the pledging of marriage vows. Our experience of the Father's love is not primarily an emotional affair but part of a relationship established by a legal contract, as in a marriage.

In our relationship with God, we are, as human beings, the female element. In his book *That Hideous Strength*, C. S. Lewis, lets the "director," speaking about God, say: "What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it." The Father comes to us in His Son, as a man comes to a woman. Isaiah expresses this: "No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."⁶³² Those words carry an almost sexual connotation. This relationship is in fact the reality to which sexual relationships are pointers. Paul refers to this in his Epistle to the Ephesians: " 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church."⁶³³

This love of the Father is the background against which Jesus reveals Himself to us. The purpose of love is to understand one another's secrets. In the sentence: "I too will love him and show myself to him," the Greek word translated "show" is *emphanizo*, which means "to exhibit, disclose or to manifest."

We find references to Jesus' revelation of Himself all through John's Gospel. The essence, or rather the functional part of it is in the relationship of the Father and the Son and the effect of that relationship upon our life.

⁶²⁸ Heb. 7:16

⁶²⁹ Peter's words in Acts 2:24

⁶³⁰ Matt. 22:32

⁶³¹ ch. 1:4

⁶³² Isa. 62:4,5

⁶³³ Eph. 5:31,33

That is the theme of these chapters in John's Gospel. The theme is introduced in the Prologue: "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."⁶³⁴ We find it further developed in Jesus' first great sermon in John: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does."⁶³⁵ And after the coming of the Holy Spirit, when this had become a personal experience for John, he gives this testimony: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."⁶³⁶

The concept of "the world" has become a cliché and it is important to define it more clearly. The more vague the concept the easier it is to handle. The need to define becomes less. As long as we can speak about the world in terms of "they" and "them," we do not have to clarify why we do not belong to the category. In as much as we are all creatures, we all belong to the world. We can also say that we belong to the world because we are part of fallen creation. This brings us closer to the meaning of the word as Jesus uses it in vs. 17. Whether or not we have a relationship with God determines whether we are part of that world. As we saw earlier, the world is that part of humanity that remains outside the realm of atonement.

Judas introduces the question why Jesus would not reveal Himself to that part of the human race. The answer Jesus gives is in no way a negative one. In Acts, we read that Jesus showed Himself for forty days to a small core group of apostles He had chosen. It is a human thought that Jesus might have had more followers in this world had He shown Himself after His death and resurrection to the Sanhedrin and to Pilate. That may be what Judas intended to say here, although at this point, he cannot have understood much about Jesus' appearances after His resurrection.

It is obvious that the purpose of Jesus' showing of Himself is to demonstrate God's love. Without the basis of the atonement, a demonstration of the love of the Father and the Son to us would have lacked the legality it has now. In Jesus' showing of Himself, He intends to do much more than merely strengthen our conviction about things pertaining to God. It amounts to an act of mutual surrender: our surrender to Him and His coming to us. One would be impossible without the other. Part of God's judgment over this world is that God remains silent for unconverted man. It is not true that God loves only those who love Him. That would imply that the initiative was ours. John says: "We love because he first loved us."⁶³⁷ In Paul's words: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."⁶³⁸ As we begin to obey the Word of God out of love for God, our capacity to receive God's love will grow.

The words: "My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" open horizons that have thus far been unknown. This statement explains the purpose for which man was created. This is the goal God had in mind when He first created man and placed him in Paradise. If Adam had chosen to eat of the Tree of Life to express his love for God, God's purpose would have been fulfilled right then and there. By eating the fruit from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam demonstrated not to love God. Thus he made it impossible to enter into a lasting relationship with God. The fact that both the Father and the Son will come and make their home with us reveals the importance of Jesus' obedience in our behalf. Only on the basis of what Christ has done for us, can the Holy Spirit come and dwell in the heart of a person who is polluted by sin.

This answers Solomon's question: "But will God really dwell on earth?"⁶³⁹ The main purpose of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to prepare the way for the Father and the Son to make their home in the heart of the person whose sins have been atoned. If this indwelling would not trigger in us a response of obedience, it would not have a liberating effect upon us either. Our obedience makes God the Lord of our life, instead of the guest. If the triune God were only the guest in our home, He would be subjected to our rules; as He becomes our Lord, we are subjected to His. We must have a clear understanding of this before we can enter into an intimate relationship with Him. The full emphasis is upon the voluntary aspect, upon the willingness on our part. This is related to the freedom we possess as persons. Respect of personhood is one of the ground rules of creation. God Himself has always strictly kept this rule.

⁶³⁴ ch. 1:18

⁶³⁵ ch. 5:19,20

⁶³⁶ I John 1:1-3

⁶³⁷ I John 4:19

⁶³⁸ Rom. 5:8

⁶³⁹ I Kings 8:27

Obedience does not merely mean following the rules. The word obedience is not even mentioned in the Greek. The NIV renders vs. 21: "Whoever has my commands and obeys them" but the Greek word *tereo* simply means "to guard," or "to keep." To keep the commands means more than simply obeying. It reflects Jesus' own attitude toward the Word of God. It speaks of an acceptance of the inspiration of the Scripture, not in a dry and dogmatic fashion, but in love. The overriding consciousness "that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"⁶⁴⁰ is not a matter of hearing and doing but of eating, drinking, and living.

The second part of vs. 24 ("These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me") is difficult to interpret. It does not mean, of course, that Jesus evades any responsibility for what He says by putting the onus on the Father, or that He would not personally agree with what He was saying. The meaning probably lies in the realm of the contrast between the Word of God and the word of man. These words correspond to what Jesus had stated earlier in this Gospel: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does," and "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me."⁶⁴¹ Jesus speaks as a man to men. He takes leave of His friends because in a few hours He will die. This is the reason there is so much human emotion and comfort in these verses. At the same time, however, the conversation deals with things of heaven. The coming of the Holy Spirit, the intimacy of fellowship with God, and the fulfillment of our goal as God's creatures are things that go way beyond any topic of human conversation. What Jesus carries on with His disciples is not a conversation; it is prophecy. As in Old Testament fashion, Jesus says here: "Thus says the Lord." This is the reason Jesus ends the sentence with the words "the Father who sent me."

We are anew reminded of the fact that the disciples could not have understood anything of what Jesus said at this point. As we saw earlier, this must have added weight to the burden of Christ's suffering. The question arises as to why Jesus bothered saying all this. The adherents of Higher Criticism would of course answer that Jesus never said this, but this is the work of some pious editor who, on the basis of the religious experiences of the early church, put these words in Jesus' mouth. Verses 25 and 26 present a clear testimony to the contrary. Jesus spoke these words in faith, knowing that the Holy Spirit would later bring them to life. Jesus conquered the devil's temptation to allow Himself to be discouraged by the disciples' lack of understanding. He planted these words as seeds in the disciples' hearts, knowing they will bear fruit. If Jesus had not sown, the Spirit would have had nothing to work with. What Jesus does here is an act of sound spiritual logic. It is also psychologically correct. Modern psychology has concluded that the human mind does not forget one single word it hears. Everything is stored in the computer of our memory. The Holy Spirit would not only bring Jesus' words back into conscious memory of the disciples, He would also bring them to life. The Holy Spirit still uses these words for us to teach us. The Word lives and bears fruit because, both physically and spiritually, "man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD."⁶⁴²

On leaving this world, Jesus leaves His peace with us as a farewell present. That which had been the controlling factor in His own emotional life, on the basis of His intimate fellowship with the Father, would henceforth be the inheritance of all who entrust themselves to Him. We cannot separate this promise from the context in which it stands. This peace is part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. All the conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit, obeying, keeping the Word, loving the Father, are related to the experience of this peace. Peace begins for us where hostility ends. But since Christ never lived on a foot of animosity with the Father, that cannot be the characteristic of the peace He possessed. Peace is also intimacy as opposed to hostility. We have peace with God because of the atonement of our sins. But there is a deeper sense of peace if the devil cannot disturb our fellowship with the Father. That is the peace of which Paul says: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."⁶⁴³ That is the peace Jesus speaks about here.

Our Lord was constantly bombarded by the attacks of the Evil One, but these did in no way affect or damage His relationship with the Father. As human beings, we incur injuries in the struggle of life, often more emotionally than physically. Jesus' peace is healing for our wounds. It is the peace "which transcends all understanding" because our mind tells us how to react under certain circumstances. It goes against the grain of our nature when we are hurting and, at the same time, rejoice in the Lord. We read about the apostles: "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."⁶⁴⁴ That transcends human understanding. It is contrary to human nature that "the night before Herod was to bring him to

⁶⁴⁰ See Deut. 8:3

⁶⁴¹ See ch. 5:19; 7:16

⁶⁴² Deut. 8:3

⁶⁴³ Phil. 4:7

⁶⁴⁴ Acts 5:41

trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains.”⁶⁴⁵ The very fact that, a few hours before His death, Jesus could say to His disciples what we read in these chapters surpasses our understanding. This is the peace of Christ. The disciples’ experience, however, was in complete opposition to what the Lord presented to them. Within a few hours they would all have fled and left Him alone. Their faith would be shaken to its very foundation and panic would tear at their souls.

They would have to go through these experiences in order to receive that peace Jesus speaks about here. The apostle Paul would later describe similar experiences by saying: “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”⁶⁴⁶ Jesus knew all this and that is why He said: “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

Jesus’ description of His death with the words: “If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” ought to be a word of comfort for everyone who sees a loved one in Christ depart. We are often, as the disciples, so much deceived by the outward appearance of death and we can so little envision the overwhelming joy of heavenly glory that the destiny of the one who is gone to glory offers us little comfort. Jesus says that this proves a lack of love on our side. To the disciples He said: “If you loved me, you would be glad” In our grieving there is always a certain amount of self-love and self-pity that increases the pain of our wounds.

Jesus was aware of the fact that the disciples did not really love Him. Their assurance that they would lay down their lives for Him was an empty gesture because their relationship with Him was based on human sympathy only, not on the working of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Only the Holy Spirit can make us partakers of divine love that is stronger than death. Jesus’ words must have sounded unreal and incomprehensible to the disciples. They could not fathom the depth of Jesus’ suffering or their reaction to it. The fact that this man Jesus, in whom they believed, would be tortured and killed and that their faith would collapse so that they would run away like scared children, was beyond the scope of their vision at that moment. They must have been convinced that Jesus was wrong. However, Jesus laid the foundation upon which their faith in His resurrection would be built. When their house of cards collapsed and the dust had settled, they would come to the conclusion that everything had happened as Jesus had foretold and, consequently, none of Jesus’ prophecies would remain unfulfilled.

The difference between disaster and the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan for this world is contained in this Word of prophecy. In the building up of their faith, this Word would occupy a central place. In John’s account of the resurrection, this becomes overwhelmingly clear. John states: “Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (*They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.*)”⁶⁴⁷

This part of the discussion ends with a remarkable definition of Jesus’ suffering and crucifixion. The conversation ends with the announcement of the coming of “the prince of this world.” What Satan does appears to be a complete victory of evil over good, of darkness over light. The striking of Jesus’ heel, as the prophecy of Genesis calls it,⁶⁴⁸ would be a spectacular matter. For a moment, the devil must have thought that he had won when Jesus went down into the realm of the dead. But in that place where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,”⁶⁴⁹ the fire could not burn the Lord of glory because the worm had not consumed Him inwardly. Consequently, the enemy had no grip on Jesus. The death of our Lord was no gain for the prince of this world but a testimony to all people who live under his dominion. Everyone would recognize, as did the Roman centurion who presided over the crucifixion, that this was not like the dying of a human being who, like all other men was a prey of sin and death, but that Jesus died out of love and obedience. We read in Matthew’s account: “When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’”⁶⁵⁰

There is of course much more in the death of Christ than those two points, but the obedience and love are the vital parts of the testimony to the world. Again, it sounds strange to us that Jesus emphasizes His love to the Father in connection with His death. We tend to put the fate of lost humanity on the foreground. In the way Jesus states the priorities, He penetrates to the core of the matter. His love for men was subjected and based on His love for the Father. The ground rule for us is the same. We can only love our neighbor as ourselves if we love the LORD

⁶⁴⁵ Acts 12:6

⁶⁴⁶ II Cor. 1:8,9

⁶⁴⁷ ch. 20:8,9

⁶⁴⁸ See Gen. 3:15

⁶⁴⁹ See Mark 9:48

⁶⁵⁰ Matt. 27:54

our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength.⁶⁵¹ It makes little difference whether the world learns from Jesus' example or not; the rule remains the same for us. The important part here is that Jesus sets an example of a man who loves and obeys God. The greatest tragedy of the world up to that moment was that thus far nobody had fully met that requirement. For all had sinned and had fallen short of the glory of God.⁶⁵² From that moment on, this could no longer be stated that way because there was now one righteous person among all of humanity. In Abraham's time, he looked for ten righteous persons to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction. In his prayer of intercession Abraham demonstrated that he had neither understood God's standard for what concerns the quality nor for the quantity of His requirements. Even Abraham's own righteousness was insufficient for the satisfaction of God's requirement. No ten men would be needed to save Sodom and Gomorrah; one was enough to save, not only Sodom, but the whole world. Jesus gives proof of this before the eyes of the whole world. God's requirement is too absolute for us, yet we cannot say that He requires too much.

At this point, the company leaves the city.

II. The Preparation on the Way to the Garden 15:1--17:26

1. The Organic Character of Fellowship with Christ 15:1-26

As we have already observed, Jesus is, at this point, on His way to Gethsemane and probably outside the city gate. We can imagine that the party passing a vineyard and Jesus touching a bunch of grapes, saying: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." In the previous chapter, Jesus had laid the legal foundation for fellowship with the Father, the Holy Spirit being the agent. In verses 1-17 of this chapter, Jesus describes the organic character of this fellowship. The topic that is further developed in the next chapter actually begins in vs. 18.

The truth Jesus illustrates here with the picture of the vine and the branches is that our relationship with Him is a natural one. As the branch is physically fed by that vine and bears fruit, so the Spirit of Christ feeds us spiritually. The Bible uses the image of a tree to depict our relationship with God. David writes: "He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."⁶⁵³ Zechariah sees a vision of two olive trees that feed their oil straight into a lampstand, providing it organically with fuel to keep the light burning.⁶⁵⁴ There the point is the testimony of the light of the Holy Spirit that shines in the darkness. In Jesus' illustration the point is the love of the Holy Spirit, the sweetness of the wine, the deep spiritual joy of God's love. Light is God's answer to the power of darkness; "wine" is His answer to the suffering, death, and sorrow in this world caused by the Evil One. The Bible speaks of wine as an image of joy. "Wine that gladdens the heart of man."⁶⁵⁵ Man looks for refuge and oblivion for the pressures and tensions of life. David, correctly, sees in that an ersatz of the real spiritual joy, when he wrote in one of the psalms: "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."⁶⁵⁶

Jesus picks up where David left off by saying: "I am the true vine." Indirectly, Jesus had already identified Himself with the light of the lampstand and the olive trees in Zechariah's vision, when He said: "I am the light of the world."⁶⁵⁷ Jesus' statement here amounts to: "I am the true joy, the true relaxation, the true escape from the pressures and sorrows of life." Fellowship with Him offers immunity to being overcome by sorrow, which, like the peace He announced in the previous chapter, "transcends all understanding." The deeper the intimacy of this fellowship, the more important the purity of this relationship. The smallest interruption of the organic unity will lead to deep injury and eventually to eternal loss.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." The two go together. The Father planted and created the vine. He has taken upon Himself the responsibility for the care of it. The purpose for which the vine was planted is fruit. A person who bears fruit in his fellowship with Christ is a person who reaches the goal God has set for his life. He who does not bear any fruit misses the mark. The Greek word for "missing the mark" is *hamartano*, which is used in Scriptures for "to sin." As the intimacy increases, the smaller sins become more important. As Solomon sings in the Song of Songs: "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in

⁶⁵¹ See Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37

⁶⁵² Rom. 3:23

⁶⁵³ Ps. 1:3

⁶⁵⁴ See Zech. 4:1-6

⁶⁵⁵ Ps. 104:15

⁶⁵⁶ Ps. 4:7

⁶⁵⁷ ch. 8:12

bloom.”⁶⁵⁸ The closer we come to the mark, the more careful we must be. These verses do not deal with being lost or being saved; the throwing away and the burning of the branch that doesn’t bear fruit is not necessarily a reference to the fires of hell. We cannot say, for instance, that Moses and Aaron were eternally lost because they never entered the Promised Land. Jesus’ words here pertain to missing God’s goal for our lives.

Before entering more deeply into the question of pruning, we have to remind ourselves again that Jesus speaks here as a man. We are implanted in Him as the branches in a vine. God looks upon the whole of humanity as upon one person before He looks at us as individuals. We only begin to count for Him as persons when, as human beings, we have taken our place in Christ. The vine stands for the body of Christ as a whole. The pruning refers, first of all, to what God does with the church. The application given of this text is often that God prunes our personal lives. I do not deny that God can take away things from us that would hinder our spiritual growth, but that is not what this parable says. We are not the vine; Christ is, and the removal of the branches does not stand for certain things that are removed from our life, but for people who are removed from the body of Christ. Personal cleansing is only performed on those who remain in Christ. The way the NIV renders the Greek words *kathairo* and *katharos* fails to bring out the close relationship in meaning. Both words have the meaning of cleansing or being clean. TLB demonstrates this more clearly with the paraphrase: “He prunes those branches that bear fruit for even larger crops. He has already tended you by pruning you back for greater strength and usefulness by means of the commands I gave you.”

There is an obvious difference between the cutting off of branches that do not produce fruit and the pruning of branches for the purpose of increasing the yield. The difference is in our identification with the vine, that is with Christ. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says: “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”⁶⁵⁹ In both statements, the core of the matter is identification with Christ. Our reaction to God’s intervention in our lives is either positive or negative, according to our identification with our Lord. We can accept our trials as a means to identify with the cross of Christ, or as negatives that impede our progress. The living branch, the one that is implanted in the vine, realizes that it is Christ who is being pruned. The verb “to prune” in English can have a negative connotation. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it rather negatively as “to cut off unwanted parts (as of a tree).” God’s pruning is always positive; it is for the purpose of producing positive results. The rendering “to cleanse” emphasizes this positive aspect. The Lord also indicates that the instrument of the pruning is the Word of God. “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.” The Word of God is always the instrument of God’s creative power, both for the physical as for the spiritual creation. The bearing of fruit on the vine is a spiritual matter. As we are unable to raise ourselves from the dead, so we are powerless to bear fruit outside the vine. Some branches may keep on vegetating after having been removed from the vine. A classic example is found in the life of King Saul, who kept on reigning over Israel for almost forty years after God had rejected him.⁶⁶⁰

God’s creation consists in concrete facts. This is not merely true because God says it, as a human being can manipulate facts with words, in the sense of a father saying to a child: “Because I say so.” God’s Word creates the facts. Jesus says that His disciples, those who love and obey Him, are as cleansed branches in the vine. This implies that a process of implanting and cleansing has already taken place. In the spiritual realm, sin that separated man from God has already been removed. In a way, Jesus again reaches forward to the facts as they would develop on earth. When Jesus spoke those words, the cross on earth had not yet become a fact. In heaven, however, the Lamb had been slain since the foundation of the world. This is the reason Jesus could reach out in faith, because in heaven where the matter was the most important, the fact had already been established.

Faith is always based on facts. Those facts may be invisible to us, but faith can make the invisible visible. Faith that is not based on facts is pure fantasy. Not only is the atonement, which makes our fellowship with God possible, a fact, but so is the fellowship itself. When Jesus makes His dwelling in us the criterion, it means that we are dealing with an established fact.

The NIV renders Jesus’ words as a condition: “Remain in me, and I will remain in you” but most other translations read: “Abide in Me, and I in you” (NKJV). The keyword for all spiritual experience is “Remain in Me.” We must place those words next to the other invitations: “Come to me.”⁶⁶¹ Jesus addresses Himself here to those who have already come. It is our responsibility to keep the lines of communication open. From His side, the Lord has done all it takes to make this fellowship possible. We must remain in the place where He can protect and feed us. The alternative for us would be to run away from Him.

⁶⁵⁸ Song 2:15

⁶⁵⁹ Matt. 10:38

⁶⁶⁰ See I Sam. 15:23

⁶⁶¹ Matt. 11:28; John 7:37

In order to know what it means to remain in Him, we must keep alive the knowledge of how we arrived at that place. If we begin to forget the conditions in which we said: "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you,"⁶⁶² we are in danger of forgetting the basis of our redemption. The consciousness of being forgiven is fundamental for our remaining in Christ.

Our remaining in Christ expresses itself in our love and obedience to the Father. We will only remain in Christ, if we daily open our heart for Him and allow Him to let His light shine upon us. The mutual aspect of the fellowship will be a tremendous stimulus to us. The Greek expresses this in the words: "Remain in me, and I will remain in you." The Greek word used is *kago*, which is a combination of the words *kai* ("and") and *ego* ("I,") meaning: "I also." Some translations render the sentence: "Remain in Me, as I remain in you." Christ remaining in us is both the basis as well as the standard for our remaining in Him. It is the normal condition, the order of creation, that Christ dwells in us and we in Him. It is an eternal principle in the sense that it is not merely a temporary provision on this side of eternity, as a relationship that protects against the temptations of sin and the weakness of our human natures. This vine has its roots in eternity. Christ is eternally human and we will be that also. From now on, there exists between Him and us an unparalleled intimate relationship that will become clearer and purer as we leave this world, but it will not change fundamentally. This means that our bearing fruit is not something that is limited to life in this world alone. The true and remaining fruit grows on the other side of the wall. What we experience here is a foretaste of things to come. The intimacy of our relationship with Christ at present is also a model of what our relationship with all our fellowmen will be in the future: a fellowship of knowing, loving, and of being known.

Bearing fruit is not our responsibility, but His. It is our responsibility to remain in Him. An important part of remaining in Him consists in the knowledge that apart from Him we can do nothing. As soon as we begin to imagine that we can produce lasting fruit on our own, the ground under us will begin to slip away. The word "do" in this context means "acting in a positive sense," or bringing about something that has eternal value. We "do" of course lots of things that are not related to our fellowship with Christ. Only that which is done out of love for Christ has value and will remain. "Do" is synonymous with "bearing fruit." The implication is that Christ does His work through us. He promises that we will bear fruit and that this fruit will last.⁶⁶³

As we will see later, the fruit Jesus speaks about here is the fruit of love, love for Him and for one another. The blossoms that produce this fruit spread around a fragrance of joy. The first and foremost result of this intimate relationship with the Lord, however, is answer to prayer. The condition for remaining in Christ is very strict and limited, but there is no limitation to the answers to our prayers. In other words, if we subject our will to the will of God, the answer to all our prayers is assured. If the Holy Spirit inspires our wishes and desires, our desires will be satisfied. That is the meaning of the words: "Ask whatever you wish." Every time we bow in prayer, we should ask ourselves: "How is our relationship with the Lord and is His Word within us?" Remaining in Him means surrendering to His omnipotence in the realization that, apart from Him, we can do nothing. Remaining in His Word is the means by which we can check our thoughts and motives and compare them with the character of God. There is no answer to prayer apart from God. This is the lesson we learn from George Mueller's life of prayer. When he applied himself to do the work of God, the door to answered prayer was opened and it never closed during his lifetime.

The context indicates that prayer and bearing fruit belong together. They are, in a sense, identical. Our prayer is the means by which fruit is produced. This does not mean that fruit grows without our cooperation. Prayer is also the essential part of our remaining in Him. Prayer is not a byproduct of fellowship with God; prayer is that fellowship.

We may often not be aware of the extent of the fruit we bear, but our fruit bearing will never be totally unawares. It never occurs without our being involved in it. In Paul's words: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."⁶⁶⁴ Our bearing fruit does not glorify us, it glorifies the Father. As the gardener receives praise for the beautiful plants he cultivates, so God receives praise for us. There is no deeper satisfaction and fulfillment than to bear fruit for God. It is also God's deepest satisfaction. It is both His glory and ours.

We must not lightly pass over the word: "showing yourselves to be my disciples." Or, as the NKJV reads: "so you will be My disciples." They had started out by being Jesus' disciples when they left everything and followed Him. Jesus now shows them that it is not enough to fall back upon this first decision, they must move on. Lasting

⁶⁶² See Luke 15:18

⁶⁶³ See vs. 16

⁶⁶⁴ II Cor. 4:7

discipleship consists in bearing fruit for the Lord. This does not mean that the past is not important. It forms the basis for bearing fruit in the present, and it makes not bearing fruit inexcusable.

Beginning with vs. 9, Jesus sets out to explain more specifically in what bearing fruit consists. Remaining in Christ means remaining in His love. This is the divine eternal love, the *agape*, which exists between the Father and the Son. Jeremiah heard God say: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."⁶⁶⁵ As far as we as human beings are concerned, this love is the most important attribute of God's character. John writes in his First Epistle: "God *is* love."⁶⁶⁶ In our fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, we become partakers of this divine nature.

The Lord shows us the practical way to remaining in God's love by being obedient. God's love is, of course, always practical by nature. To make a distinction between what is practical and theoretical is human business. We call practical what serves us in daily life to achieve our goals. In that respect, God's love is for most people not practical and relevant. Objectively viewed however, nothing is more practical in the whole universe than the love of God. When we obey God's commands, we obey the laws that determine our element. As it is practical and vitally important for a fish to remain in the water, so it is important for a human being to remain in God's love. No man can live without love; he will shrivel and die if he does not receive human love and is ultimately able to surrender to the love of God. Jesus' words confirm, what we have already seen, that love is the basis of obedience. This obedience is, by nature, obedience to a natural law, as the heart obeys the electrical impulses of our body and our lungs inhale and exhale air.

Love would have remained a natural law for us had sin not interfered. This statement is not completely correct, because in his unspoiled condition, Adam had neither eaten from the Tree of Life, nor from the Tree of Knowledge. For him, therefore, it was not a matter of remaining in God's love. It would have been for him the most logical consequence of his nature had he chosen the love of God. By choosing against God's love, he erected an obstacle to the love of God that could only be taken down in the death of Jesus Christ. For us, therefore, it is no longer a natural matter to remain in God's love; to us it is a moral choice that demonstrates itself in obedience to moral laws. This is the difference between Jesus' obedience to the Father's commands and our obedience to Jesus' command. To Jesus, obedience was not only a natural law; it also meant His death on the cross. This truth places us before a dimension that goes beyond anything we can experience.

Remaining in Christ's love requires an act of surrender. There is in human love always the double aspect of male and female. This pertains not only to the sexual experience of human love but also to the emotional. It is difficult for a man to show emotions that are primarily female. A male is by nature aggressive, not passive, in the expression of his love. According to C. S. Lewis, God is so utterly masculine that, in comparison with Him, all of creation is feminine. This gives to males the opportunity to demonstrate both aspects of love: the male aspect toward their spouses and the female aspect toward God in surrender to Him. In this also, Christ gives us the example. His love of the Father is demonstrated in His obedient surrender; His love for us demands our surrender to Him. A woman will not feel this dichotomy, because to her love only has one facet. So when Jesus says: "Now remain in My love" He means, practically, "continue to surrender yourself to Me."

Jesus wraps it all up by saying in vs. 11: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." The purpose of the vine is to produce "wine that gladdens the heart of man."⁶⁶⁷ The implication is that the pressures of life, the sufferings, and sorrows are too much for us to bear without any outside help. We rightfully reject the excesses of alcoholism. But the Bible does not disapprove of the Israelite habit to drink a glass of wine to relax and rejoice. Whether we approve or not, Jesus has built the image He uses here upon this usage. As a glass of wine has a relaxing effect upon our physical and emotional condition, so will fellowship with God work upon our spirit. We will experience it as joy. This was Jesus' own experience in His fellowship with the Father. For us it is part of our salvation that is rightfully ours because of Jesus' substitutionary suffering. As His love is the matrix for our love, and His obedience the basis for ours, so is His joy the sounding board for our joy so that our joy may be complete. Love is the motivation for obedience and obedience works joy.

The ultimate proof of God's love is the death of Jesus Christ for mankind. Not only "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends," but in Paul's words: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."⁶⁶⁸ Dying for a friend is the greatest sacrifice a human being can bring for his fellowmen. To die for an enemy is humanly impossible. It is contrary to the most elementary concepts of our human nature. It can only be done by God and for God. The fact that Jesus does not mention this

⁶⁶⁵ Jer. 31:3

⁶⁶⁶ I John 4:8,16

⁶⁶⁷ See Ps. 104:15

⁶⁶⁸ Rom. 5:8

aspect of divine grace does not mean that it would not be important or that it is not present here. Jesus limits Himself to the circle of His friends because He is among friends and He wants to emphasize friendship. Added to this is the fact that love, by its very nature, knows no enemies. Jesus' statement, the reference to His death, is the soil in which the vine is rooted; this is the essence of the whole image.

In the context of this chapter, Jesus' own death is never clearly mentioned. Speaking to the disciples, He says that they must demonstrate this genuine divine love by laying down their lives for one another. Peter had said earlier "I will lay down my life for you."⁶⁶⁹ Those words sound the same as Jesus' words here, but their meaning could not be more different. Peter's statement was meaningless; he was not ready for that kind of sacrifice. That must be the reason Jesus had said: "you will follow later."⁶⁷⁰ A demonstration of love on that level is evidence of a spiritual victory and that kind of victory Peter had not yet won; he had not even understood what it was. His condition improved later when he failed the three test questions Jesus put to him in the last chapter of John's Gospel.⁶⁷¹ The only position in which a human being will ever be able to lay down his life for his brothers is by remaining in Jesus' love. It is on the basis of the forgiveness of our sins and our accepting of God's grace that the fruit grows on the branches of the vine. I ought to be careful how I write about those things. It is so easy to make statements about being willing to lay down my life without realizing that I could draw back at the last moment. It is not death that scares me, but the pain of dying that causes fear.

It is easy to misunderstand Jesus' words in vs. 14: "You are my friends if you do what I command." Jesus does not say that His love for us depends on our obedience to Him. His is love unconditional, but the experience of that love will only be ours when we obey. Friendship is the experience of intimacy on the basis of mutual respect and love. The Bible calls Abraham "a friend of God."⁶⁷² Others are called by synonymous terms, as Enoch and Noah who walked with God,⁶⁷³ David was called "a man after [God's] own heart,"⁶⁷⁴ and Daniel was addressed as "highly esteemed," or "dearly beloved."⁶⁷⁵ All these merited their title by demonstrating their love for God in consistent obedience. In the New Testament, Jesus put all others in the shade, even Moses, God's confidant, who was faithful in God's house and with whom God spoke face to face.⁶⁷⁶ Jesus is the Man of whom the Father said: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."⁶⁷⁷ If God calls us friends, it is because of Jesus. We are included in the obedience of Jesus Christ, and consequently we are included in the circle of God's intimates. But as with all things that are implicit in our salvation, they only become effective for us if we claim them in obedience.

As a young Christian I once met with a pastor by the name of Roland Brown, who wrote John 15:15 in my Bible. What Jesus describes here is the secret David expresses in the psalms: "The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them,"⁶⁷⁸ or as the NKJV renders it: "The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him." Jesus calls us His friends. This statement makes Jesus' death on the cross, which was not explicitly mentioned in the previous verse, the basis for our friendship with Him. The proof of His friendship with us is that He reveals God's secrets to us. Jesus had early said to the disciples: "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them,"⁶⁷⁹ and "Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."⁶⁸⁰ Later in the evening, He would pray: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word."⁶⁸¹ In the context of this chapter, we can say that Jesus laid down His life for us because of this relationship of intimacy and friendship. The road to "the secret of the Lord" is built upon the same foundation as the pardon of our sins. Both become effective if we accept them in faith.

Being partakers of God's revelation of Himself has far reaching consequences. It not only helps us to better understand God's being and character but also His intervention in the events of this world. David says: "He made

⁶⁶⁹ ch. 13:37

⁶⁷⁰ vs. 13:36

⁶⁷¹ See ch. 21:15-19

⁶⁷² II Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23

⁶⁷³ Gen. 5:24; 6:9

⁶⁷⁴ I Sam. 13:14

⁶⁷⁵ Dan. 10:11 (NKJV)

⁶⁷⁶ See Num. 12:7,8

⁶⁷⁷ Luke 3:22

⁶⁷⁸ Ps. 25:14

⁶⁷⁹ Matt. 13:11

⁶⁸⁰ Matt. 13:16,17

⁶⁸¹ ch. 17:6

known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel.”⁶⁸² And Amos assures us: “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”⁶⁸³ This does not mean that we will be able to calculate the date of Christ’s return, but we can, as did Dr. Simpson, strive to bring back the King through world evangelization. It also means that we can influence world history through intercessory prayer, as Abraham in his intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah and Daniel for Israel’s return from captivity. It is said that John Wesley saved Great Britain from a revolution, such as devastated France. Paul reasons along the same lines when he states that the Holy Spirit promotes intercession in the hearts of the believers who are concerned about a creation that is disrupted by sin. We read in the Epistle to the Romans: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”⁶⁸⁴

Our friendship with God relates not only to an intimate relationship but also to a close cooperation to achieve God’s goal with creation in bringing it back under the Lordship of Christ. We are God’s friends if we are God’s collaborators and God’s ambassadors.

In saying these words, Jesus abolished slavery. It is difficult for us to determine our own position in this respect. We are given this offer as weak and imperfect human beings and the danger is real that our obedience to God, which forms the foundation of the friendship, will weaken. We can so easily become proud of our unique position that we lose our status of friends. We do well, therefore, to follow Paul’s advice in this matter, when he says: “Thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves.* Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.”⁶⁸⁵ The right balance is kept if we understand that, while God emphasizes friendship, we emphasize obedience.

When Jesus says: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last,” it does, of course, not mean that our will is completely set aside and that we have no choice at all. If that were true, it would not mean the abolition of slavery. It means that, while we were slaves and existed in a position that was unworthy of man, He took the initiative. It is because He chose us that we are again able to choose. The comfort of Jesus’ words is for me that my going and bearing fruit is not dependent upon what I do but on what He has done for me. Our bearing fruit is only indirectly related to our choice. He is the vine, we are the branches. Our responsibility is not to bear fruit but to remain in Him. Bearing fruit is the result of our remaining. If we consider the alternative of remaining in Him, the choice is not too difficult and not too free either!

Jesus’ words were, of course, primarily addressed to the disciples, and the fruit that is mentioned is, first of all, the building of the church. Bearing fruit in one’s personal life is implied. We can only together form the temple of the Holy Spirit if our own body is the Spirit’s temple. But the choice and the call that are mentioned in these words refer, first and foremost, to the apostleship. We have to be careful in applying Jesus’ promises indiscriminately to our personal needs and circumstances. It is only in as much as we become part of the great work God is doing in this world that we can claim the promises for answered prayer. Answered prayers are related to the monuments we erect in the Kingdom of God, as did, for instance George Mueller.

There is also an immediate connection between answered prayer and the love to one another. The Lord commands us to love one another, but without our praying in which we open ourselves for His love and ask for this love, it will be impossible to obey the command. Love for God is the basis of our obedience. Obedience is the condition of our remaining in Him, and remaining in Him bears the fruit of love. Loving one another is the command that must be obeyed. Thus the circle is complete.

2. Fellowship with Christ and the Hatred of the World

15:18-16:33

⁶⁸² Ps. 103: 7

⁶⁸³ Amos 3:7

⁶⁸⁴ Rom. 8:19-26

⁶⁸⁵ Rom. 6:17-19

The tone of this section is totally different from the preceding one. The emphasis here is on the darkness, the hatred, and the suffering in which this world is steeped. The contrast is stated clearly between the intimate love within the fellowship of Christ and the misery of hatred that surrounds this fellowship. Life with the Lord Jesus Christ protects us, but it does not isolate us. If we try to use Christ's love to shut ourselves off from the rest of humanity, we miss the point. In this section, Jesus breaks through any kind of isolation we may have built up around us, either wittingly or unwittingly. This is the difference between the oblivion caused by the use of wine and the joy provided by the true vine. Wine intoxicates and makes us less human, the love of Christ sharpens our wit and makes us more human. A Christian does not flee but conquers.

Jesus' words bring us back to the circumstances in which they were spoken. It is easy to forget, when reading these wonderful words about the vine and the branches, that Jesus was less than 24 hours away from His death. The disciples may not have been aware of this, but the Lord did not forget it for one moment. What awaited Him is the immediate result of the hatred of the world. "The World" in this case is Jesus' pious countrymen, who reject fellowship with the God they confess to worship. As the death of Jesus Christ is, for us, the focal point on which we concentrate for all inspiration to love and obedience, so, for those who reject Jesus, the same death is the focus for inspiration of hatred and rebellion. We are being hated because of our association with Jesus. We are hated because He is hated. Surrender of self, giving one's life for someone else, goes directly against the grain of the philosophy of fallen man. The foundation of rebellion is self-preservation and egoism. The world considers Jesus' love as a reproach, which awakens hatred.

Writing to Timothy, the apostle Paul states: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."⁶⁸⁶ This does, of course, not mean that the amount of persecution we endure would be a measure of our godliness. Absence of maltreatment does not necessarily mean absence of fruit. Paul wrote these words during the reign of the Emperor Nero, when it was impossible to be a Christian without incurring the emperor's wrath. The church of Jesus Christ has repeatedly, but not unremittingly, passed through similar episodes in world history. That is why Jesus says: "If the world hates you..." The world's hatred is always present but not always active.

It is also true that the hatred of the world is not always unjustly focused on Christians. We can never justify hatred, but we have to acknowledge that some Christians do not always show themselves at their best and in purest fellowship with the Lord. Many Christians evince a faked piety without a demonstration of genuine love. There are numerous examples of wars between Protestants and Catholics, or between Christians and Moslems in which both parties incur guilt. There is often a demonstration of fanaticism instead of love. Christians sometimes have a tendency to blow details out of proportion at the price of important things that are at the core. The world does not always hate without a reason. But Jesus does not speak about that kind of details here. He looks at us from the perspective of the complete purity of fellowship with Him. Whenever we are confronted with hatred, we should always ask ourselves if it is a form of justifiable criticism because of our inconsistent attitude or whether it is a demonic reaction to the revelations of divine love. We may sometimes be tempted to suppose the latter in an effort to avoid facing the former.

The statement that Christians do not belong to the world merits a closer look. If we define "the world" as that part of creation that has withdrawn itself from God's government and has risen up in rebellion against Him, we can say that a Christian does not belong to it. The fact that we have answered God's call doesn't mean that we do not share this planet with our fellowmen. It also does not mean that we are too good for this world, although non-Christians sometimes believe that to be our attitude. It is not a matter of being good or bad but of being reconciled or rebellious. Yet, the author of Hebrews says of some people "the world was not worthy of them."⁶⁸⁷ This, however, is not the pertinent question here. Christians form the *ecclesia*, the group of people that has been called out of this world into fellowship with God. It is against this group of people that the world directs its hatred. Jesus says: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own." That love is, of course, not the same as in the preceding verses. It is not the love that is willing to give its life for the other. Of that kind of love the non-reconciled person, being an egoist, has no idea. Love among people in the world is nothing other than the feeling of those who are in the same boat and sense that they belong together.

Jesus' statement: "No servant is greater than his master" is also found elsewhere in the New Testament. Jesus spoke these same words, probably for the first time at the beginning of His public ministry, in the address to the disciples when they were being sent out, in Matthew's Gospel: "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master."⁶⁸⁸ We find the second quotation at the foot washing in John's Gospel, where Jesus connects His

⁶⁸⁶ II Tim. 3:12

⁶⁸⁷ Heb. 11:38

⁶⁸⁸ Matt. 10:24

words to an object lesson.⁶⁸⁹ Since, in the context of this chapter, these words are spoken against the background of persecution, we may suppose that the words: "Remember the words I spoke to you" refer to Matthew's Gospel. Jesus actually turned things around when He said: "No servant is greater than his master." When we say that one person is greater than another, we speak about dignity, not immunity. Jesus speaks here about vulnerability. A servant is usually less vulnerable than his superior. The higher tree catches more wind.

There is a ray of hope in the words: "If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also." It is not a forgone conclusion that all who at that moment are in a state of rebellion will always remain so. As long as the voice of God is heard in this world, there is the possibility that rebels will be reconciled.

Jesus uses the expression "because of my name" here differently than He does in vs. 16. The difference is not in the words "in" or "because of." The Name of Jesus stands for who He is and what He does. It refers, first of all, here to His humanity. Our prayer in Jesus' Name is effective because we draw from the fact that, as a man, He conquered sin and death. This is the very reason the non-reconciled person hates the Name of Jesus. He looks upon this victory as an act of treason. What Jesus did tears away the cover of darkness from the human heart and exposes him naked and non-reconciled. That is the effect the testimony of a Christian can have upon the non-Christian. This, I believe, is the meaning of Paul's words to the Corinthians: "If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!' " ⁶⁹⁰ Paul also writes: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."⁶⁹¹

We should remember that Jesus addresses these words primarily to His disciples and that He refers to the pious Jews for whom keeping the law was the most important part of their life. It is about those people that He says: "They do not know the One who sent me." Had they really known the Father, the Incarnation of the Son would not have been a problem for them. The actual content of "the Name" is here the Incarnation. It can be reassuring to men to imagine God as being infinitely removed and unapproachable. Man can feel himself threatened by the fact that God revealed Himself in flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ. Our lies keep God at a distance. David says: "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."⁶⁹²

Jesus repeats here what He had stated several times in public that the miracles He performed bear witness to the fact that God had revealed Himself in Him. He had said earlier: "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me."⁶⁹³ The negative reaction of those who heard and saw Jesus performing miracles is counted as sin. It is not because of the sin in which they lived prior to Jesus' coming, but because of their rejection of the Savior that they are lost. This does not mean that they had not sinned before or that they would not have been held responsible for their acts, but it suggests that God will hold those who never heard the Gospel less responsible than those who did hear. The ultimate sin is the rejection of God's offer of grace in Jesus Christ. This is so utterly sinful that, in comparison, all else becomes less. We cannot build a theology of missions on this verse as if it explains the fate of those who have not heard the Gospel. That would lead to simple answers to complex problems. The question how much light the person who never heard possesses and how much of this light he has rejected will undoubtedly play a role on the Day of Judgment, but that matter is beyond the scope of our vision. We do know that God will hold us responsible for the light we possess and how we follow it.

The Jews had had more than enough light to be able to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. Their damnation consisted in the fact that they rejected the light they possessed. Jesus said that the reason for this was their hatred for God, whom they professed to love. The statement: "They hated me without reason" is a quotation from one of the Psalms. David wrote: "Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head."⁶⁹⁴ David spoke about a man who endured scorn for God's sake. The Psalm is full of prophetic references to Jesus' suffering. The folly and guilt in that psalm become here the sin of the world that Jesus took upon Himself. The hate without reason reached its pinnacle at the cross.

Hatred is only justifiable if it is directed against unrighteousness. Hatred for God, therefore, is without ground. What reason does man have to hate God? The world God created was man's perfect habitat, both for his physical as well as for his emotional needs. Spiritually also, it would have been ideal, if man had sought fellowship

⁶⁸⁹ See ch. 13:16

⁶⁹⁰ I Cor. 14:24,25

⁶⁹¹ II Cor. 2:15,16

⁶⁹² Ps. 145:18

⁶⁹³ ch. 5:36

⁶⁹⁴ Ps. 69:4

with God. The fact that creation as a whole became man's enemy is man's own fault. When God puts us to the test because He loves us, we experience that as hostility. In our shortsightedness, we do not realize that a comfortable pain free existence, which we consider to be ideal, actually leads to our death. A person who walks in ice and snow can only stay alive and warm if he keeps on going; lying down and resting would mean freezing to death. People hate God because of the pain they experience, which actually is their salvation.

The purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to justify God's deeds in this world. Redeemed man will ultimately testify that God is right, as we see in the Book of Revelation. John records the voice of the redeemed in heaven who sing: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great- and for destroying those who destroy the earth."⁶⁹⁵

Jesus puts here another emphasis upon the coming of the Holy Spirit than in chapter fourteen. There, the topic is the Spirit's ministry in the heart of the believer. Beginning with vs. 26, the topic is the Spirit's influence, through the believer, to the world. The main theme in chapter fifteen is "Apart from me you can do nothing." Only when the Holy Spirit had taken possession of our inner being and we live in close fellowship with the Lord, will we have an influence upon the world around us. The Spirit's ministry in the world is through the believer. The believer will sometimes think that he has no part in what happens, but that does not mean that he is not involved. It will be the collaboration of the testimony of God's Spirit and of our witness that convinces the world of the truth. This can mean a conviction to salvation or to the world's detriment.

One of the reasons Jesus gives for the disciples' witness is the fact that they have been with Him from the beginning. Their witness will be the testimony of eyewitnesses. Their testimony will not be a philosophical statement of ideas but a practical declaration of facts. Modern Christianity has removed itself completely from the Bible in this respect. Facts have no value or meaning for modern theology. According to the Lord, facts are the proof of evidence in the testimony of the person who has received the Holy Spirit. As the apostle John states in his first epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."⁶⁹⁶ The testimony of the Book of Acts consists of the facts of the life of Jesus. If the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are built upon an illusion, we have nothing to say. If what the Bible says about Christ's words and acts is not the truth, then the person who calls himself Christian deceives himself.

Chapter 16:1-33

In the prophecy with which this chapter opens, the Lord speaks not about His upcoming imprisonment and crucifixion but about the time after Pentecost and the whole period of persecution following that, up to the Great Tribulation at the end of time. Jesus had made similar statements at the beginning of His ministry when He commissioned the disciples to go out in the campaign that covered the whole of Israel. We read His words in Matthew's Gospel: "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."⁶⁹⁷ Jesus wants us to understand that persecution is not an unforeseen event. This knowledge can prevent our world from crumbling around us when we meet persecution. The Israelites had to learn that lesson in the desert when they arrived at Massa and Meribah, and found themselves without drinking water and they asked themselves the question: "Is the LORD among us or not?"

⁶⁹⁵ Rev. 11:17,18. See also 15:3,4 and 19:1,2

⁶⁹⁶ See I John 1:1-3

⁶⁹⁷ Matt. 10:17-23, 28

When Jesus says: "I did not tell you this at first because I was with you," He does, of course, not refer to the above quoted statements. It means that Jesus planted His words in the disciples' memory for the Holy Spirit to bring them to life after Pentecost. In an earlier chapter He had told them: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."⁶⁹⁸ The presence or absence of the Lord would make the greatest difference in their understanding. Jesus' leaving was absolutely necessary for the maturing of their understanding. Only the Holy Spirit could do what the physical presence of the Lord could not.

More than in chapter fourteen, Jesus emphasizes the connection between His leaving and the coming of the Spirit. "Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." We understand that perfect atonement by the shedding of Jesus' blood was necessary to make the pouring out of the Holy Spirit possible. God's holiness had to be satisfied first. Not only would it have been impossible for the Holy Spirit to come upon people who were still polluted by their sin; it would have been even more impossible for the Spirit not to come upon those who were totally covered by the righteousness of Christ. That would have been the undoing of God's righteousness. All this clarifies what precedes. But Jesus' explanation refers to the future. The coming of the Holy Spirit is, first of all, meant for the believers, but God also wants to influence the world through them. The conviction of the world will be the result of the testimony of the believers.

It seems contradictory to what was said about persecution of Christians that the world would be convicted. Conviction here, obviously, does not mean what we usually take it to mean. The Greek word used is *elegcho* which means: "to confute," "to admonish." In the KJV it is often rendered: "to convict, convince, tell a fault, rebuke, or reprove." The same word is used in Luke's Gospel where we read: "But when John *rebuked* Herod the tetrarch because of Herodias, his brother's wife..."

Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words explains that the word "signifies (a) 'to convict, confute, refute,' usually with the suggestion of putting the convicted person to shame; see Matt 18:15, where more than telling the offender his fault is in view; it is used of 'convicting' of sin, John 8:46; 16:8; gainsayers in regard to the faith, Titus 1:9; transgressors of the Law, James 2:9; some texts have the verb in John 8:9; (b) 'to reprove,' 1 Cor 14:24, RV (for KJV, 'convince'), for the unbeliever is there viewed as being reprovved for, or 'convicted' of, his sinful state; so in Luke 3:19; it is used of reprovving works, John 3:20; Eph 5:11,13; 1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15; all these speak of reproof by word of mouth. In Heb 12:5 and Rev 3:19, the word is used of reprovving by action." It does not necessarily mean that people will understand that their concept of sin, righteousness, and judgment is wrong, but that the Holy Spirit, by applying an objective standard, will prove that people's attitude toward those things is wrong. Man's belief determines his actions. A person who has no clear understanding of sin, righteousness, will be destroyed by sin, righteousness, and judgment. In the life of a believer, the real content and value of those will be demonstrated. A person in whom the Holy Spirit resides and who recognizes Him as Lord, will avoid sin, will demonstrate righteousness, and instead of coming under God's judgment, he will bring conviction to others.

The essence of sin is the breaking off of a relationship with God. A person who does not relate everything in life to God does not even understand that his condition and his acts are incongruent with God's character. By manifesting His presence in the believer, the Holy Spirit makes it obvious how terrible the break with God is. In this way, sin becomes particularly sinful.

The same can be said about righteousness, which is the opposite of sin. It is actually better to reverse this and to say that sin is the opposite of righteousness. Righteousness consists of the bringing of everything in life in relationship with God. This makes straight that which is crooked, it heals what is sick, and it brings to life that which is dead. In his fellowship with God, the believer demonstrates something of God's righteousness in this world.

Judgment is related to sin and righteousness. It is God's answer to the perpetrator of evil.

Jesus' words come to us as a surprise. We would have expected the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world to be tender, friendly, and comforting, as it is for us. But the Holy Spirit operates in this world like a sword that penetrates. According to Jesus' definition of the Spirit's ministry, sin, righteousness, and judgment are the three essentials the world learns to know when confronted with the character of God. In these verses, Jesus gives a completely unexpected twist to the interpretation of these concepts. Our Lord does not deviate from the concept of God's holiness, but He lets the light of God's love shine upon it. The fact that the first point, sin, is a negative does in no way diminish the positive character of His approach. Sin does not only constitute a break with God, it also rejects the One who came to heal the break. That fact will ultimately be the criterion on the Day of Judgment. We are not lost because we were born in this lost world but because we refuse to let ourselves be healed.

⁶⁹⁸ ch. 14:26

When we simply reverse Jesus' statement, we see the whole gamut of God's grace revealed. It means that Jesus came to pay the price of our sin in full with His own blood, and that, in His death, He has demonstrated once and for all the proof of God's love for us. Man is no longer guilty before God because he committed an endless string of offenses and crimes, but only because of his rejection of Jesus Christ as his Savior. Accepting Christ means a complete and perfect atonement of all sin.

The same can be said about righteousness. God's righteousness is no longer something sinful man has to fear, but it consists of Jesus' going to the Father. This is the definition Paul gives of the Gospel: "In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed."⁶⁹⁹ God's righteousness demands payment for our sin. It is impossible for man to satisfy this demand. Jesus' going to the Father in His death on the cross makes the Gospel a legally binding act of God for everyone who believes. By making God's righteousness the criterion, rather than God's love, the basis of our salvation becomes much stronger. And God's righteousness makes His love shine the brighter!

At the same time, Jesus explains to the disciples that the deep sorrow of separation ("In a little while you will see me no more") is related to the revelation of God's righteousness. If the disciples had understood what Jesus was saying to them, it would have made all the difference in the days that were ahead. If we understand that our painful experiences are not senseless episodes but that they are the immediate result of God's intervention in this world, our hardships would be easier to bear; they would become indications of victory. Even the ungodly philosopher Nietzsche knew that if one understands the "why" of things, one can bear the "how."

In His definition of judgment, the Lord goes to the core of the matter and penetrates all camouflage. The essence of all chaos in the universe is the fact that the devil rebelled against the only, almighty, eternal God. Satan wants to create the illusion that his plan has met with success. Judgment takes the ground away from under him. This means, at the same time, hope for the believer and doom for the world. Judgment is passed in the victory of Jesus Christ in His death on the cross. The apostle Paul states in Colossians: "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."⁷⁰⁰ Judgment upon sin is not primarily judgment upon man but upon the devil. Man will only come under this judgment inasmuch as he associates with the devil. Those who are for the Lord do not come into judgment because they have already passed from death into life.⁷⁰¹ In this way Jesus demonstrates that His going away is essential in connection with the facts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Since the disciples would participate in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which would make them instrumental in influencing the world, Jesus' words are of the utmost importance to them. What they experienced and understood, however, was nothing but the deepest sadness.

Jesus' words: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear," make us understand that there is an ongoing revelation after Jesus' departure. The Holy Spirit would not only remind them of everything Jesus had said to them,⁷⁰² He would also reveal new things that would make the truth complete. Much heresy has found a fertile ground in these words of Jesus. Many call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit to justify their deviations from the truth. We always have to remind ourselves that the human mind is clouded by sin and it is possible for man to wrongly interpret the truth the Holy Spirit reveals. In his book *My Utmost For His Highest*, Oswald Chambers urges us to, from time to time, throw overboard all our Christian convictions and to hold on only to what the Lord hands back to us. We will never be able to come to completely know the truth on this side of eternity. What the Lord says here about the work of the Holy Spirit begins in this life and it is completed in heaven.

We cannot separate these words from what Jesus said earlier: "I am the way and the truth and the life."⁷⁰³ The way the Holy Spirit shows us is nothing else than the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ; the meaning of His work and person. "Truth" is here not a philosophical concept or a catchword for everything that exists, it is the definition of that which is at the center of the universe: God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus uses the word in this limited sense. This is what He meant when He said to the Jews: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."⁷⁰⁴ And to Pilate He would say: "I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."⁷⁰⁵ This is the reason Jesus can say: "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." The words: "He will speak only what he hears" probably have the same meaning in connection with the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus as in "the Son can do

⁶⁹⁹ Rom. 1:17

⁷⁰⁰ Col. 2:15

⁷⁰¹ See John 4:25

⁷⁰² See ch. 14:26

⁷⁰³ ch. 14:6

⁷⁰⁴ ch. 8:32

⁷⁰⁵ ch. 18:37

nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”⁷⁰⁶ It is a matter of interdependence and obedience.

Part of the promise of the Holy Spirit is that He will tell us about the things to come, which we find revealed in the Book of Revelation. There John expresses in images what Jesus shows to him. We limit the meaning of Jesus’ words too much, however, if we take them to refer only to prophecies regarding the future. They contain also something of the explanation Peter gives us regarding the prophecies of the Old Testament. Peter writes: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.”⁷⁰⁷ Christ is the theme of all prophecy, both in the New Testament as in the Old. If we lose sight of the unity of Scripture, we lose our way in the details. Just as the actual definition of truth is nothing else but the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, so the future is nothing else. Knowledge of the future does not exist in determining the date of the Great Tribulation or the identity of the Antichrist, but in the manifestation of Jesus in all His glory. The rest is detail and consequently of less importance.

With the words: “All that belongs to the Father is mine” Jesus gives us a glance into the inner workings of the Trinity. The meaning of these words, undoubtedly, escaped the disciples. Jesus speaks here about the glory of the Son of Man. As Son of God, the glory of the Father was His already. That needs no further explanation. But as a created human being, being equal to God means a victory for all created beings over everything that separated them from the Creator. This is the ultimate goal of all of creation. God had created man for the purpose of becoming equal to God so that He could put all of creation under his feet. This is what was achieved in Jesus Christ. That is why soon “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”⁷⁰⁸ The author of Hebrew states: “In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”⁷⁰⁹ The Holy Spirit will proclaim this fact of the glorious victory over sin and death, of the fact that a man is seated in heaven on the throne of the universe.

The section of verses 16-21 is the least condensed of this chapter. Jesus intent is obvious; His disciples will not see Him while He is in the grave for a little more than about 24 hours. The seeing again would take place at the resurrection. The disciples will have understood the part about sadness. It must have been clear to them that Jesus was going to die. Their reaction to Jesus’ capture indicates that they did not accept this fact. But that doesn’t mean that they would not have understood what Jesus was saying here. It is different with the part about the resurrection and the seeing again. That was something completely outside their field of vision. Jesus’ fourfold announcement of those events had never truly penetrated their mind. Even more astonishing is that they understood nothing about Jesus’ statement that He was going to the Father. This means that they had missed the whole point of Jesus’ life and ministry. They had no idea what was happening.

The remarks they made were obviously made in the background. If it is true that the company was on its way to Gethsemane, some may have walked up front and others brought up the rear. This could explain why it took a while before the evidence of their lack of understanding reached the Lord. Even if Jesus’ going away would not mean such a deep psychological shock to the disciples, a shock which would make their whole world collapse, the spectacle of seeing their most beloved friend being tortured to death before their very eyes would cause unbearable grief to them. However great our hope in the resurrection may be, pain, sickness, and death remain horrible things. And the disciples would have to go through this without the hope of resurrection.

In speaking about His death and resurrection, Jesus also hinted to something more. The words “the world rejoices” can hardly refer to the relatively small group of Jews and Romans who were at Jesus’ execution at that time. They were the representatives of the whole system of which Satan is the ruler. “The world” in this context is not the world of men but the evil world of snakes and scorpions and demons. Jesus had said earlier to His disciples about this world: “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”⁷¹⁰ Jesus was very much aware of the fact that His struggle was “not against flesh

⁷⁰⁶ See ch. 5:19

⁷⁰⁷ I Peter 1:10-12

⁷⁰⁸ Hab. 2:14

⁷⁰⁹ Heb. 2:8,9

⁷¹⁰ Luke 10:19

and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”⁷¹¹

One of the greatest problems, which was probably the greatest cause of the depression that the disciples would experience, was the fact that they did not recognize the enemy and consequently they were powerless in this struggle. Only after Jesus had gained the victory, they would consciously take part in the struggle, and they would become a power the devil had to take note of, the church that the gates of hell cannot overcome.⁷¹² Once “the baby was born,” the mother instinct would take over. They would realize what it means to be human. God created man in His image and likeness (probably after the fall of Lucifer), as His own weapon to crush the enemy. This is one of the reasons there is such a joy when a human being is born. This may be the theme of the symphonic poem John wrote down in Revelation, where we read: “A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.”⁷¹³

What Jesus says, in the context of this chapter, about labor pains refers, first of all, to the experience of the disciples. But we can also see in it a description of Jesus’ own suffering, which far surpassed the suffering of the disciples. In His suffering, Jesus cancelled the original curse that had been pronounced over the motherhood of Eve. Immediately after God had announced to the serpent that the Messiah would crush its head, He said to Eve: “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.”⁷¹⁴ In that sense, the labor pains are an image of the cross where the new man was born. There is a sense in which a woman in labor partakes in the suffering of Christ, and in her giving birth to a human being, she experiences the resurrection. By using this image for the disciples, the Lord wants them to understand that their suffering and depression will not last forever. Theirs would be a sharp but brief pain that would be forgotten once the results become obvious.

The joy of fellowship with the Lord is the power that sustains in all circumstances. Nehemiah told the people of his time: “Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”⁷¹⁵ Without fully understanding this himself, Nehemiah must have tasted something of the resurrection of Christ. It is difficult for us to image the triumph of the resurrection. The suffering of our Lord is so much easier for us to visualize. Several years ago, I saw in *The National Geographic* an article about the “Shroud of Turin.” It is not certain that the body of Christ made this imprint on the shroud after His death. But irrespective of the historical correctness, the shroud gives us a clear image of what the suffering of our Lord must have been like physically. The way in which He was tortured and His body was bruised is unbelievable. The scourging that left wounds on His legs and on the rest of His body indicates that the soldiers who did this to Him had gone wild and struck Him mercilessly and with sadistic pleasure. Yet, all of this was no more than an evil dream the moment the power of the Father filled the body of His Son and He rose from the dead. In comparison with the joy of the resurrection, even such pain fades away!

Joy is stronger than circumstances. When our Lord says: “No one will take away your joy,” He does not suggest that no one will try. Everything and everyone will work together to divert our eyes from the resurrection and to direct them to the decomposition and the corruption that force themselves upon us. The fact that we were allowed a peek into the last chapter makes the whole content of the book bearable. We know how the story will end.

Jesus relates the resurrection to answered prayer: “My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” Answered prayer is always related to faith. We read in Mark’s Gospel that Jesus said: “I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”⁷¹⁶ Faith also grows with the experience of seeing one’s prayers being answered. Being witnesses of the resurrection of Christ must have been for the disciples the greatest stimulus of their faith, and consequently the greatest warranty that their prayers would be answered.

What Jesus mostly emphasizes, however, is the connection between the resurrection and the renewed relationship with the Father. The resurrection of Jesus Christ establishes for us a direct contact with the Father. We received back so much more than Adam ever lost. It is not a matter of restoring what was lost but of resurrection

⁷¹¹ Eph. 6:12

⁷¹² See Matt. 16:18

⁷¹³ Rev. 12:1-6

⁷¹⁴ Gen. 3:16

⁷¹⁵ Neh. 8:10

⁷¹⁶ Mark 11:24

from the dead. The relationship Adam had in his condition of innocence did not last. His eating of the Tree of Knowledge ended it. Jesus' resurrection does not make us return to a condition prior to Adam's eating of the Tree of Knowledge but to a condition that is beyond eating from the Tree of Life. Resurrection is the eating of the fruit of life. Because of the resurrection, we are not only people who have no sin in the eyes of God but men and women who have overcome sin, death, and the devil. As God honors His image, even in the unconverted man, so the Father honors the image of His Son in the converted person. Proof of this is answered prayer in the Name of Jesus.

What does this mean? Up to that time, people had prayed to God from a position of being separated from God and on the basis of a temporary arrangement by which sin was covered by the blood of a sacrificial animal. The most important aspect of the prayer in Jesus' Name is the fact that the shadow has become reality. We now come to the Father as people whose sin the blood of Jesus has washed away and whose heart has been renewed by the resurrection. The resurrection has created a completely new situation that did not exist previously.

It also means that, through our unity with Jesus, as branches in the vine, we fully participate in all that is His. That which the Father gives to the Son, He gives to us.

The third aspect, which we mentioned already, is that the resurrection is the greatest stimulus of faith that can be imagined. The resurrection of the Son by the Father is a miracle of the highest order; all else is of lesser importance. It is only logical to believe that, if the greatest miracle has already taken place, all the lesser things we ask for in prayer will certainly come to pass also.

Talking plainly about the Father could not happen on this side of the cross and the grave. This kind of communication is meant for the dispensation in which we live presently, and probably also for the one to come. We seldom realize that, in the present time, Jesus is revealing the Father to us. A person whose sins have not yet been forgiven does not know God. After our conversion begins the process of cleansing and sanctifying in which the Lord will show us bit-by-bit phases and spots in our life that need healing and must be confessed. Each of those experiences brings us to a deeper knowledge of the Father. Non-confessed sin and unwillingness to change will keep that knowledge from us. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord."⁷¹⁷

When Jesus says that, up to that moment, He has spoken to the disciples figuratively, He does not merely refer to the parables He used. Everything Jesus said was an earthly expression of a heavenly reality. Only after the Holy Spirit had been poured out could spiritual things be communicated spiritually. The time Jesus mentions is the same as "in that day" in vs. 23; it refers to the time after the resurrection when Jesus will see them again. Here also is the mention of answered prayer. First, prayer was answered on the basis of faith, which was the result of the newly found relationship with the Father; here it is in connection with seeing the Father. We think of the incident, after the resurrection, when Peter is being rehabilitated,⁷¹⁸ where it becomes obvious that there is a direct link between forgiveness and the Father's love. Answered prayer is related to confession of sin and to the realization of being the object of the Father's love.

The love of the Father Jesus speaks about here is not His general love for mankind, the eternal attribute of which John says: "God is love."⁷¹⁹ That is an element that finds its only source in the character of the Father; it is without any outside cause or stimulus. Jesus' words suggest that God would love us because we love Jesus. Or is the love Jesus mentions our experience of the eternal love of God to which we become more susceptible because of our love of Christ? We may experience God's love as personal and conditional although, in reality, it is an ever-present attribute of God's eternal character.

On the one hand, there is the Son's constant prayer of intercession in our behalf upon which our salvation and sanctification rest. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about this: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."⁷²⁰ Charles Wesley expressed it thus in his hymn: "Five bleeding wound He has, received on Calvary. They pour effectual prayers; They strongly plead for me. 'Forgive him, oh, forgive' they cry, 'nor let the ransomed sinner die.'" On the other hand, Jesus says here: "I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you." The two opposite statements are not contradictory. The first, about Jesus' intercession, emphasizes the legal aspect of our relationship to the Father. It is the binding contract that satisfies all the demands of God's holiness. The direct and immediate answer to prayer emphasizes God's love. It is true that God's holiness and His love are opposites, but they are not contradictory.

⁷¹⁷ Heb. 12:14

⁷¹⁸ See ch. 21

⁷¹⁹ I John 4:8

⁷²⁰ Heb. 7:25

So it is our attitude toward Jesus that determines our relationship with the Father. It is impossible to love God and not to love Jesus and not to believe that He is God's solution for our sin and the sin of the world.

In vs. 28, the Lord draws the whole picture of the facts of salvation with two simple lines. He sketches the picture of His whole life, emphasizing the importance of that very moment at which He speaks those words. Thus far, He had followed the line of His coming from the Father into the world. Now the point of return has come at which He leaves the world to go back to the Father. This is the moment, the drama the disciples see being played out before their eyes and which they fail to understand. Several times in these chapters Jesus uses the expression, "the time has come" to pinpoint this moment.

A high level of consciousness is needed for a person to be able to reduce the essence of one's life to such simple terms. Most of us are often too overwhelmed by the complications of life to be able to distinguish the outline, or to give expression to it. Speaking in those terms about His life, Jesus outlines at the same time the whole history of salvation. This is the outline of the Incarnation and atonement. Those same lines also determine the life of every human being. They will become clearer as our surrender to God becomes firmer.

It almost seems an oversimplification of the complex of suffering and death to say: "Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." This is not a flight from reality for our Lord. He conquers by stating in a few words what is at stake. Earlier that same evening, Jesus conquered by taking a towel to wash the disciples' feet. We read: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God..."⁷²¹

The disciples' reaction to Jesus' words shows how hopelessly superficial they were. Yet, they believed in Christ and their demonstration of faith is rather touching. But their faith had not been tested by fire, and their untested faith was mixed with too many elements of their own nature to resist the coming shock. But Jesus' regal attitude did not fail to leave an impression on them. Although their eyes never completely opened to the reality, some of this reality did penetrate. The awareness that this man who stood before them and spoke to them, came from the Father became overwhelmingly clear. It sounds strange to us that they would say: "Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions." Their words may refer to the ancient custom to receive instruction by asking questions. We see this, for instance, in Socrates' dialogues. They may have meant that nobody could teach Jesus anything. At that moment, however, Jesus still was on earth as a complete human being, who could not take recourse to the divine attribute of omniscience He possessed as the Second Person of the Trinity. All of Jesus' knowledge at that point was knowledge that had been revealed to Him. He knew more because He knew the Scriptures, because Moses and Elijah had told Him about His exodus, because He was a prophet, and because, as the "men of Issachar, who understood the times [He] knew what Israel should do."⁷²²

Something extraordinary happened to the disciples at this point. The crisis that awaited them was preceded, as is often the case, by a deep assurance of God's presence. There is a sense in which this revelation precipitated their fall. It may be better to say that what we would consider to be a fall was actually part of the revelation. Their flight and abandonment of Jesus became part of their seeing the Father. We will never be able to see the Father without fleeing from our self and from our presumed faith. We climb the path that leads upward by descending. We gain our life by losing it. Jesus then shows them that, what they consider to be faith in God, was actually faith in themselves. They would all be scattered. At this point in the story, Matthew mentions Jesus' quotation of Zechariah's prophecy: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."⁷²³ Jesus knew that all men would forsake Him, but did He know that the Father would forsake Him also? Did that part of Jesus' suffering come as the most painful surprise? Yet in the Psalms, David had prophesied this moment also: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The peace Jesus speaks about for the second time⁷²⁴ would not be the disciples' share before the resurrection had occurred. It could have been theirs had they understood what the resurrection was all about. This demonstrates that Jesus' words reached far beyond that particular moment. Jesus spoke about trouble and suffering that would befall Christians from the time of Pentecost up to the Great Tribulation. Throughout the ages, those who have put themselves under Jesus' protection have suffered, they still suffer, and they will suffer. That suffering is temporary and not all-encompassing. It is not suffering that we inflict upon ourselves but that which others cause. It is the suffering that comes from the fact that we live in the world but are not of this world.

⁷²¹ ch. 13:3

⁷²² See I Chron. 12:32

⁷²³ Matt. 26:31; see Zech. 13:7

⁷²⁴ See ch. 14:27

We know how Jesus has overcome the world. In Paul's words: "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."⁷²⁵ He overcame because: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."⁷²⁶ We partake in this victory if we follow in His footsteps.

Our present condition is beautifully illustrated in Tolkien's book *Lord of the Rings*. The magic ring has been destroyed and the prince of evil, Sauron, is defeated, but his vassal Saruman acts as if nothing has happened and continues his reign of terror without having the basis of power upon which it was originally based. If we are convinced that the worst that can ever happen to us is that our body is killed but that the reality that awaits us after death cannot be taken from us, we will be able to see through the propaganda of the devil and realize that there is no real cause for fear. The magic ring has been destroyed and, consequently, the basis for all the activity of Satan has been removed. The rest is only a matter of time. I have vivid memories of the deep impression these words of Jesus made upon me as a child, when my father would read them at the Bible reading after the meal at the dinner table. Although I had not yet consciously opened my life to the Lord, I sensed something of the majesty of the words: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

"The world" is not only the whole system that is in the hands of the devil, it is also the world that was pulled out of joint when man fell into sin. It is the world that exists as a result of man's sinful acts. It is the world that is a cancerous tumor in God's creation; its cells follow the laws of life and, as a result, destroy the body. Jesus has isolated the tumor, which is now doomed to die. By putting His obedience over against the disobedience of Adam, He overcame. As the world in its present condition came about because of the disobedience of one man, so is also the victory the result of the obedience of one man. We often do not realize how heroic this act is that brought the victory. Nothing more heroic ever happened in the history of the world than the death on the cross of the man Jesus Christ. What is said in heaven about this is not a piece of heavenly propaganda, blown out of proportion for practical reasons, but a statement of objective appreciation of His acts: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. You are worthy ... because you were slain. ... Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"⁷²⁷ One of our fellow human beings, Jesus Christ, my Brother, has done this!

Jesus' Prayer for the Disciples and for the Church

17: 1-26

Jesus' last prayer together with His disciples is one of the most amazing documents in the Bible and in the whole of world literature. No human being who knows that he is about to die would be able to utter such words. Not only is Jesus in complete control of the situation and of His own thoughts and emotions, but what He says goes far above anything the human mind can imagine.

Jesus uttered these words at the end of an evening spent with His disciples, during which He washed their feet, celebrated the Passover feast with them and commenced the sacrament of the communion service. We find a condensation of His words in chapters 13-16.

The words of John about Jesus' attitude at the beginning of the evening can be applied to all the events that took place at that time and all the words that were spoken by Him. In ch. 13:1,3 we read: "It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God."

It is Jesus' knowledge that elevates this prayer above all other prayers that had ever been uttered. We should not make the mistake, though, of confusing Jesus' knowledge with His divine attribute of omniscience. As a man He had access to supernatural knowledge. His divine attribute of omniscience, however, He had left behind in heaven, when He "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."⁷²⁸ It would have been impossible for Jesus to leave behind some divine attribute, such as His omnipresence, and bring with Him His omniscience when He became man and was born in Bethlehem. As far as I understand, the attributes of the divine nature are eternally interacting and inseparable.

⁷²⁵ Col. 2:15

⁷²⁶ I Peter 2:23,24

⁷²⁷ Rev. 5:5, 9, 12

⁷²⁸ Phil. 2:7 RSV

Jesus had acquired His supernatural knowledge the same way other people had received such knowledge: by revelation from the Father and through study of the Word of God. Throughout His life and ministry Jesus appealed frequently to the written Word of God as the source of His understanding. Even in this prayer He mentions the Scriptures. In vs. 12 He says: "None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled." Other instances are: - "But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"⁷²⁹ - "Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled."⁷³⁰ - "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."⁷³¹

As a 12-year-old boy He showed such an unusual appetite for Bible knowledge that He stayed behind in the temple where the whole Old Testament was kept and where the people were who could interpret it. When His knowledge of Scripture increased, His awareness of the reason for His coming into the world must have grown also. Passages such as "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come; it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart,'"⁷³² must have clinched the matter for Him. The Old Testament told Him Who He was and why He had come. So when Satan tried to shake His faith about His being the Son of God, He came fully armed with Scripture knowledge to ward off the attack. The enemy must have known that Jesus' assurance that He was God's Son was based on His faith in the written Word. The divine revelation came only after Jesus gave Himself to His task in obedience and let Himself be baptized by John.

It is important for us to realize that Jesus came to this point in His life by going the same way all of humanity is treading. If we cannot see Jesus as a complete human being who lived a complete human life and died a human death, we will not be able to stand in awe before the prayer He utters here. If we think that Jesus, as the Second Person of the Trinity, could fall back upon recourses of divine omnipotence in a way that is inaccessible to us, there will be no benefit or blessing for us in this prayer. But if we see Him stand here and hear Him pray, understanding that He used the same tools of Scripture and faith that are at our disposal, we will fall down and worship.

Jesus used the term "Father" for God. His was a unique relationship with the God of whom He was part. We distinguish "The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit" in God: The Holy Trinity, Three in One. But Jesus had made it abundantly clear throughout His life, that "Father" is a legitimate name for us also to give to God. Jesus never denied the uniqueness of His relationship to the Father, but He also demonstrated that the human fatherhood we know on earth is an image, a reflection of a heavenly reality. The Old Testament used the term "Father" for God, as in "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him."⁷³³ We are under the impression that the reality is earthly fatherhood and that what God does is a picture of what happens on earth. Jesus sets this straight by calling God "the Father."

So when Jesus addresses God as "Father," He speaks as a human being, as a creature who comes before the Creator, as a child of God, who comes before His Father. He approaches God in the same way as we, having been brought into a new relationship with God through the sacrifice that Jesus is about to bring, may approach him. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."⁷³⁴ In spite of the similarity between Jesus' approach of the Father and ours, there is an eternity of difference between the request He sends up and anything we can ask for.

"Father, the time has come." Jesus speaks about His death less than 24 hours away. It is appointed for us to die, but our death is not part of the original plan of God for our lives. Death is the result of sin, of the broken fellowship with God. Jesus had no sin, nor was His fellowship with God ever broken. No one is born into this world to die, except Jesus who came into the world to die. In Matthew's Gospel, He says: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁷³⁵ The decision that Jesus should come

⁷²⁹ Matt. 26:54

⁷³⁰ Mark 14:49

⁷³¹ Luke 24:27

⁷³² Ps. 40:6-8

⁷³³ Ps. 103:13

⁷³⁴ Heb. 10:19-22

⁷³⁵ Matt. 20:28

into this world to give His life as a ransom was made in eternity. The writer to the Hebrews speaks about an “eternal covenant.” We read: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...”⁷³⁶ And in Revelation, Jesus is called “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.”⁷³⁷ So when Jesus says: “the time has come,” He speaks about the realization in time and space of the eternal covenant.

As creatures, who were born and live within the frame of time, it is almost impossible to understand eternity. But we can sense awe when we see how the two meet. “The time has come” means eternity has entered time. This happened first at the Incarnation when the Word became flesh, when God was born as a human being; it reached the climax when this human being went to God’s altar to lay down His life.

“Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” When Jesus speaks about glory, we would suppose that He looked beyond the death that was before Him. Partly this is true. We can see very little glory in the crucifixion, but we have no problem seeing it in the resurrection. Yet, I believe that when Jesus asks for glory He has the whole process of His exodus in mind: that is His death, His resurrection and His Ascension. Jesus glorified the Father in His death. The same word is used in connection with the death of Peter, which Jesus predicts in chapter 21.⁷³⁸

Death in itself is ugly, but there can be glory in the way we face death. In 1944, the Nazis publicly executed a group of Dutch hostages in the city of Haarlem, Netherlands. After the war a statue was placed in the city to commemorate this atrocity. The sculpture shows a man, a prisoner with a shaved head, who faces the firing squad. He has a serene expression on his face, which is not of this world. That is glory. Jesus did not only conquer death in his resurrection, He also emanated glory in the way He died.

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”⁷³⁹ “Like a lamb.” In heaven, Jesus’ glory is expressed in this image. John sees Him in His heavenly glory in the image of a lamb. We read in Revelation: “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”⁷⁴⁰

It is true that Jesus glorified the Father in the way He died, but I don’t believe that this is all He asks for when He says: “Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you.” Later in this prayer it will become evident that Jesus is speaking about the glory of His divine attributes. He asks for the glory He had before the creation of this world. Verses 5 and 24 speak about this. This glory must have been given back to Him at His resurrection. In Matthew’s Gospel, we read that Jesus says: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”⁷⁴¹ Since all divine attributes must be interactive and eternal, the return of Jesus’ omnipotence must have meant that the exercise of all the divine attributes was given back to Him. “Glorify your Son,” must then mean that the glory of His divinity would come back.

We have a problem of time here. We understand that, at the moment of His resurrection, the rags of mortality were thrown away and the robe of glory was handed to Him. But here Jesus is speaking before His crucifixion. Later in this prayer we shall see, though, that Jesus moves back and forth between time and eternity in a way that is completely beyond our comprehension. In vs. 11 the RSV translates Jesus’ words with “And now I am no more in the world.” The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes Jesus’ attitude towards the cross with the words: “... Jesus, ... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁷⁴² It was the anticipation of the joy of His homecoming and the glory that would be bestowed upon Him, that enabled Jesus to endure the suffering on the cross. We understand Jesus’ attitude toward the cross better if we think of this anticipation, but in reality He did move back and forth between the glory of His eternal existence and the shamefulness of His condition on earth. As a human being, He counted so heavily on the restoration of His glory that He was able to borrow from it. He did, so to speak, take out loans on the basis of this collateral. He did this several times throughout His life as, for instance, when He forgave sin on the basis of the payment for sin His would make on the cross.

⁷³⁶ Heb. 13:20

⁷³⁷ Rev. 13:8

⁷³⁸ ch. 21:19

⁷³⁹ Isa. 53:7

⁷⁴⁰ Rev. 5:5,6

⁷⁴¹ Matt. 28:18

⁷⁴² Heb. 12:2

There is no doubt that Jesus' death on the cross glorified the Father. The cross was, of course, the most atrocious instrument of torture man had invented at that time. It caused a slow death in excruciating pain. It was the symbol of man's utter depravity. As such it did not bring glory to the Father. But everything God touches becomes holy. The ground on which He stood when He talked with Moses from the burning bush became holy ground.⁷⁴³ In the same way, the cross changed from a curse to a blessing when Jesus' body touched it.

Paul demonstrates that Christ turned the shame, baseness and the stupidity of human sin, into the glory of God's wisdom. We read: "But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."⁷⁴⁴ Our problem in approaching the subject is that we don't know how to define "glory." In Isaiah's vision, the Seraphim equate "glory" with "holy." They say: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."⁷⁴⁵ We have the same problem in defining what "holy" means. It is my understanding that "holy" stands for the sum of God's infinite and eternal character and that "glory" is the outward expression of this. If we take the above as a hypothesis, we see that the glory of the cross expresses God's wisdom, God's righteousness, and God's love,—God's wisdom in that it answers the question of man's sin. The cross fulfills the demand of God's righteousness: that sin be atonement for and fulfills the yearning of God's love that the life of the sinner be spared and that his soul be saved. There are probably other aspects that are beyond the scope of our vision that were supplied for in Jesus' death on the cross. From the five different sacrifices in the first seven chapters of Leviticus, we see that the sacrifices express a wide scope of meaning, which all portray the death of Jesus on the cross. In the opening sentence of His prayer, Jesus says things that are of a depth that is beyond our ability to sound. Jesus calls upon the "eternal covenant" mentioned by the writer to the Hebrews.⁷⁴⁶

Jesus immediately draws man into this covenant when He says in vs. 2 and 3 "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." The covenant is not only a treaty that brings glory to the Father and the Son, but it makes man participate in this glory through salvation and restoration. These words reveal three things about eternal life:

1. The gift of eternal life is bestowed upon us by Jesus Christ.
2. The essence of eternal life is knowing God.
3. The key to eternal life is trust in Christ as the One sent by God into this world.

1. It sounds so simple: "For you granted Him authority..." We have to realize, though, that in putting things this way Jesus emphasizes His humanity. As the eternal omnipotent God, He needed no authorization by the Father to do things. As God, He is equal with the Father. When He said earlier "You heard me say, I am going away and I am coming back to you." if you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I,"⁷⁴⁷ He speaks as man. The amazing implication of this is that as a human being Jesus gives eternal life to other human beings. This is astounding!

It is obvious that, when God placed Adam and Eve in Paradise, He intended them to become partakers of His divine nature by eating from the Tree of Life. It is a tragedy beyond words that Eve picked fruit from the wrong tree. Jesus, as a man, ate from the right tree and thus became the first man to enter into perfect, eternal fellowship with the Father. The immediate result of this was that He was allowed to share this life with others. God gave Him that authority. If this gift is part of the glory of human beings, the limits of human authority have not yet been reached. I am not saying that we can go around and give eternal life to others. We certainly cannot do this in our present condition. But when we share in God's glory, who knows what we will be able to do! It frightens me to think of it. At an earlier point in His life and ministry, when healing the paralytic, Jesus says: "'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....' He said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.'"⁷⁴⁸ I believe that we are allowed to share in the ministry of forgiving sins in Jesus' Name, even in our present non-glorified condition. Pastor Johan Blumhardt of Möttlingen was confronted with the issue of forgiving sins when a revival broke out in his village. The story is too long to tell in detail. After a struggle of one-and-a-half years with a demon who had taken possession of a young girl, Gotliebin Dieltus, Blumhardt saw the demon leave the girl, shouting, "Jesus is Victor!" Immediately afterward people started coming to the parsonage to

⁷⁴³ See Ex. 3:2-5

⁷⁴⁴ I Cor. 1:23-25

⁷⁴⁵ Isa. 6:3

⁷⁴⁶ Heb. 13:20

⁷⁴⁷ ch. 14:28

⁷⁴⁸ Mark 2:10,11

confess their sins. The first man who came, a confirmed drunkard, said to Blumhardt: "Forgive me my sins." Blumhardt said that only Jesus forgave him, not he. The man insisted and finally Blumhardt agreed to say to him: "I forgive you." I believe this Gospel truth is imbedded in Jesus' words "The Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." If the Son of Man has this authority, it means that the authority is part of His manhood. Jesus even says this clearly to His disciples. In Matthew's Gospel He says: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."⁷⁴⁹ And in this Gospel we read: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."⁷⁵⁰ Obviously, this authority is derived from Jesus' death on the cross and forgiveness should be granted only in Jesus' Name. But still, as servants of Christ, we have been given the authority to grant forgiveness within the limits of people's confession and Jesus' atonement. The fact that this office has been abused, as for instance in the Roman Catholic church, does not mean that the principle has been invalidated. When Jesus says: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven," it must imply the authority to grant eternal life also. This is part of the glory to come. It is obviously not yet one of the options available to us in the present condition of our limited experience of grace.

2. The essence of eternal life is knowing God. "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God." Our present knowledge of God is very limited, to say the least. It will take all of eternity to discover that the limits of this knowledge will never be reached. Just one glimpse of God is enough to bring life to our dead spirit. "It only takes a spark to get a fire going." One split-second of a vision of who God is, is sufficient to bring about a lasting transformation in a human heart. If one drop does this to us, what will the ocean do!

It took one glimpse of God's glory to transform Saul of Tarsus from being a raving murderer into an apostle of Christ's love. We would wish that God would be more generous in showing Himself to us. But in saying this, we demonstrate how little we understand of who God is and who we are. God said to Moses: " 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' "⁷⁵¹ Isaiah saw the glory of God in the form of an Old Testament revelation of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵² His reaction was: "Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."⁷⁵³

Ezekiel gives a more detailed description of his vision of God's glory in the first chapter of his book. Following that, he writes: "I came to the exiles who lived at Tel Abib near the Kebar River. And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days-overwhelmed."⁷⁵⁴ This sensation of being overwhelmed was followed by several years of paralysis and inability to speak. We could say that Ezekiel barely survived the experience.

The apostle John saw more of the glory of the Son and of the Father than anybody else in the Bible. At his first vision of the glorified Christ he says: "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead."⁷⁵⁵ Yet, his description of God's presence on the throne in heaven, in the fourth chapter of Revelation, is the most complete picture of glory that was ever drawn for us and it seems to have been unimpeded by physical weakness of the apostle. Of all the people who knew Jesus intimately, John seems to have been the most open to the love of Christ. Three times, he describes himself in this gospel as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."⁷⁵⁶ There must be a correlation between the ability to receive love and to see glory. The more we will let ourselves be filled by the love of God, the more we will love Him and know Him.

Jesus calls the Father "the only true God." This expression is unique in the Bible. There are other texts that probably say the same thing, as in Deuteronomy: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."⁷⁵⁷ In Paul's doxology: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."⁷⁵⁸ And in Jude's praise: "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus

⁷⁴⁹ Matt. 16:19

⁷⁵⁰ ch 20:23

⁷⁵¹ Ex. 33:19,20

⁷⁵² See ch. 12:41

⁷⁵³ Isa. 6:5

⁷⁵⁴ Ezek. 3:15

⁷⁵⁵ Rev. 1:17

⁷⁵⁶ See ch. 13:33; 21:7,20

⁷⁵⁷ Deut. 6:4

⁷⁵⁸ I Tim. 11:17

Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”⁷⁵⁹

The reference is probably not meant to contrast God with idols, for idol worship was non-existent in Jesus’ days in Israel. Jesus emphasizes the ultimate reality of God, contrasting it with the illusion in which we live created by sin in this world.

3. The key to eternal life is trust in Christ as the One sent by God into this world. Jesus puts the knowledge of “the only true God” on the same level as knowing Jesus Christ, the One Who was sent by God. Although the knowledge of Christ’s character is of the utmost importance to our spiritual growth, as Paul emphasizes several times in his epistles, the knowing, accepting and believing of the fact that God became a man in order to die for us at the cross, is the key to salvation.

It is hard for us to imagine how Jesus must have appeared to the people of His time. We tend to see Him only with a halo, if not literally then at least figuratively. We cannot picture Christ coming into our home and drinking a cup of coffee. Yet, at least superficially, that was the kind of man He was to many people. People were not awe-struck by Him until they started to know Him more intimately and they saw His miracles. And even some of those who were part of His daily companions failed to be thus affected by Him. Judas, for instance, managed to keep on stealing under Jesus’ very eyes. The Holy Spirit radiated from Jesus’ person, but He did not transform lives until at Pentecost. It wasn’t really until the coming of the Holy Spirit that people started to understand who this Jesus was. It was the Spirit who made Matthew quote Isaiah with the explanation that Christ’s coming into the world literally meant “God with us.” “‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’-- which means, ‘God with us.’”⁷⁶⁰; and John’s majestic statement: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”⁷⁶¹; and in his epistle: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched; this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”⁷⁶²

Several times in His prayer, Jesus mentions the need that people recognize Him for what He is: God, Who became man. In vs. 8 we read: “For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.” Vs. 21 - “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Vs. 25 - “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.” For most of us, who call ourselves Christians, this point has been settled. We may not understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but we accept the fact that Jesus is “God manifest in the flesh.”⁷⁶³ For the Jews of Jesus’ days, this was the most sensational discovery they could make. According to Jesus’ own words to Peter, this understanding was impossible without a direct revelation by the Father.⁷⁶⁴ It must have been very difficult for the disciples to grasp this truth. This becomes obvious in Jesus’ previous discussion with Thomas and Philip: “Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’ Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”⁷⁶⁵

How crucial this understanding is, John makes clear in his first epistle. We read there: “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.”⁷⁶⁶ And elsewhere in the same epistle: “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. Anyone

⁷⁵⁹ Jude vs. 25

⁷⁶⁰ Matt. 1:23

⁷⁶¹ ch. 1:14

⁷⁶² I John 1:1,2

⁷⁶³ I Tim. 3:16 -KJV

⁷⁶⁴ Matt. 16:16,17

⁷⁶⁵ ch 14:5-11

⁷⁶⁶ I John 4:2,3

who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life: he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”⁷⁶⁷

There is, of course, a deeper way of knowing Christ that surpasses the recognition that Jesus is “the Word become flesh.” The passion of Paul’s life was “to know Christ.” In his Epistle to the Philippians we read: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”⁷⁶⁸ Eternal life is granted to us when we acknowledge Christ as the One sent by God for our salvation and it grows when we penetrate deeper into the understanding of the person of Jesus. Just as the knowledge of God the Father is not a static experience but a dynamic one that will carry us throughout eternity, so will the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ occupy us from everlasting to everlasting. In heaven we will keep on eating from the Tree of Life.

Jesus’ work on earth consisted of several parts. The first part was His life as a human being. Then there was His teaching, which included His training of the disciples as well as His addresses to the multitudes, and finally His sacrificial death on the cross. At the moment Jesus’ pronounced this prayer, His death had not taken place yet. The inclusion of His death in the work that glorified the Father seems strange to us. We are unable to consider our work done until it is in the past. As finite, time-bound human beings, we cannot be certain about the future. Yet, Jesus’ inclusion of a future event as part of things accomplished is no reckless presumption. It may be beyond our grasp to go back and forth between time and eternity as He did, but it only shows how much greater Jesus is as a human being than we are. First of all, Jesus glorified the Father in the way He lived His human life. As we stated before, we understand that He was born on earth with all the limitations of humanity “that flesh is heir to” except the tendency to sin. But sin is a foreign element in man; it is not part of our human nature as God created it. The writer to the Hebrews expresses it: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, hut we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are; yet was without sin.”⁷⁶⁹ Using the raw material that is at the disposal of every man, Jesus built a life that was glorious. John says: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”⁷⁷⁰

The secret of His human life was not His divinity but His humanity. He lived in intimate fellowship with the Father. He lived a life of faith and of absolute obedience unto death. His life was built upon the written Word of God. As Michelangelo showed us what can be done with a piece of stone, so Jesus showed us what can be done with a human life. It is impossible to read Jesus’ biography in the Gospels and not be overwhelmed with the glory of it.

Another part of Jesus’ work was His teaching and the training of His disciples. His sermon notes, as preserved for us in the Gospels, indicate that His sermons were unsurpassed. What can be compared in world literature to the Beatitudes? Where do we find a combination of depth and simplicity as in His parables? Even His enemies had to admit: “No one ever spoke the way this man does.”⁷⁷¹ The masses testified about His preaching: “What is this? A new teaching; and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”⁷⁷² It seems, however, that Jesus was less successful in the training of His disciples. One of them betrayed Him and another one denied Him under stress. After they received tutoring for over three years; they still fought among one another about who was number one. And when He was about to depart, they had no idea what was going to happen in spite of Jesus’ repeated announcements that He would be arrested and killed and that He would rise from the dead. Nobody was at the tomb at the third day to witness the resurrection. Evidently, nobody had taken His words seriously.

That this did not come to Jesus as a surprise, we gather from His parting words: “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”⁷⁷³ Jesus knew He was only laying the groundwork. It seemed as if all His words had fallen “on stony ground.” He knew, however, that the Spirit would come and water and warm the ground and make the seed germinate and bear fruit. He had faith in the Word of God that He had planted in their hearts. We have to understand that when Jesus said that He completed the work, He gave a statement

⁷⁶⁷ I John 5:1, 10-12

⁷⁶⁸ Phil. 3:10,11

⁷⁶⁹ Heb. 4:15

⁷⁷⁰ ch. 1:14

⁷⁷¹ ch. 7:46

⁷⁷² Mark 1:27

⁷⁷³ ch. 14:25,26

of faith.

This is even truer about His death on the cross. When He said this prayer, He had not even been arrested yet. It is hard for us to grasp that Jesus' death and the pouring out of His blood was not an isolated event. It was the culmination of the eternal covenant mentioned in Hebrews.⁷⁷⁴ Jesus is called "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."⁷⁷⁵ According to the "eternal covenant," the Son would give His life for the redemption of mankind and the Father would raise Him from the dead. This had been decided in heaven and it was carried out on earth. In the same way as the shadow of a body cannot change unless the body that casts it changes, so could the crucifixion not be prevented unless the covenant was annulled. Eternal covenants cannot be altered. When Jesus said on the cross "It is finished," He declared the conclusion of what had been inevitable throughout time and eternity.

The prayer for the return of His eternal glory goes in time beyond the cross; it is not a prayer for the cancellation of the cross. It would take us too far to put Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane against the background of the prayer we are studying. When Jesus prayed in Matthew's Gospel, that the cup would be taken from Him, He did not ask that He would not have to die on the cross.⁷⁷⁶ He actually asked that He be allowed to carry the load of the sin of the world to the cross instead of succumbing under it in the garden. So, as far as Jesus is concerned, the cross that lies ahead of Him is in principle already in the past. The fact that He had come into the world to die is proof of this. Once again, for us who have to live one day at the time, this is hard to grasp. Jesus' death on the cross brought glory to the Father. Yet the cross is the epitome of human depravity. It stands for sin carried to the extreme. Not only were people who were crucified condemned to the garbage pile of humanity, but God Himself cursed people who were nailed to the cross. Paul transfers the curse that God had put on corpses hung on a tree to people who were crucified. In Galatians, he writes: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"⁷⁷⁷ The quotation is from Deuteronomy which reads: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, You must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."⁷⁷⁸

What glorifies the Father in Jesus' death is not His mode of dying, but the love that drove Him. It was love to the uttermost that brought Jesus to the extremity of human depravity. He did not soil Himself in doing so. But by touching the cross with His own hand, He became cursed according to the law; but He turned the curse into a blessing. In the same way He could touch a leper and not only not become unclean Himself, but cleanse the leper. "A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean.' Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched then. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'"⁷⁷⁹

Paul explains in detail in his first Epistle to the Corinthians the difference between God's view of the cross and men's view. We read: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe... But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."⁷⁸⁰

Having stated that He considered His work on earth as finished, Jesus asks the Father that His eternal glory be given back to Him and that the eternal fellowship between the Father and the Son be restored. "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus' request does not imply that the previous condition is restored without any change. The new dimension of His humanity is to be maintained in heaven. Or, can we say that in eternity the slaying of the Lamb had taken place and so the creation of the Man Jesus Christ was an eternal fact also? In saying this we try to express in human words, in words that are fitted for time and space, things that should be expressed in terms of eternity. We don't know that language.

The question that boggles our mind is, did Jesus, as a man, have any recollection of His existence in eternity, or did He base His presumption (can we use such a word in this context?) on His knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures? It seems that, although Scripture contains the elements of Jesus' human knowledge in seed form, the full assurance was the result of His intimacy with the Father as a created human being with His

⁷⁷⁴ Heb. 13:20

⁷⁷⁵ Rev. 13:8

⁷⁷⁶ Matt. 26:39

⁷⁷⁷ Gal. 3:13

⁷⁷⁸ Deut. 21:22,23

⁷⁷⁹ Mark 1:40,41

⁷⁸⁰ I Cor. 18, 21, 23-25

Creator. If we, who hardly know where we came from and where we are going, have inklings of glory on the basis of what the Bible tells us, how much more did Jesus know that glory was awaiting Him. The difference between His experience and ours is, among other things, that we feel we should be able to contain this glory; and He knew that He had contained it already. He had been in the Father and the Father in Him. Understanding these things, as a man, is part of the fact that we are created in God's image.

This ends the section in which Jesus asks that the exercise of His divine faculties, which He had laid aside when He became man, be returned to Him. This, evidently, was done at the moment of His resurrection. In the opening words of the "Great Commission" He says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."⁷⁸¹ As we said before, it seems impossible that, if His omnipotence would be given back to Him, all the other characteristics of the person of God would not follow. We believe that the unity of the divine demands that the characteristics cannot be separated.

In the second part of His prayer Jesus speaks to the Father about the disciples (Verses. 6-19). We distinguish some clear divisions. He acknowledges that the disciples are a gift from the Father. Their discipleship is based on divine revelation. The Word of God and their obedience to this Word play a very important part in their relationship as disciples with their Master. Jesus prays for their protection, their joy, their sanctification, and their mission. There is a wealth of detail in this prayer that makes it hard to apply simple outlines to the word; but, basically, this is the content of Jesus' request.

There is a mystery contained in these words that is hard to dig out. The Father had chosen beforehand the people who were given to Christ by the Father. They were His. We hit upon the paradox between God's predestination and man's liberty. In the two-dimensional world in which we live and do our thinking, those two are irreconcilable. We have to recognize that the reconciliation is in the added dimension, which is inaccessible to us. There are two things we have to bear in mind in approaching the problem: first, the issue is not salvation; and second, human liberty is not incompatible with God's character.

Jesus speaks about the disciples. He chose twelve young men to be with Him and to be trained by Him. We read in Mark's Gospel: "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve-designating them apostles-that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."⁷⁸²

In telling the same story, Luke introduces the moment by saying: "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."⁷⁸³ It was after a whole night of prayer in which Jesus sought the mind of the Father that He called His disciples. That one betrayed Him and went into an eternity of perdition proves sufficiently that salvation is not the object.

Jesus touches this mystery of God's choosing freely; and in doing so, He leaves it untouched. He recognizes the decree of the Father, accepts it, honors it, rejoices in it, and works with it. Whether on a human level He understood it better than we do, I don't know. The fact that He handled it so much better (I say this without any desire to be disrespectful) would indicate that He understood much more, or maybe He just respected the limits of His human understanding.

So here we have it: The disciples had been picked out by the Father and given to Christ. For what purpose, that is dealt with later on in this prayer. The ultimate aim is the salvation of mankind. Jesus had said earlier, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."⁷⁸⁴ The first step toward this goal is revelation of the Father to the disciples. It is important to understand this priority; otherwise, we would not understand the thrust of Jesus' prayer for His disciples.

Jesus makes two statements about His training of those men: He revealed the Father to them, and they obeyed God's Word. It seems as if both of these were overstatements. That same evening Philip demonstrated that he had never gotten the point of this revelation. We read in chapter 14: "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.'" ⁷⁸⁵

Yet we can hardly doubt the reality of Christ's words here. He revealed so much of the Father to His

⁷⁸¹ Matt. 28:18

⁷⁸² Mark 3:13-15

⁷⁸³ Luke 6:12

⁷⁸⁴ ch. 3:17

⁷⁸⁵ ch. 14:8-11

disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come upon them they would know. We could compare Jesus' revelation to the printing of a picture. The negative had been projected on the paper, now it would take the developer to bring out the image.

In the same vein, we could argue that the obedience of the disciples to the Word of God was far from what it should have been at this point. They certainly had not evinced perfect obedience. But the seed of obedience had been planted in their lives and Jesus knew it would grow and bear fruit.

The word they had obeyed was "come." Jesus had invited the disciples to follow Him and they had obeyed that invitation. "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'" ⁷⁸⁶ They were still following. The Lord's disciples will even follow Him in heaven. We read in Revelation: "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes." ⁷⁸⁷ Following Jesus is the foundation of all obedience; if we stick to this principle, our obedience will grow into perfection.

It seems that Jesus saw more in His disciples than they saw in themselves. They had little awareness of their position. When Jesus started using parables in His method of teaching, He said to His disciples: "But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." ⁷⁸⁸ I am sure they themselves had no inkling of their blessedness. It wasn't until years later, after the Holy Spirit had done His work in Peter, that he echoes these words when he writes: "For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things." ⁷⁸⁹

The knowledge and acceptance may not be perfect but it is irreversible. It is hard for us to see Jesus as a mere human being, as the disciples must have seen Him. The "much more than human" of Jesus cannot have been constantly before their eyes. The realization would come and go. We only know Him as the glorified Lord; they walked with Him daily and saw Him when He ate and drank and perspired and slept. To believe that this man came from God took more than human understanding. As Jesus said to Peter: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." ⁷⁹⁰ The disciples understood, though, that the words of Jesus were words of life. John sums it all up, when Peter says: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." ⁷⁹¹ None of their subsequent lapses of faith could ever undo such a confession. The coming of the Holy Spirit sealed this truth for good in their lives.

Having established, in His prayer, His relationship with the disciples as a gift from the Father to Himself, Jesus starts His intercessory prayer for them. As we mentioned above, He prays for their protection, their joy, their sanctification, and their mission.

When Jesus says: "I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me," (Vs. 9) He does not intend to limit His love to only a handful of people, but He pictures their situation in the hostile environment in which they will remain behind when He leaves. In Matthew's Gospel, He told His disciples: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." ⁷⁹² His request for them should be seen against this background. Christians in this world find themselves in an impossible situation. We are surrounded by demonic powers that are bent on our destruction. How does a sheep defend himself against the wolves? In a merely human setting, we would consider it reckless irresponsibility if we would let our children go into a situation where death seems inevitable. God seems to take enormous chances in sending us into the world. If any of us survive, it is by sheer miracle. For some reason those miracles do happen by the millions.

There is a rather complicated allegory in Revelation 12, where John sees a woman, gloriously attired, who is about to give birth to a child. A dragon stands in front of her, ready to kill the child once it is born. We read: "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was

⁷⁸⁶ Matt. 4:19

⁷⁸⁷ Rev. 14:4

⁷⁸⁸ Matt. 13:16,17

⁷⁸⁹ I Pet. 1:9-12

⁷⁹⁰ Matt. 16:17; (KJV)

⁷⁹¹ ch. 6:68,69

⁷⁹² Matt. 10:16

snatched up to God and to his throne.”⁷⁹³ We understand that the central meaning of the picture John paints is the birth and Ascension of Christ. The amazing part is that His death and resurrection are left out of the picture. Only the beginning and the end are shown. We know what is in between.

John’s allegory depicts the situation of the average child of God at the same time. The picture is there for our encouragement. We know what will happen in the end. One of the greatest dangers for a child of God is not recognizing the danger, and, by consequence, not seeking the protection that is needed.

In His prayer for the disciples and later on for us, who believe in Him through their message, Jesus seems to leave most of the middle out also. He also only mentions the beginning and the end. For us, who are still in the middle, this is at the same time a difficulty and a comfort. Jesus emphasizes again the fact that we are the Father’s gift to Him and He adds the enigmatic words: “And glory has come to Me through them.” This last statement seems premature, to say the least. But premature is a time-bound word that has no place in a prayer about eternity. Even when Jesus utters these words in space and time, they are valid. We have to understand them against the background of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan. Ever since man fell into sin the devil has claimed him as his own. He claimed the world, but God defeated him through Noah. Again, after the flood, God planted the seed of victory in the calling of Abraham. Satan lost the case of Job. And now here, in the fullness of time, God has formed a bridgehead for Himself in enemy territory in the eleven disciples. This bridgehead is the decisive factor in the war. It is the assurance of victory. It is the beginning of glory. This bridgehead is us.

It seems so ridiculous when we look at the quality of the people who form the bridgehead that they would bring about the decision in the war. Paul even says about the church: “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things; and the things that are not; to nullify the things that are.”⁷⁹⁴ How well we fit in that category! The protection Jesus asks the Father to give us is the protection of the Name. “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name; the name you gave me; so that they may be one as we are one” (Vs. 11). This is the first time in the Bible the title “Holy Father” is given to God. The Name combines intimacy with majesty.

We have very little understanding about holiness. We seldom come further than by defining it in negative terms. As far as I can grasp, holiness is identical with glory. It is probably the total of that which cannot be added up, the sum of all God’s eternal and perfect attributes. It is the essence of the Divine. John describes God as being “Light.” In his First Epistle we read: “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.”⁷⁹⁵ And when John sees the divine glory in heaven, he says: “And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.”⁷⁹⁶ The relationship between God’s holiness and God’s attributes is the same as between light and the rainbow; they are identical.

The Name of the Father stands for His character, that is His holiness. It is this Name that Jesus calls upon for our protection. It will be clear that being protected by God’s holiness will have consequences for our life. It will change our moral behavior. In Leviticus, God says to Israel: “I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”⁷⁹⁷ This admonition is repeated several times throughout the book of Leviticus and it is picked up again in the New Testament. Peter says: “For it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”⁷⁹⁸

When somebody represents a large firm or a powerful state, he enjoys protection. The taking of hostages of the American Embassy in Iran in the 1980s was a highly exceptional occurrence. Generally speaking, the full power of a nation will protect its functionaries. The devil knows it when we wear our spiritual uniform. There is the story in Acts of the sons of Sceva who tried to cast out a demon without themselves having the protection of the Name of God’s holiness. We read: “The evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’”⁷⁹⁹ A man who had heard this story prayed: “God let me be known in hell!” We should be sure that the devil knows who we are and that he identifies us with Jesus Christ. That is the best protection we can have.

In this verse, Jesus brings out that protection by the Name of the Father will create unity among believers. Sin divides, the Holy Spirit unites. The implication seems to be that a lack of holiness gives the devil a foothold in our

⁷⁹³ Rev. 12:4,5

⁷⁹⁴ I Cor. 1:26-28

⁷⁹⁵ I John 1:5

⁷⁹⁶ Rev. 4:3

⁷⁹⁷ Lev. 11:45

⁷⁹⁸ I Pet. 1:16

⁷⁹⁹ Acts 19:15

lives and thus brings about disunity. Living in a hostile world, we cannot afford splits. We need the protection individually and collectively. Dead or wounded soldiers and prisoners of war don't win wars.

According to verse 12, Jesus considered it one of His primary responsibilities to provide protection to His disciples. In this context He does not explain how He went about doing this. But we get a glimpse of the action when we read in Luke that Jesus addresses Peter with the words: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."⁸⁰⁰ It is obvious that Jesus' intercession for Peter did not prevent him from committing the act. It would have helped if Peter had known his own heart and placed himself under Jesus' protection. But he was too inflated to realize what was going on. From this illustration it is evident that our own recognition of weakness is of the utmost importance. Also, we understand that protection does not prevent hurt. The difference is in the outcome. Satan had no intention to "sift" Peter; he wanted Peter destroyed—that is, he intended to burn both the wheat and the chaff. Jesus' protection made Satan's effort into a positive winnowing of wheat, where the action works as a purification.

In preparation for His going to the cross, Jesus asks the Father to take over the protection of the disciples. It is my understanding that, after His resurrection and ascension, Jesus took this responsibility back. We read in the epistle to the Hebrews that Jesus presently performs in heaven the task of High priest; and that by His intercession for us, He enables us to reach the goal of our life of faith. Isn't this the meaning of the statement in Hebrews: "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them?"⁸⁰¹ The more we are aware of this truth and lean upon it, the better we will fare. Jesus' words here give us a new awareness of the situation in which we live and of our responsibility for others who have been entrusted to us. First of all, we need protection. We are caught in the war that is raging between God and Satan, and we are being shot at. I am not saying that we can lose our salvation; but unless we act as if we can lose it, we are in great danger. We also have to realize that we are very vulnerable. "As sheep among the wolves." Any idea that we should be able to make it on our own can be fatal. Simple trust that God will act as a shield to protect us is the only hope we have. We live in a world where the conflict is being smoothed over by a barrage of propaganda of the enemy. In the prologue to his book *Pilgrim's Regress*, C.S. Lewis makes the astute observation that we have developed the inability to disbelieve advertisements. This is truer in the spiritual, invisible world than in the world of newspapers and television. Jesus saw clearly through the fog. He knew what the enemy was up to. A good part of the nights He spent in prayer alone was probably given to intercession for the disciples. This is the thrust of His advice to the ones who were with Him in Gethsemane. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."⁸⁰²

If Jesus, as man, prayed for those who were with Him, we should take upon ourselves to put hedges of spiritual protection around our families and the ones we rub shoulders with. In this respect also "we should follow in his steps."⁸⁰³

A problem in this respect is the mention of Judas. The translation the NIV gives here is unfortunate. "The one doomed to destruction" is the translation of "apoleias." The Greek has a play of words here: "None of them perished, but the son of perishing."⁸⁰⁴ *Adam Clarke's Commentary* points out here that "Perdition" or "Destruction" is personified and that Judas is represented as being the son. Both the KJV and RSV translate here: "the son of perdition." We have to be careful not to read more into this text than is there. There seems to be no doubt that Judas was lost. Whether he was part of the gift of the Father to the Son is difficult to determine. That Jesus had chosen him is beyond doubt. Early in His ministry Jesus said already: "Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"⁸⁰⁵ We may presume that Jesus had no foreknowledge of Judas' betrayal when He chose him as one of the twelve. As part of the Incarnation Jesus emptied Himself of His omniscience also, in order to function as a complete human being within the limits of His humanity. There seems to have been a growing awareness on the side of the Lord of the fact that Scripture predicted the betrayal of the Messiah by one of His intimate friends. From the quoted verse in chapter 6 it is clear that at that point Jesus knew that Judas was "a mole" of the devil. Whether it was common knowledge that Judas stole money from that disciples' cash box, as we read in chapter 12, we don't know.⁸⁰⁶ Jesus probably knew. At the last Passover celebration, Jesus knew for sure who the traitor was and why he

⁸⁰⁰ Luke 22:31,32

⁸⁰¹ Heb. 7:25

⁸⁰² Matt. 26:41

⁸⁰³ I Pet. 2:21

⁸⁰⁴ Westcott

⁸⁰⁵ ch. 6:70

⁸⁰⁶ See ch. 12:6

had been allowed to become one of the twelve. In chapter 13 we read: "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'"⁸⁰⁷ Other verses in chapter 13 indicate how deeply Jesus was affected by this knowledge. We read in vs. 21 "After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.' " In vs. 26 Jesus answers John's question with: "'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon." The following verse says: "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. 'What you are about to do, do quickly.' " Jesus knew and Judas knew that Jesus knew. Jesus' warning to the disciples and to Judas in particular was a genuine effort to dissuade him from his intended act. The betrayal was foretold, but this did not mean that the action was predetermined and irrevocable. If we take that stand, Jesus' attitude and words would be sheer comedy, a comedy of the cruelest kind. Jesus' words to Judas were born of love, not of cruelty.

Judas' answer to Jesus' love for him by an act of betrayal must have been a very traumatic experience for our Lord. The fact that He knew and saw it coming did not soften the emotional impact. Jesus does not dismiss the gravity of it all in the prayer that is before us, but He gains the victory over it by His appeal to Scripture. "So that Scripture would be fulfilled." By handing it back to the Father without questioning the eternal wisdom of it, He is able to preserve the "full measure of His joy" which is mentioned in the following verse. If we realize what must have gone on in our Lord's heart, we can only stand in awe.

One of the reasons for Jesus' prayer in front of the disciples was that "they may have the full measure of my joy within them." Evidently, it had not been Jesus' habit to let the disciples share in His intimate fellowship with the Father. The nights of prayer He had spent alone. What He had to say was for God's ear, not for men. Jesus knows what His disciples will go through in the next hours and days. He knows that they will be driven to despair and He wants to protect them as much as possible. Earlier in the evening He had tried to convey to them what was going to happen, so they would be prepared.

Earlier, He said to them: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe."⁸⁰⁸ Elsewhere, we read: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."⁸⁰⁹ And in the previous chapter: "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray."⁸¹⁰ In vs. 4 - "I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you." And vs. 32, 33 - "But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

In spite of all these words, most of the disciples did not stand up to the shock. They all fled, even John, although he came back later with Mary, Jesus mother, when Jesus had been crucified. None of Jesus' prophecies about His death and resurrection had penetrated. Nobody was at the grave on the morning of the third day to witness Jesus' coming out of the grave. Evidently this was not because no measure of joy was available to them; they did not avail themselves of it. Corrie ten Boom once said about some missionaries, that they had given everything to the Lord, but they had not taken everything from Him. This could be said about the disciples also. The "joy of the Lord" is a mighty weapon and it is there for us to use. Nehemiah said, "Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."⁸¹¹ And Paul adds to this "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"⁸¹² It seems so easy to say such things, especially in retrospect. While we are in traumatic situations, the hardest thing to do is to praise the Lord. We have to recognize though, that we demonstrate a lack of trust in Jesus' words if we don't. He told us He had overcome the world, didn't He?

In vs. 14 Jesus uses the designation "the world" in the same sense as in vs. 9. Not the world as God created it, but the world, or rather the inhabitants in their rebellion against God: the people who have consciously chosen the side of the enemy. In the sense Jesus uses the word, it includes both humans and demonic powers. Although men may not realize this, they are being manipulated by the devil. The apostle Paul expresses this succinctly in Ephesians: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the

⁸⁰⁷ ch. 13:18

⁸⁰⁸ ch. 14:27-29

⁸⁰⁹ ch. 15:11

⁸¹⁰ ch. 16:1

⁸¹¹ Neh. 8:10

⁸¹² Phil. 4:4

powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”⁸¹³ Jesus says the same thing in the following verse. But here He emphasizes that the disciples belong to the group who have laid down their arms. They are the ones that were identified in the “Parable of the Sower” as the good ground in which the seed fell and produced a harvest. It is because of this harvest of the Word of God in their lives that they incur the wrath of their surrounding. The fact that the Word was received in their hearts and germinated identified them as people belonging to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Jesus is still speaking ideally at this point. At that very moment the identification of the disciples with the Kingdom of Heaven was not as clear as it sounds in Jesus’ words. They would all run away in just a short time and Peter would do worse than that. But Jesus knew the germinating power of the Word He had planted in their lives. He knew what Isaiah said: “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”⁸¹⁴

We would hesitate to say that we are not of this world in the same way as Jesus was. We are not the result of Incarnation. We were born in this world with a tendency to sin. But Jesus considers us to be saved, sanctified, and glorified. We say that God is still working on us; Jesus says that we are a finished product.

The actual reason for our remaining in this world instead of being taken up in glory immediately upon our conversion is not mentioned here, at least not directly. There is a reason for God to keep us here. We are meant for eternity in heaven but we play an important part in time on earth.

Jesus says specifically: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” This request is not a mere repetition of the one in vs. 11. There it was not specified from what we must be protected, although the implication is clear. Here the enemy is identified as only one. It remains true that we are in danger of being polluted by the wrong kind of social intercourse and peer pressure. Human relations play an important part, but the main focus is the person of Satan.

There is repetition in Jesus’ prayer, almost as in the poetry of the Psalms. But with every repetition a new dimension is added. In vs. 11 the Name of the Father was invoked as protection against the world. In vs. 17 sanctification in the truth, that is in the Word of God is added as essential for the fulfillment of our mission in this world. Protection, evidently, does not only mean that no harm will come to us, but that we will be able to accomplish what we are here for.

Vincent Word Study states about the word “sanctify”: “Constantly used in the Septuagint to express the entire dedication and consecration of both persons and things to God.” The essence of holiness, which is the equivalent of “sanctus” is that God claims it and imparts His character to it. That is why Moses had to take his shoes from his feet because the ground on which he stood was holy.⁸¹⁵ That is why people are called holy, not because they are sinless, but because they belong to God. The difference between a human being and a plot of ground is that there is will and moral behavior involved.

The tool of sanctification is the Word of God. That is for us in the first place the written Word, the record of the facts of salvation. We learn from the records of the Old Testament the creative power of the Word. It calls into existence that which does not exist. The whole of creation is the fruit of God’s speaking. The Word is also God’s call to men and the promise that accompanies that call. In the New Testament we learn that the Word is a Person. God’s last Word is Jesus Christ. The Epistle to the Hebrews states this clearly: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”⁸¹⁶

Obviously, Jesus means more with His words here than that we should read the Bible. Bible reading is an important part of the process of sanctification. It is as Jesus says Himself earlier: “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”⁸¹⁷ Paul states: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly....”⁸¹⁸ The Word of God is for us the means of fellowship with Him. It creates in us what is not there in the natural. It makes us new creations.

Also, we should not interpret sanctification in the narrow sense of the word as only the shedding of bad habits and the leading of a pious life. Sanctification is the initiation into the glory of God. It means becoming

⁸¹³ Eph. 6:12

⁸¹⁴ Isa. 55:10,11

⁸¹⁵ Ex. 3:5

⁸¹⁶ Heb. 1:1,2

⁸¹⁷ ch. 15:7

⁸¹⁸ Col. 3:16

partakers of the divine nature. When God said to Moses: “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet,”⁸¹⁹ He meant literally that Moses would represent Heaven in a world that is in the grips of evil and darkness. God sanctified Moses in Pharaoh’s court for the salvation of Israel. In that sense of the word we are being sanctified by the truth of the Word of God in order to be what God wants us to be and to do in this world what God wants us to do.

If I understand Jesus’ words correctly, He speaks about His death on the cross when He says in vs. 19 “for them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” Or, as the RSV reads: “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth.” This means that Jesus’ death is the basis not only of our pardon and rehabilitation but also of the great commission. Immediately preceding this verse, Jesus speaks about this commission. “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (Vs. 18). This means that there is a great similarity between the way Jesus came to earth to die and the way we are to carry out our mission. Jesus’ consecration, or sanctification, meant His death on the cross. Our consecration means giving our life for Him in obedience.

Jesus indicates the mode of service: obedience to death; but at the same time He shows that His death on the cross is our enabling to be obedient and serve. Anyone who decides to go and die for Christ for any other reason than the fact that Jesus died for him is a fool. Anyone who tries to hang on to his life is a fool, since he will lose it anyhow. It is not a matter of dying or not dying, but of dying now or later. Those who die now gain; those who try to postpone death will lose everything. So Jesus is saying that His death on the cross is our enabling to go into the world as He came into the world. He sanctified Himself for me so that I would be truly sanctified. To be sanctified means to obey and to go.

Beginning with vs. 20 Jesus starts praying for the church that will come into being as a result of the disciples’ witness. Here we enter the picture. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.” Everything that pertained to the disciples in the preceding verses applies to us also. Christ has revealed the Father to us. Without Him we would not know God as we know Him now. We are as much a gift of the Father to the Son as the disciples were. We have received and obeyed His Word. If not, we can hardly count ourselves as believers. We have accepted as fact that God became man in Christ. We are the vehicles of God’s glory. “Glory has come to Me through them.” And we are covered by the same protection of God’s holy Name as the disciples were. The measure of our joy may be full also. We are not of the world, although we live in it. He sent us into the world in the same manner as He had been sent Himself by the Father and our consecration should be unto death, as His was.

The link between them and us is their message, the written records of the Gospels, the Epistles and the other books of the New Testament. Few events in world history have been so carefully and abundantly recorded as the life and words and acts of Christ. Our faith in Christ is not merely a mindset that is emotionally uplifting but that has no connection with the facts of real life. We have more written proof of Christ than of any other person in ancient history. Yet those records have been submitted to more destructive criticism and abuse than any other records. Socrates’ words have never been doubted as Christ’s were. Bible critics have gone through Scripture with multi-colored pens to mark words that were obviously Christ’s; others that were doubtfully His, and others that could not possibly have come from His mouth—all this without any basis that would make sense in any other discipline of learning. The authority of the written record we possess is a sufficient link between us and the facts of salvation to accept, on reasonable, logical grounds Christ as Lord and Savior. As a matter of fact, it makes more sense to accept the message as a package than to pick what suits our fancy and reject the rest.

Having established the unity among the Lord, the disciples and ourselves, we can proceed to claim the blessings of this prayer for ourselves. According to vs. 21 this unity is not just historical but spiritual. Jesus says: “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” This unity is a two-sided truth: it makes believers into an organism, into the body of Christ and it establishes the credibility of our testimony to those who are outside this body. Sin has isolated man from God, man from man, and man from himself. When Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God and they also hid from one another. They felt ashamed in front of one another. Their physical nakedness was just as embarrassing to them as their spiritual nakedness. The only factor that annuls shame is love. In our present condition, even with our sins forgiven, how seldom do we open up, either for God, for ourselves, or for one another.

Jesus speaks about an openness that is impossible in our present condition. He presents His own relationship with the Father as a model for our relationship with one another. There was no restriction of love between the Father and the Son. It will only be possible to love one another if we allow ourselves to be loved in such a way by God. Yet, how seldom do we come to the point where we ask God, as David did: “Search me, O God, and

⁸¹⁹ Ex. 7:1

know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”⁸²⁰ Even in our relationship with God, there is often the fear of getting hurt if we present ourselves naked before Him. According to the apostle John this is a lack of love: “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”⁸²¹ How much of this perfect love we will ever be able to practice on earth, I don’t know. We may have to do the best we can with the imperfect means we are working with. Yet, Christ seems to say that we should aim for this. We may not be able to reach the stars but we should set our course by them. Robert Browning wrote: “Oh but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp. Or what’s a heaven for.” By this “impossible” prayer Jesus wants to establish His testimony in this world. Remember that only a few hours before Jesus uttered these words the disciples were bickering and fighting amongst one another as to who was the greatest among them. In Luke’s Gospel we read: “Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.’”⁸²²

The key is found in the following verse (22) where Jesus says: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” This verse, also, raises questions as it gives answers. The only possibility to demonstrate unity is through the glory of God, which is given to us; but where is it? When Moses came down from the mountain his face shone with the glory of God and everybody saw it. We read: “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.”⁸²³

There is a possibility that we possess more than we are aware of. Moses did not know that his face was radiant with God’s glory. It is true that God does not want us to be conscious of our sainthood. But the instances in which the world stands in awe before us because of the glory they see in us are few and very, very far apart. Yet Christ reminds the Father of the fact that He has given them the glory the Father had given to Him. Although we have to stick to the fact that we do not see this, we cannot just leave those words without digging into them. The glory the Father had given to Christ had been given to Him as a human being. As far as we can understand, there cannot be any question of the First Person of the Trinity giving glory to the Second Person. God’s glory was given to Jesus in the flesh. This must mean in the first place the glory of His manhood. As God put His image in Adam, so Christ bears the image of God. Sin destroyed the image in us, not in the sense that it isn’t there any more, but it has been severely damaged. In imparting God’s glory to us Jesus probably means that the image is being restored. Paul says: “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”⁸²⁴ And in Ephesians we read that it means: “To be made new in the attitude of your minds; And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”⁸²⁵ The glory of God’s image will, obviously, not be perfect until the day of resurrection when our mortal bodies are redeemed. But the seed of glory is evidently planted in our hearts in renewal of our thinking and in practicing righteousness and holiness. None of this would be possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was the beginning of the realization of Jesus’ words. He is the glory that was given to us. We have to realize that Jesus’ gift of glory does not automatically bring about changes in us. First of all, there will be no regeneration without conversion. And then, Paul speaks about practices. We will have to work out the glory in our personal lives and in our relationship with one another. But the fact remains that God, obviously, sees more in us than we do ourselves. That is not bad. Bad is when people around us do not see more in us than we do.

In vs. 23 Jesus elaborates on what He said already in vs. 21. The mystical unity Christ speaks about surpasses any relationship we know: Christ in us, the Father in Christ and all of us melted together, yet preserving our individuality. Sexual unity between husband and wife is a vague image of our unity with Christ and His unity with us. For many people this connection is difficult to see, since we associate sexuality often more with impurity of thought than with sanctification. Paul contrasts sexual immorality and union with God in such a way that there is obviously a comparison implied between healthy sexuality and unity with God. We read: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the

⁸²⁰ Ps. 139:23,24

⁸²¹ I John 4:18

⁸²² Luke 22:24-26

⁸²³ Ex. 34:29

⁸²⁴ Col. 3:9,10

⁸²⁵ Eph. 4:23,24

members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.' But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."⁸²⁶ If the world sees glory in a fellowship of believers, which, as we said above, they hardly ever do, their conclusion will be that it is the result of a supernatural intervention. This is what Jesus means when He says: "to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." They will say: "What is going on here; this phenomenon is not possible on a human level." And so, if they honestly keep on seeking for an answer they will come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh. But, as we said, would to God this would be a frequent and normal happening. I have to admit, though, that I became a Christian because I saw something in my peers that I did not have myself.

Vs. 24 is the guarantee for our future. The Father will answer the prayer of His Son and we shall be with Him throughout eternity. Paul says: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."⁸²⁷ And Jesus promised us: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."⁸²⁸ Not only will we be with Him but we will see His glory and share His glory. I appreciate very much that Jesus said not "I want them to be with Me to see My glory" but, "I want them to be with Me, and to see My glory." It is the sight of His glory that will transform us. The apostle John says: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."⁸²⁹ The glory Jesus speaks about in this verse is essentially different from the glory mentioned in vs. 5. There Jesus said: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus' glory from before creation is His divinity. As we observed before, this cannot be glory that the Father gives to the Son. It must be the exercise of Jesus' divine faculties that Jesus laid aside when He came to earth to be born as man. But the glory in verse 24 is glory that the Father gives to Jesus as a human being. The bestowing of this glory is based upon the eternal love between the Father and the Son. "The glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

We don't know what went on between the Father and the Son before creation. The "eternal covenant" mentioned in Hebrews⁸³⁰ has never been disclosed to us. We only know that it formed the basis for Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We understand from this that the sacrifice on the cross at Golgotha was more than an expiation for the sins of the world; it was an act of surrender out of love from the Son for the Father. The fact that human sin made this possible and that this supreme sacrifice was acted out on our planet leads us into a mystery that is far beyond my human understanding. We get a glimpse of this facet of Jesus' death in the first sacrifice mentioned in the book of Leviticus, the burnt offering, which was "an aroma pleasing to the LORD."⁸³¹

The "eternal covenant" was a covenant of love. Jesus only mentions the Father's love here. "Because you loved me before the creation of the world." He passes over His own love for the Father, which was expressed in His death. As a matter of fact, the cross is nowhere mentioned directly in this prayer. There can be no doubt, however, but that the love was mutual and eternal. God is love, not only in that God loves us, but the Father loves the Son and the Spirit, the Son loves the Father and the Spirit and the Spirit loves both. The divine love that reaches us is radiation from God's character. In the Incarnation and the resurrection a fundamental change took place in the order of things in the universe. In his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, C.S. Lewis says that the Incarnation did not only mean that God became man, but that it meant "the taking up of man into God." The glory of Jesus at His resurrection and ascension is a divine glory bestowed upon Him as man. The writer to the Hebrews states: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour."⁸³² The glory of Jesus is the glory of man. Jesus wants us to see, not only what He did for us, but what He did with us and our humanity. It is easy to read over the words "Father, I want..." The KJV says: "Father I will..." and the RSV: "Father, I desire..." *Vincent's Word Study* has a footnote on this: "God says that this expression 'is nowhere else found in the mouth of Jesus.' " and then the author goes on to disagree by quoting three other verses. The point

⁸²⁶ I Cor. 6:13-20

⁸²⁷ Phil. 1: 23

⁸²⁸ ch. 14:2,3

⁸²⁹ I John 3:2

⁸³⁰ Heb. 13:20

⁸³¹ Lev. 1:9

⁸³² Heb. 2:9 (KJV)

is though that Jesus expresses an emphatic desire here. The other references quoted by Vincent prove this: Matt 8:3 - "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man." I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy." Mark 14:36 - "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" and John 21:22 - "Jesus answered, 'If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.'"

Vs. 26- For the first time, probably the only time in the New Testament, Jesus addresses God as "Righteous Father." The mention of God's righteousness has, of course, bearing upon the following words about to whom God reveals Himself. So the first meaning of the term righteousness has to do with revelation. God reveals Himself to some and not to others because He is righteous.

Jesus' words in Matthew's Gospel throw an interesting light on this truth as well as the words addressed to Peter. We read: "At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'"⁸³³ And to Peter Jesus says: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."⁸³⁴

The reference to God's righteousness draws sin into the picture. If God's revelation of Himself is determined by His righteousness it would indicate that when a person's sin has been dealt with, either by a sacrificial animal, the blood of which covered sin, or by the blood of Jesus Christ which washes away sin, that person is ready for the revelation of the Father. Knowing God comes through forgiveness of sin. This truth is expressed in Jeremiah. " 'No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,' declares the LORD. 'For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.' "⁸³⁵ So forgiveness of sin is behind Jesus' words in Matthew also. The wise and the learned are the ones who spurn forgiveness of their sin. The little children are the ones who have come and accepted. That this has nothing to do with age is clear from the conversation with Peter. There is also no condemnation of real wisdom and learning. It is the fake and the phony, that which passes for the real thing but isn't, that is exposed.

Therefore, we find in Jesus' words a definition of the concept "world." The Lord has used the term several times in this prayer. It stands for the group of people who do not know God, who are excluded from God's revelation and who consequently are spiritually dead. It is this world that God loves and wants to be saved although the world resents and rejects this love. Earlier Jesus said: "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world" (Vs. 14). God planted the knowledge of Himself into this world in the Person of His Son, Who, as a human being could say to the Father: "I know You." From Him the knowledge of God will spread till eventually it will have covered our planet. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."⁸³⁶ Jesus knows the Father and the disciples know that He knows the Father and that their only hope of ever knowing Him is in Jesus. This, I believe, is contained in the words, "and they know that you have sent Me." Earlier Peter had confessed: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."⁸³⁷ Knowing the Father is a growing process. Jesus says here that the revelation will continue. This means that from His present position in Heaven, Jesus continues to reveal the Father. This is part of His High-priestly function. That is why Paul identifies the knowledge of God with the knowledge of Jesus Christ in His present glory. In Philippians, he says that the all-consuming passion of his life was: "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."⁸³⁸ Knowing the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will be the essence of our life in eternity. Jesus said in the beginning of His prayer "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (Vs. 3) Our life in Heaven will depend on knowing God. This concept is expressed by John in Revelation as the Tree of Life that grows on both sides of the River of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit a year. The

⁸³³ Matt. 11:25-30

⁸³⁴ Matt. 16:17

⁸³⁵ Jer. 31:34

⁸³⁶ Hab. 2:14

⁸³⁷ ch. 6:68,69

⁸³⁸ Phil. 3:10,11

idea seems to be that eternal life has to be sustained by the absorption of knowing God in the same way as physical life has to be nourished. Jesus guarantees us this nourishment.

Part Five: The Crucifixion and Resurrection**(18:1--21:25)****I. The Rejection of Christ**

18:1--19:16

1. Jesus' Imprisonment

ch. 18:1-12

John omits the account of Jesus' heroic struggle in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is reported in the Synoptics,⁸³⁹ and proceeds directly with the entrance of Judas and the guards who come to arrest Jesus.

Jesus was completely prepared for that which awaited Him, as was Judas. Judas had picked the Garden of Gethsemane because He knew that Jesus often came there with His disciples. Judas had been there himself with Jesus and the others and had participated in prayer and fellowship. His choosing of this place was an act of cool, unsentimental calculation. This detail is another proof of the fact that Judas acted in cold blood.

John does not mention the point of Judas' kiss as the Synoptics do. Matthew mentions: "Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: 'The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.' Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him."⁸⁴⁰ In Don Richardson's book *Peace Child*, the author describes how, as a missionary in Irian Jaya, Indonesia, he told this story to the tribal Sawi people who were cannibals. To his horror, the people reacted enthusiastically to Judas' clever plot. They admired the fact that Judas "tuwi asonai man," "fatted Jesus with friendship before the killing." Judas sealed his betrayal of Jesus with a kiss.

Judas' kiss achieved a two-fold goal. First, Jesus was identified in the dark for the benefit of those who came to arrest Him. Judas could have done this differently by, for instance, simply saying: "the second from the left." He must have been afraid that Jesus would have made an effort to escape. Hence his instructions to the guards: "arrest him."

The kiss was probably also meant for Judas' own protection against the anger of the other disciples. They would not come to the realization of what was going on until it was too late. We must remember that the others considered Judas to be one of them up to the last moment.

In spite of Judas' carefully laid plan, panic occurred when Jesus took the initiative in the arrest and made His capture an act of majestic surrender. Jesus asked the guards: "Who is it you want?" upon which they answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus' answer to them, "I am he," is the Greek form of the Name with which God revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM."⁸⁴¹ It is the Tetragrammaton YHWH, which the Jews refused to take upon their lips for fear of using the Name of the Lord in vain. Jesus used the same words as in His earlier statement to the Jews: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."⁸⁴² This must have been the main reason why these people, in spite of themselves, "drew back and fell to the ground." Jesus' glorious revelation of Himself to His conspirators and murderers in the darkness of the garden was awesome. Those evil people stood there for one moment blinded by the light of His glory that threw them with their faces flat on the ground. Jesus was not arrested because the enemy was stronger than He was. His going to the cross was an act of free surrender. This moment was prophetically foreshadowed in the incident where the soldiers of King Ahaziah tried to capture the prophet Elijah. We read: "Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, 'Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!' 'Elijah answered the captain, 'If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!' Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men."⁸⁴³ There are, of course, some great differences between Elijah's scene of wrath and judgment and Jesus' revelation of Himself. For Elijah it was the confirmation that he really was "a Man of God." Jesus didn't need any such proof. His Word has the same effect as the fire that fell from heaven in Elijah's story; it does, in a different sense, consume the wicked.

Jesus' answer was, at the same time, a manifestation of grace. In presenting Himself to the soldiers, He secured the safe conduct of the other disciples. "If you are looking for me, then let these men go." It is obvious that Jesus' surrender of Himself provides a freedom for others that far surpasses the events of that hour. John sees in this the fulfillment of the prophecy Jesus had pronounced a few moments earlier in His last prayer. He had prayed: "While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except

⁸³⁹ Matt. 26:36-46; Mark Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46

⁸⁴⁰ Matt. 26:48-49; see also Mark 14:43 ff; Luke 22:47 ff

⁸⁴¹ Ex. 3:14

⁸⁴² ch. 8:58

⁸⁴³ II Kings 1:9-15

the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.”⁸⁴⁴ John is, of course, right in this interpretation, but the fulfillment of the prophecy is not exhausted in this incident. When we read the words of Jesus’ prayer, we think of protection of the disciples of physical danger. John’s reference to this prophecy here does not mean that the disciple’s escape from capture in the garden was the only realization of the prophecy. They were protected physically, but this was part of a spiritual protection that encompasses all.

John is the only Evangelist who ascribes the drawing of the sword to Peter; the other Gospel writers mention the incident without using names. John also mentions the name of the servant, Malchus, whose ear was cut off. It is doubtful that Peter had merely intended to cut off the ear. He must have aimed to split the man’s skull and missed, which would indicate that he was nervous and unsure of himself. John writes: “Jesus commanded Peter, ‘Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?’”

From comments in the other Gospel, we understand that Jesus never doubted the Father’s power to intervene. The point, however, is not deliverance from need but the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Matthew’s quotation of Jesus’ words at this moment is the clearest: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”⁸⁴⁵ It was the Scriptures that had guided Jesus all through His life on earth and brought Him to this place in His life and ministry. To ignore the guidelines the Father had laid out and to begin acting on His own would have defeated the whole purpose of His coming into the world.

2. Jesus’ Interrogation Before Annas and Peter’s Denial ch. 18:13-27

According to John’s chronology, Jesus was first taken to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest. Annas is the first man in authority to interrogate Jesus. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about Annas that he was: “the virtual head of the priestly party in Jerusalem in the time of Christ, a man of commanding influence. He was the son of Seth (Josephus: Sethi), and was elevated to the high-priesthood by Quirinius, governor of Syria, 7 AD. At this period the office was filled and vacated at the caprice of the Roman procurators, and Annas was deposed by Valerius Gratus, 15 AD. But though deprived of official status, he continued to wield great power as the dominant member of the hierarchy, using members of his family as his willing instruments. That he was an adroit diplomatist is shown by the fact that five of his sons ... and his son-in-law Caiaphas ... held the high-priesthood in almost unbroken succession, though he did not survive to see the office filled by his fifth son Annas or Ananus II, who caused James the Lord’s brother to be stoned to death (circa 62 AD). Another mark of his continued influence is, that long after he had lost his office he was still called ‘high priest,’ and his name appears first wherever the names of the chief members of the sacerdotal faction are given.” John’s report gives us a clear impression of power struggle of the hierarchy in the office God had ordained for Aaron and his sons. There was no trace left of the divine mandate of the office.

As Jesus enters the palace of the high priest, John is reminded of the words of Caiaphas uttered a few days earlier: “It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”⁸⁴⁶ When John quoted those words earlier, he intimated that their meaning went well beyond what Caiaphas intended to say. As we read them in the context of this chapter, they are an indication of the cruel prejudice of the court, which excludes all pretexts of justice. The Sanhedrin had already decided what to do with Jesus before they even interrogated Him. But John says more. Remembering the moment later in life and penning down his Gospel, he sees Jesus entering the court of justice as the Lamb led to the slaughter. Jesus died for others, not for Himself.

We do not read that Jesus was taken from one building to another, so the hall where Annas was seated was probably in the same building as Caiaphas’ quarters.

At this moment Peter and John reappear. John does not behave himself as a stranger in Jerusalem; he knows the people of the court and the high priest himself. Using his influence, he ferries Peter past the doorkeeper. We get the impression that at that point Peter’s first denial of Christ takes place. When Peter sets himself close to the fire, the slave girl who was the doorkeeper, comes to him and asks him the question: “You are not one of his disciples, are you?” All this probably took place during the preliminary hearing.

In the meantime, Annas, whom John calls here “the high priest”, is questioning Jesus. In spite of the fact that he had been deposed from this office for over fifteen years, the people evidently still called him “high priest.” The irony of this moment should not escape us. Here is a man, who was no longer the high priest, interrogating Him

⁸⁴⁴ ch. 17:12

⁸⁴⁵ Matt. 26:53,54

⁸⁴⁶ ch. 11:50

who would be within three days High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.⁸⁴⁷ From the days of Aaron up to the day of Caiaphas, the office of high priest had been a shadow of the coming of Jesus Christ. Annas and Caiaphas ought to have bowed down before their Lord and should have given account to Him. Here the shadow interrogates the reality. As most of the Old Testament kings of Israel understood very little of theocratic call, so these priests had no notion of who they were and what they were doing. He who overestimates himself underestimates what he does. Because these men did not see themselves as foreshadowing the reality to come, they failed to understand the importance of the sacrifices they brought. Annas had been so preoccupied with his own importance that the thought that someone would come who would give content and meaning to his office had been completely pushed to the background. Here the Messiah stood before him and he failed to recognize Him. Without realizing this, these men proved that they did not believe Daniel's prophecy, which had foretold: "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.' It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed."⁸⁴⁸

Annas questioned Jesus about His disciples and His teaching, implying that there might be some secret organization with a secret doctrine. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "He probably asked him by what authority, or in virtue of what right, he collected disciples, formed a different sect, preached a new doctrine, and set himself up for a public reformer? As religion was interested in these things, the high priest was considered as being the proper judge. But all this, with what follows, was transacted by night, and this was contrary to established laws. For the Talmud states, Sanhed. c. 4 s. 1, that-'Criminal processes can neither commence nor terminate, but during the course of the day. If the person be acquitted, the sentence may be pronounced during that day; but, if he be condemned, the sentence cannot be pronounced until the next day. But no kind of judgment is to be executed, either on the eve of the Sabbath, or the eve of any festival.' Nevertheless, to the lasting infamy of this people, Christ was judicially interrogated and condemned during the night; and on the night too of the Passover, or, according to others, on the eve of that feast. Thus, as I have remarked before, all the forms of justice were insulted and outraged in the case of our Lord."

At this point, one of the officials, probably a member of the Sanhedrin, struck Jesus in the face. John does not repeat the details of the shameful treatment given to our Lord by the other members of the council, as the other Gospel writers do. Matthew, for instance, records: "Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, 'Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?'"⁸⁴⁹ He does establish the irony between Anna's question about the disciples and Peter's denial that takes place simultaneously in the courtyard. While the night-interrogation goes on, Satan attacks Peter in the strongest possible manner. Peter had announced earlier that evening that he was ready to die with Jesus. All the disciples had made similar statements. He had disregarded Jesus' warning that he would be unable to bear the pressure. He overestimated himself and underestimated his opponent. He had no inkling that [his] "struggle [was] not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."⁸⁵⁰ He did not possess the weapons needed for such an encounter. Entering into a confrontation with the evil while trusting one's own strength can be fatal. The only option for victory is to take our position in Christ, to take up the spiritual armor and to stand. Peter failed miserably in this. The worst that could have happened to Peter was that he would have been condemned and executed together with Jesus. But that possibility was rather slim. John's life was apparently not in danger, and it must have been known that he was a disciple of Jesus. Peter had proclaimed that he was ready to die, but obviously he wasn't. He who wants to keep his life can never be victorious over the devil. If Peter had really been ready to die with Christ, then Satan would have had no handle on him. In the story of Esther, we see that Haman's demonic plan to exterminate the Jews collapsed when Esther brings herself to say: "If I perish, I perish."⁸⁵¹ According to the Revelation, one of the factors in the victory over Satan is that those who fight him "[do] not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."⁸⁵² As most of us, Peter did not know himself. He didn't know what he would be able to do under pressure. Jesus had said to Peter: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen

⁸⁴⁷ See Heb. 5:6

⁸⁴⁸ Dan. 9:25-27

⁸⁴⁹ Matt. 26:67,68

⁸⁵⁰ See Eph. 6:12

⁸⁵¹ Est. 4:16

⁸⁵² Rev. 12:11

your brothers.”⁸⁵³ This is the moment at which he was being sifted as wheat. That is the way God looks upon what happens to Peter here. The Holy Spirit separates the corn from the chaff in Peter. This was obviously not what the devil intended to happen. He only wanted to bring a human soul to eternal despair.

John tells us that Satan’s first attack is made by the girl who had let him in. After opening the door for him, she probably went to the fire where Peter had gone to warm himself. Comparing the various Gospel records of the incident, it is difficult to establish the exact sequence of the events. The story of the denial was probably reconstructed on the basis of Peter’s own report. Peter being highly excited and the courtyard being dark, it is logical that different Evangelists come up with different accounts. In his book *Jesus The Messiah*, Edersheim seems to suggest that the second denial may have consisted of two or three different parts. At one point, more than one person may have asked Peter the same question at the same time. The only real danger lurks when a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off, recognizes him as one who was with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. John does not tell us anything about Peter’s reaction at the crowing of the rooster, as the Synoptics do. Luke gives us the most moving version of the event: “Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”⁸⁵⁴

For the second time in Peter’s life his house-of-cards collapses. The first time was at the miraculous catch of fish when he cried out: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”⁸⁵⁵ At this point he flees the scene and flees himself. It needs no comment that this bitter crying is his salvation; it flushes his soul. He had never realized that he would be able to say the things he said under the pressure of circumstances. He had considered himself to be a spontaneous, honest fellow. But when he opened his mouth, cowardice, disloyalty, lies, and blasphemy came out. That would be enough for any person to weep bitterly. When Peter collapsed the first time, Jesus had put him back on his feet by saying: “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.”⁸⁵⁶ About one week or so later, Jesus would speak the same kind of words to him at the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. In God’s dispensation, every human failure is a step forward. After all, the result of sifting the wheat is that wheat is all that remains.

3. Jesus Before Pilate ch. 18:28 – 19:15

John omits the account of what happened when Jesus was before Caiaphas, the accusations by false witnesses, and how He was condemned to death. He, evidently, considered these details to be sufficiently known. Also Judas’ remorse and subsequent suicide are not mentioned.

The reason for bringing Jesus before Pilate was that the Jews were not allowed to execute anyone themselves. This, however, did not seem to be a hindrance when they decided to kill Stephen.⁸⁵⁷ But there is more involved. The prophets had carefully foretold the mode of Jesus’ death. He was to die as the Passover Lamb on the altar of human sin. No bone of His was to be broken.

Luke tells us that Jesus stood twice before Pilate, and that in between those two interrogations, He was taken to King Herod. The other Gospel writer treat Jesus’ appearance before Pilate as one session. Without the details John provides for us, all this would be rather incomprehensible. It would seem illogical, for instance, that Pilate would condemn Jesus to death, merely on His declaration of His being the King of the Jews. John shows us how Jesus defines these terms.

John also tells us that the Jews did not want to enter the Praetorium, the hall in which the governor heard cases brought before him, because they did not want to defile themselves because “they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.” These words have given rise to much speculation. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* explains: “Some maintain that to ... *pascha* ... here does not mean the paschal lamb, but the other sacrifices which were offered during the paschal solemnity-for this had been eaten the evening before; and that our Lord was crucified the day after the Passover. Others have maintained that the paschal lamb is here meant; that this was the proper day for sacrificing it; that it was on the very hour in which it was offered that Christ expired on the cross; and that therefore our Lord did not eat the paschal lamb this year, or that he ate it some hours before the common time. Dr. Pearce supposes that it was lawful for the Jews to eat the paschal lamb anytime between the evening of Thursday and that of Friday. He conjectures too that this permission was necessary on account of the immense number of lambs which were to be killed for that purpose. When Cestius desired to know the number of the Jews, he asked the priests how

⁸⁵³ Luke 22:31,32

⁸⁵⁴ Luke 22:60-62

⁸⁵⁵ Luke 5:8

⁸⁵⁶ Luke 5:10

⁸⁵⁷ See Acts 7:57-60

he might accomplish his wish? They informed him that this might be known by the number of the lambs slain at the Passover, as never less than ten partook of one lamb, though twenty might feast on it. On this mode of computation he found the lambs to be 256,500; ... See Josephus, War, b. 6 c. 9. s. 3.”

There is no law in the Old Testament that forbade Jews to enter the house of a non-Jew. Yet, the thought seems to have established itself that one would become ritually unclean in doing so. We gather this from Peter’s remarks upon entering the house of Cornelius: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him.”⁸⁵⁸ *Vincent’s Word Studies* supposes that the defilement would occur upon entering a house from which not all leaven had been removed. Whatever the reason, this insult to Pilate may not have put the governor in the best of moods.

The bitter irony of all this should not escape us. The Jews were in the process of committing a murder, which is against every law, and at the same time, they are meticulously concerned about the observation of one detail that is not even covered by the law. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “They considered the touch of a Gentile to be a defilement, and on this occasion, at least, seemed to regard it as a pollution to enter the house of a Gentile. They took care, therefore, to guard themselves against what they considered ceremonial pollution, while they were wholly unconcerned at the enormous crime of putting the innocent Savior to death, and imbruing their hands in their Messiah’s blood. Probably there is not anywhere to be found among men another such instance of petty regard to the mere ceremonies of the law and attempting to keep from pollution, at the same time that their hearts were filled with malice, and they were meditating the most enormous of all crimes. But it shows us how much more concerned men will be at the violation of the mere forms and ceremonies of religion than at real crime, and how they endeavor to keep their consciences at ease amid their deeds of wickedness by the observance of some of the outward ceremonies of religion by mere sanctimoniousness.”

The Jews were not only concerned about their outward ritual purity, disregarding the condition of their souls, but they were also about to put to death Him, who is the original, of which the law was a shadow. A greater negation of the law is hardly imaginable. Pilate must have felt greatly insulted by the fact that he was forced to come out because the accusers considered themselves too good to come in.

The historians Josephus and Philo have little good to say about Pilate. They state that the governor could be bribed, that he committed serious acts of cruelty and robbery, that he maltreated prisoners and enforced regulations that were insulting to the Jewish faith, performed executions without due process, and perpetrated acts of unusual cruelty. He was governor of Judah from 26-36 AD. So when Jesus stood before Pilate, He fell into good hands! He could expect little justice from the side of the official authorities. It is hard to believe that the Jewish priests could evince such complete disregard for the legal process as we read this in the Gospels. We would have expected them to at least keep up the appearance. We would have expected that the priests and leaders of the people would have thought through this aspect of the case. Obviously, time had been too short for this. The leaders must have taken it for granted that Pilate could be easily bribed or that they had enough on him to blackmail him. At the end they were proved to be right in this.

Initially, their accusations and arguments were too flimsy for Pilate to act on. John does not mention any of the charges that are stated in the other Gospels. The threat that finally makes Pilate change his mind is found in the next chapter: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”⁸⁵⁹ The fact that Pilate demonstrated suspicion that the Jews actually had no solid grounds for this case must have grated them severely. In keeping the accusations undefined, the Jews were telling Pilate that what Jesus had done was their business and that they had enough proof against Pilate to force the governor to pronounce the sentence they wanted.

The point that evokes Pilate’s reaction is the mention of Jesus’ kingship. This is the reason for the private conversation that takes place between our Lord and the governor. The apostle Paul would later write to Timothy that “Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.”⁸⁶⁰

In the interrogation, Jesus immediately takes the initiative. He answers Pilate’s question: “Are you the king of the Jews?” with a counter-question: “Is that your own idea ... or did others talk to you about me?” This is a strange question that must have intrigued Pilate a good deal. Jesus wants to find out if Pilate had discovered in Judaism that God reveals Himself to man, and if that had evoked a spiritual hunger in his heart. Jesus’ heart, evidently, went out to this cruel and corrupt man. He tried to awaken in him the desire that could lead him on the way everlasting. Jesus asks Pilate if he had any hope or expectation of the coming of a Savior. Pilate’s answer makes clear that he is neither interested in Judaism, nor in the God who is worshipped in it. He finds the idea that he

⁸⁵⁸ Acts 10:28

⁸⁵⁹ See ch. 19:12

⁸⁶⁰ I Tim. 6:13

would be a Jew, or would be interested in things Jewish, repulsive. The only thing that interests him in the case of Jesus is the political aspect of it. In His elaboration, Jesus introduces Pilate to the concept of spiritual reality. But that does not interest him either. This leads to Pilate's question or exclamation: "You are a king, then!" to which Jesus answers: "You are right in saying I am a king." At that point, Pilate must have come to the conclusion that Jesus' definition of kingship had a religious connotation without any political significance and that, consequently, it was harmless. But Jesus' definition of kingship is far from negative; it is a most positive statement. That positive aspect is the good confession our Lord testified before Pilate. The reason for Jesus' coming into the world is to testify to the truth. In a sense, this is a very touching moment in the court case. Jesus is, obviously, deeply moved and concerned about the fate of this man. He appeals to things in Pilate's life that would enable him to recognize the truth when he saw it. In Pilate also there were traces of the image of God that remained. Matthew's mention of the note his wife sent him suggests that there was some intimacy in their marriage.⁸⁶¹ He may have had children he loved. There are in the life of the hardest individual moments of sensitivity that can be made into points of contact with God's reality. Jesus reveals God to this man in the most tender terms: "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." What an appeal to the governor's conscience!

It is, in a sense, impossible to define truth, just as it is impossible to express the character of God in human words. The best way to make us understand what truth is like is to contrast it with the devil's lie. God's truth is everything that gives meaning to life. It is, therefore, closely related to love and holiness, which is to the character of God Himself. Jesus' approach makes us understand that Pilate must have had some awareness of the essence of truth. Jesus assumes the same arguments the apostle Paul presents about the knowledge of people "who suppress the truth by their wickedness." We read in Romans: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."⁸⁶²

It is frightening to read Pilate's words that are so contemporary in our day: "What is truth?" Pilate did not ask a question, he made a statement. It was the governor's confession of faith in relativism. If Pilate had known about the Theory of Evolution, he would have said that man's ability to think logically was the result of a chemical reaction in the brain cells. Truth was for him, not an absolute outside man, the essence of God's being, but a projection of the human mind, the product of a chemical reaction. Had Pilate asked Jesus an honest question, Jesus would undoubtedly have given him an honest answer. But Pilate's question was not a question. It is a strange thing that, when we begin to confess that truth is something outside us, we also discover God's purpose for man, which is that the truth would also be in man. Ultimately, that will lead us to the point where we become truth, as Jesus is the truth.

Pilate not only does not ask a question, he also doesn't want an answer. To acknowledge that truth is an entity outside man involves the risk of an encounter with the God of truth. When God enters our life, we have to make room for Him. It is easier to leave Jesus and go out, as Pilate did. It also immediately makes us guilty of Jesus' death.

John does not mention the episode of Jesus' appearing before King Herod.⁸⁶³ He proceeds immediately to Pilate's effort to free Jesus in exchange for the murderer Barabbas. It seems that Pilate made an honest effort. We may suppose that he expected the crowd to vote in favor of Jesus. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments here: "It is not easy to give the character of Pilate. From the manner of his conduct, we scarcely can tell when he is in jest or in earnest. He appears to have been fully convinced of the innocence of Christ; and that the Jews, through envy and malice, desired his destruction. On this ground he should have released him; but he was afraid to offend the Jews. He knew they were an uneasy, factious, and seditious people; and he was afraid to irritate them. ... For fear of the clamors of this bad people, he permitted all the forms and requisitions of justice to be outraged, and abandoned the most innocent Jesus to their rage and malice. In this case he knew what was truth, but did not follow its dictates; and, he as hastily abandoned the author of it as he did the question he had asked concerning it. Pilate, it is true, was disposed to pity-the Jews were full of malice and cruelty. They both, however, joined in the murder of our Lord. The most that we can say for Pilate is, that he was disposed to justice, but was not inclined to hazard his comfort or safety in doing it. He was an easy, pliable man, who had no objection to do a right thing if it should cost him no trouble; but he felt no disposition to make any sacrifice, even in behalf of innocence, righteousness, and truth. In all

⁸⁶¹ Matt. 27:19

⁸⁶² Rom. 1:18-20

⁸⁶³ See Luke 23:4-12

the business Pilate showed that he was not a good man; and the Jews proved that they were of their father, the Devil.”

Pilate not only underestimated the power of the Sanhedrin to influence the crowd, he also misjudged the smoothness of his own diplomacy. We don't know how much Barabbas had been involved in the Jewish struggle for freedom. The Gospel writers all agree that Barabbas had committed a murder, but if the murder was political, as the word “insurrection” seems to indicate, he may have had more sympathy from the side of the crowd than Pilate counted on. Also, Pilate's calling Jesus: “the king of the Jews” was a political blunder. Mark seems to suggest that the initiative for the release of Barabbas did not come from Pilate but from the crowd. We read: “The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.”⁸⁶⁴ But the name Barabbas is not mentioned in that context.

Pilate's last effort to release Jesus was by means of a most cruel method, which was completely against all rules of justice. He orders Jesus to be flogged, probably knowing full well that his band of sadistic soldiers would submit Him to their most cruel games. Pilate's foul plan was to evoke the pity of the crowd by presenting them with the picture of a man who had undergone torture. It was only after this plan failed that Pilate pronounced his final judgment upon Jesus and condemned Him to death.

Jesus' experience in this flogging was a fulfillment of the prophecy in the Psalms: “Plowmen have plowed my back and made their furrows long.”⁸⁶⁵ We don't know if Jesus quoted this Psalm to Himself as He did the twenty-second Psalm during His crucifixion. If the Shroud of Turin⁸⁶⁶ is any indication, regardless of the question whether it really is the shroud that enveloped Jesus at His burial, we can imagine by the marks on the calves of the victim how the soldiers must have torn into Jesus like wild animals. We cannot draw a picture that is realistic enough of this scene of cruelty and sadism. We ought to be grateful to the Gospel writer that they spared us the brutal details in their sober silence. John is particularly reserved at this point.

For a moment, we get the impression that even Pilate, in a weak moment, feels some pity with the figure Jesus cuts after the treatment the soldiers gave Him. At least, he decides to use the pitiful picture to appeal to the nobler sentiments of the crowd, sentiments which they demonstrate not to possess.

Pilate appears to have had a flair for euphemism. First, in saying: “What is truth?” and then in the words: “Here is the man!” I don't know why the NIV deviates from the Greek: “Behold the man.” Pilate's vain effort to prove Jesus' innocence by the way He looked, bleeding, decked with a crown of thorns and a mock royal robe, has more meaning than the governor intended it to have. This is what the Man looks like who is about to carry away the sin of the world. The picture of glory in reverse is the picture of what sin has done to man. What Pilate wanted to say was: “Look at the poor wretch!” Pilate must have seen in Jesus the image of what man can do to his fellowman. As Caiaphas, without knowing this, and without intending to, proclaimed God's truth when he prophesied about the death of Christ⁸⁶⁷, so Pilate makes here a declaration that came from God about the condition of man in his sinful state. The amazing thing is that Pilate, who was unfamiliar with God's revelation, saw in the condition of Jesus' rejection His innocence. The Jews, who knew the law, must have seen their own picture in the mirror of Jesus' miserable condition, otherwise they would not have reacted with such an outburst of anger. While Pilate saw Jesus' innocence, they saw their own guilt. Both parties were correct!

We can hardly pass by the deep symbolic significance of the fact that Jesus was wearing a crown of thorns. God intended man to be “crowned with glory and honor.”⁸⁶⁸ As David sang: “You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.”⁸⁶⁹ According to the writer of the Hebrew Epistle, David's Psalm was particularly a prophecy about Jesus Christ. We read: “ ‘You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.’ In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”⁸⁷⁰

Here we see man maimed by sin. Jesus is at this point the culmination of what sin is all about. He became “the Man of Sin.” In the words of the apostle Paul: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.”⁸⁷¹ The result of man's fall into sin was that the earth would produce thorns and thistles. We read that God said to Adam: “Cursed is

⁸⁶⁴ Mark 15:8

⁸⁶⁵ Ps. 129:3

⁸⁶⁶ See National Geographic, June 1980

⁸⁶⁷ See ch. 11:49,50

⁸⁶⁸ Ps. 8:5

⁸⁶⁹ Ps. 8:6,7

⁸⁷⁰ Heb. 2:7-9

⁸⁷¹ II Cor. 5:21

the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you.”⁸⁷² Without knowing what they were doing, the soldiers, in the cruel game they played with Jesus, gave expression to man’s deepest need. The representative of the human race wears a crown of thorns.

The shouting back and forth which is the result of Jesus’ being presented to the crowd is full of significance. Everything that is said is truth with an unintentional double meaning. As His carrying our sins and sicknesses means redemption for us, so also is His wearing of a crown of thorns the victory over the curse. Because of what happens here, the earth will ultimately hear and obey us again.

When Pilate fails in playing on the sentiments of the crowd, he begins another game of teasing and aggravation. The mob demands Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Pilate uses this to make the people understand that they are in the power of the Roman Empire and that they are not free. He only gives his ultimate consent after the chief priests say: “We have no king but Caesar.” After hearing this statement from the mouth of the Jewish leaders, Pilate must have felt that this was worth the price of a bad conscience.

There are several moments of truth in the dialogue between Pilate and the multitude. “We have a law, and according to that law he must die” is one of them. Jesus’ death was indeed stipulated by the law, but not for the reasons given by the Jews: “because he claimed to be the Son of God.” Jesus’ death is the fulfillment of the demand of the law to bring about atonement of sin. Every sacrifice that was brought according to the law was a pointer to the sacrifice Jesus was about to bring at the cross at this moment. Without Jesus’ death, all the Old Testament sacrifices would have become meaningless. This is why John the Baptist had exclaimed: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”⁸⁷³ If Jesus had not died according to the law, the law itself would have lost its significance. Because He claimed to be the Son of God, that burden had become His by design. No one else could have taken His place. This, however, was not what the Jews intended to say. They did not realize that what they wanted was a confirmation of Jesus’ own claim. The words “the Son of God” had yet another meaning for Pilate; to him this was the title only the Roman emperor could bear.

Taken in its totality, the statement of the crowd was only a half-truth. It is typical for the propaganda of Satan to use slogans like the above. What it means, according to the crowd, is that Jesus has to die because He committed the sin of blasphemy. This, of course, was a lie. In reality, Jesus had to die, not because He was guilty, but because He was innocent. The law demanded “a lamb without blemish or defect.”⁸⁷⁴ And Jesus’ claim to be the Son of God could not be refuted by the law. Earlier, Jesus had told the Jews that His claim was backed up by the fact that His works proved He was “the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world.”⁸⁷⁵ At that moment, it appears that the Jews would have had no scruples to execute Jesus on the spot. It is difficult to reason out why now the leaders go to such length to have Jesus executed by the Roman authorities. The first reason is, probably, because it would have been impossible to stone Jesus to death during the Passover celebration, and secondly, if ever the multitude had turned against its leaders because of the death of this popular Jesus, they could always say that the Romans had done it.

Pilate had become familiar with the title “King of the Jews.” He had analyzed Jesus’ claim, and he had come to the conclusion that the label belonged to a realm that had no political danger. He had then used the expression to mock and provoke the Jews. But the appellation “Son of God” came closer to home for Pilate. It was the title given to the emperor and no Roman governor could tolerate that any of the emperor’s subjects would call himself by that name. The Jews, on the other hand, insinuated that *no one* could bear that title, not even the emperor. Pilate’s situation became more and more untenable. Going back inside and interrogating Jesus anew brought no relief to him since Jesus completely ignored him. As Herod, so Pilate had come to the place where God would no longer speak. He had cut himself off from the source of life and revelation. Outwardly, there seems to be little difference between the Pilate before and after the encounter with Jesus, but inwardly Pilate had made a choice against the truth. His condition is now irrevocable. He had separated himself from the truth. Yet, he is irritated by the fact that Jesus remains silent. With some demonstration of pomp, he makes clear to Jesus that He is the loser by refusing to speak. He warns our Lord that He is in his power; that he has the power to kill or to let live. That threat would have had a paralyzing effect upon any other person. But Jesus had once said Himself: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”⁸⁷⁶ The power one man has over another is always negative. The power Jesus has over Pilate is positive. Jesus could have given life to Pilate. That fact makes Pilate’s words to Jesus ridiculous.

⁸⁷² Gen. 3:17,18

⁸⁷³ ch. 1:29

⁸⁷⁴ I Peter 1:19

⁸⁷⁵ ch. 10:36

⁸⁷⁶ Matt. 10:28

Another difference between Pilate's and Jesus' power is that Pilate's power was delegated and consequently temporal. Power had been given to Pilate and it would be taken away from him again. Jesus' power is eternal; it is one of His divine attributes. We can hardly blame Pilate for not understanding this. Yet, he must have sensed enough of the truth to try to let Jesus go free. Only the blackmail the Jewish leaders have on him keeps him from doing this. As we saw before, the Jews speculated that they could make the governor do as they wished. This is why they never made any serious attempt to present a case against Jesus that had any resemblance of judicial merit. They had enough proof in hand against Pilate to force their case. They could bend or break the governor.

John describes in detail the place and the time at which the official verdict is pronounced. The NIV circumvents some of the problems of vs. 13 by saying that Pilate "sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha)." The Greek word used for "Stone Pavement" is *Lithostroton*. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* explains: "[The Pavement] *Lithostroton*, ... literally, a stone pavement: probably it was that place in the open court where the chair of justice was set, for the prefects of provinces always held their courts of justice in the open air, and which was paved with stones of various colors, like that of Ahasuerus, Est 1:6, of red, blue, white, and black marble; what we still term Mosaic work, or something in imitation of it; such as the Roman pavements frequently dug up in this and other countries⁸⁷⁷, where the Romans have had military stations. [*Gabbatha*.] That is, an elevated place; from *gabah*, ... high, raised up; and it is very likely that the judgment seat was considerably elevated in the court, and that the governor went up to it by steps; and perhaps these very steps were what was called the Pavement. John does not say that *Lithostroton*, or the Pavement, is the meaning of the word *Gabbatha*; but that the place was called so in the Hebrew. The place was probably called *Lithostroton*, or the Pavement: the seat of judgment, *Gabbatha*, the raised or elevated place.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: "Due to the excavations of Père Vincent, the Pavement (*lithostroton*) is now almost certainly identified as the large paved area that was a part of the Castle of Antonia, at the northwest corner of the temple area."

John also specifies "It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour." There is a difference of opinion among scholars about the exact time at which the Passover was celebrated. There probably was not even a consensus among the Jews as to when the right time was. Some celebrated it on the eve of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and others two days earlier. It is logical to suppose that Jesus' death on the cross coincided with the actual killing of the Passover lamb. The Exodus' record states: "Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight."⁸⁷⁸ The Hebrew reads literally "between the evenings," which could mean that ample latitude of time was allowed. It may mean that the lamb could be killed between 6 o'clock in the evening of the 15th day and 6 o'clock on the evening of the 16th day. If it is true that Jesus ate the Passover meal before 6:00 PM on day 15 and died before 6:00 PM of the next day, both the image and the reality took place within the framework prescribed by the law.

The sixth hour is calculated from sunrise at 6:00 AM, which makes it approximately 12 noon. The time is not stated exactly, because the Synoptics place the crucifixion at "the third hour." Mark's Gospel states: "It was the third hour when they crucified him."⁸⁷⁹

Barnes' Notes makes the following observation: "In John 19:14 it is said, 'And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour,' etc. Much difficulty has been felt in reconciling these passages, and infidels have usually adduced them to prove that the evangelists have contradicted themselves. In reconciling them the following remarks may perhaps make the matter clear: (1) The Jews divided both the night and the day into four equal parts of three hours each. ... The first division of the day commenced at six o'clock in the morning, and ended at nine; the second commenced at nine and ended at twelve, etc. 'The third' hour mentioned by Mark would therefore correspond with our nine o'clock; the "sixth" hour mentioned by John would correspond with our twelve, or noon. (2) Mark professes to give the time accurately; John does not. He says 'it was about the sixth hour,' without affirming that this was exactly the time. (3) A mistake in 'numbers' is easily made; and if it should be admitted that such an error had crept into the text here, it would be nothing more than has occurred in many ancient writings. It has been proved, moreover, that it was common not to write the 'words' indicating numbers at 'length,' but to use 'letters.' The Greeks designated numbers by the letters of the alphabet, and this mode of computation is found in ancient manuscripts. For example, the Cambridge manuscript of the New Testament has in this very place in Mark, not the word 'third' written at length, but the Greek letter gamma (g), the usual notation for third. Now it is well known that it would be easy to mistake this for the Greek letter sigma (s), the mark denoting 'six.' An error of this kind in an early manuscript might be extensively propagated, and might have led to the present reading of the text.

⁸⁷⁷ By "this and other countries" Clarke means England and abroad.

⁸⁷⁸ Ex. 12:6

⁸⁷⁹ Mark 15:25

Such an error is actually known to exist in the *Chronicon* of Paschal, where Otho is said to have reigned [s] (six) months, whereas it is known that he reigned but three, and in this place, therefore, the [g], three, was mistaken for [s], six. (4) There is some external authority for reading 'third' in John 19:14. The Cambridge manuscript has this reading. *Nonnus*, who lived in the fifth century, says that this was the true reading... Peter of Alexandria, in a fragment concerning the Passover, as quoted by Usher, says, 'It was the preparation of the Passover, and about the 'third' 'hour, as,' he adds, 'the most accurate copies of the Bible have it; and this was the handwriting of the evangelist (John), which is kept, by the grace of God, in his most holy church at Ephesus.' ... It is to be admitted, however, that no great reliance is to be placed on this account. That a mistake 'might' have occurred in the early manuscripts is not improbable. No man can 'prove' that it did 'not' so occur, and so long as this cannot be proved, the passages should not be adduced as conclusive proof of contradiction. After all, perhaps, without the supposition that there is any error in the text, the whole difficulty may be removed by the following statements: (1) Calvary was 'without' the walls of Jerusalem. It was a considerable distance from the place where Jesus was tried and condemned. Some time, more or less, would be occupied in going there, and in the preparatory measures for crucifying him. (2) It is not necessary to understand 'Mark' as saying that it was precisely nine o'clock, according to our expression. With the Jews it was six until seven; it was the third hour until the fourth commenced; it was the ninth until it was the tenth. They 'included' in the 'third' hour the whole time from the third to the fourth. The same mode they adopted in regard to their days. ... (3) It is not unduly pressing the matter to suppose that Mark spoke of the time when the process for crucifixion commenced-that is, when he was condemned-when they entered upon it-when they made the preparation. Between that and the time when he was taken 'out' of Jerusalem to Mount Calvary, and when he was actually nailed to the tree, there is no improbability in supposing that there might have been an interval of more than an hour. Indeed, the presumption is that considerably more time than that would elapse. (4) John does not profess, as has been remarked, to be strictly accurate. He says 'it was about the sixth hour,' etc. (5) Now suppose that John meant to indicate the time when he was 'actually' suspended on the cross-that he spoke of the 'crucifixion' denoting the 'act of suspension,' as it struck 'him'-and there is no difficulty. Any other two men-any witnesses-might give just such an account now. One man would speak of the time when the process for an execution commenced; another, perhaps, of the very 'act' of the execution and would 'both' speak of it in general terms, and say that a man was executed at such a time; and the circumstantial variation would 'prove' that there was no collusion, no agreement to 'impose' on a court-that they were honest witnesses. That is 'proved' here. (6) That this is the true account of the matter is clear from the evangelists themselves, and 'especially from Mark.' The three first evangelists concur in stating that there was a remarkable 'darkness' over the whole land from the 'sixth' to the 'ninth' hour, Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44. This fact-in which Mark concurs-would seem to indicate that 'the actual crucifixion' continued only during that time-that he was, in fact, suspended at about the sixth hour, though the preparations for crucifying him had been going on (Mark) for two hours before. The fact that Mark (Mark 15:33) mentions this darkness as commencing at the 'sixth' and not at the 'third' hour, is one of the circumstances undesignedly occurring that seems to signify that the crucifixion then had 'actually' taken place, though the various arrangements for it (Mark 15:25) had been going on from the 'third' hour. One thing is conclusively proved by this-that the evangelists did not 'conspire together' to impose on the world. They are independent witnesses, and they were honest men; and the circumstance adverted to here is one that is allowed to be of great value in testimony in courts of justice- 'circumstantial variation with essential agreement.' "

It is probable that barely four hours after Jesus had been sentenced, He was already dead.

4. The Crucifixion ch. 19:17-42

John does not mention the interruption of Jesus' carrying of the cross as the other Gospel writers do. The soldiers, who led Jesus away, requisitioned a certain Simon of Cyrene when Jesus fell down under the load.⁸⁸⁰ The carrying of the crossbeam of a cross by a criminal condemned to death must have been a common sight in the Roman Empire. It was common enough for Jesus to borrow the image. He had said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."⁸⁸¹ The revolutionary character of that statement lay in the fact that the exhortation was given to civilized people, whilst criminals did the actual carrying of a cross. This reminds me of a condition during World War II, when the Nazis occupied the Netherlands. Before the war, it was considered shameful to have served a prison term. During the war, being put in prison by the Nazi authorities became a badge of honor. Graffiti on the walls of the prison in Scheveningen proclaimed that "the glory of Holland" was incarcerated there. By His being submitted to this utmost ignominy, Jesus made the shameful honorable. By carrying the cross, Jesus transformed the cross and the whole complex of shame and sin for which it stands into a symbol of honor and glory. He conquered the shame, strangely enough, by collapsing under it. In the same manner, He conquered death by dying. The shame of the cross, however, was not merely a matter of public opinion; God also cursed a hanged person. The Old Testament states: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."⁸⁸² The apostle Paul specifies: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"⁸⁸³ The transformation Jesus brought about was, first of all, in behalf of God and subsequently for the benefit of man.

The four Gospel writers agree that Jesus was not crucified alone but that two common criminals were crucified with Him. John omits many of the details we find in the other Gospels, but he concentrates on the notice Pilate had placed on Jesus' cross and on the dividing of Jesus' garments. He also introduces himself together with Mary at the foot of the cross.

Crucifixion is one of the cruelest tortures mankind has ever invented. The shroud of Turin shows that the nails were driven through the wrists of the victim, not through the palms of the hand as was supposed before. Years ago, I read an article in *Time Magazine* that described the skeleton of a man who had been crucified. It showed that the nails were driven through the wrists and sideways through the heel. Thus the Bible's oldest prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, in which God had said to Satan: "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."⁸⁸⁴

The place of crucifixion is Golgotha, which is Aramaic for "Skull." I used to think that the round shape of the hill gave the impression of a skull but a visit to Jerusalem and to the place called "Gordon's Calvary" rectified this. The side of "Gordon's Calvary" is a sheer cliff of white limestone with several dark cave openings in it. When the sun reaches its zenith the caves give the impression of the eyes and nose of a skull. The place also looks like the *perfect* sight for an execution.

It seemed like an ordinary vulgar execution of two criminals and a religious fanatic, but Jesus' crucifixion is beyond doubt the greatest crime humanity has ever committed. Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled: "[He] was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."⁸⁸⁵ John does not mention Jesus' intercessory prayer, or most of the other utterances Jesus made while hanging on the cross, which are recorded by the other evangelists. But he gives us the most complete version of Pilate's notice: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." The shortest version is found in Mark: "THE KING OF THE JEWS."⁸⁸⁶ He also mentions the protest of the priests to Pilate.

It is obvious that Pilate intentionally worded the notice in a way to insult the Jews, as if this was indeed their king who was being crucified. The irony of this is only surpassed by the Holy Spirit's who uses this notice to proclaim the full Gospel in this impossible situation. When we ask ourselves who says that Jesus is the king of the Jews, we have to answer: Pilate and the Holy Spirit. We see again a similar situation as when Caiaphas thought he was getting rid of an enemy, whilst in reality he prophesied as high priest.

⁸⁸⁰ See Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26

⁸⁸¹ Matt. 16:24. See also Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

⁸⁸² Deut. 21:22,23

⁸⁸³ Gal. 3:13

⁸⁸⁴ Gen. 3:15

⁸⁸⁵ Isa. 53:12

⁸⁸⁶ Mark 15:26

What does the Holy Spirit say? First of all that Jesus was, not only from the town of Nazareth, but also a Nazarene, as some versions render this.⁸⁸⁷ Jesus died in fact a Nazarene, someone who had made the vow not to drink fermented drinks. During the Passover celebration, He had said: "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."⁸⁸⁸ Pilate could not have known this. What the governor wanted to state was that Jesus originated from the town of Nazareth. In Hebrew or Aramaic the consonants are the same, so both the words Nazareth or Nazarene could be understood.

As far as Jesus being a king was concerned, Pilate knew more. He had been impressed by Jesus' testimony and his notice must have been an effort to rid himself of a bad conscience. In doing this, he proclaimed the full truth. But it also meant for him personally a complete break with the truth. Pilate effectively crucified truth himself. Pilate not only hurt the Jews, he hurt his own soul beyond redemption.

The notice was done in Aramaic, which was the language the Jews had brought back from Babylonian captivity. John calls it Hebrew here. Latin was the language of the Roman government, and Greek the language of world civilization of that time. Thus the Holy Spirit used Pilate's stubbornness to proclaim the truth in writing, visible to all the world. Now the whole world knows that Jesus is a Nazarene, the King of the Jews. Pilate's refusal to change the notice proves that this was not a subjective personal opinion of Jesus Himself, but the objective truth.

Then the soldiers sit down to divide Jesus' garments among themselves. John tells us that there were four soldiers involved. Whether this means that four had the oversight over the three crucified ones or whether each cross had four soldiers assigned to it, we do not know.

Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament states: "All the Synoptists relate the parting of the garments. The four pieces to be divided would be, the head-gear, the sandals, the girdle, and the 'tallith' or square outer garment with fringes. Delitzsch thus describes the dress of our Lord: 'On His head He wore a white sudar, fastened under the chin and hanging down from the shoulders behind. Over the tunic which covered the body to the hands and feet, a blue tallith with the blue and white fringes on the four ends, so thrown over and gathered together that the gray, red-striped undergarment was scarcely noticeable, except when the sandal-shod feet came into view' " It seems strange that Jesus' undergarment would have been of such high quality. It is symbolic for the covered glory that is typical in the Incarnation. The point in John's emphasis of this incident of the dividing of Jesus' garments is that it is the literal fulfillment of David's prophecy: "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."⁸⁸⁹ For those whose eyes were open for this, the taking form of David's Twenty-Second Psalm must have been almost eerie. But no one probably noticed except for our Lord Himself. The culmination of this was, of course the moment Christ cried out: " 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' -which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " ⁸⁹⁰ which John omits. In the casting of lots by the soldiers the Holy Spirit proves that Jesus' execution was not an unfortunate and unforeseen accident but the fulfillment of God's perfect plan that had existed before the foundation of the world.

If the soldiers took all the clothing that belonged to Jesus, this means that Jesus was left completely naked. For obvious reasons, this is never presented thus in paintings depicting the crucifixion. In the words of the Flemish poet Guido Gezelle: "All rights denied, naked Christ died." Jesus had said before: "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these."⁸⁹¹ Now, it was not only true that "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,"⁸⁹² but the Son of Man had no clothing to cover His nakedness.

The shame of nakedness is related to a feeling of shame over sin. It was only after committing the first sin that Adam and Eve felt ashamed of the fact that they were naked before each other, before God, and before themselves. A feeling of shame for physical nakedness is actually a feeling of shame for the nakedness of the soul. In carrying away the sins of the world, God did not leave His Son any kind of covering for the shame. He experienced the full measure of humiliation. The author of the Hebrew Epistle states that Jesus "endured the cross, scorning its shame."⁸⁹³ That does not mean that the disgrace did not affect Him, but that it didn't keep Him from enduring it. As there was no wine to dull the pain of crucifixion, so there was nothing to cover the shame.

⁸⁸⁷ ASV, NASV

⁸⁸⁸ Matt. 26:29

⁸⁸⁹ Ps. 22:18

⁸⁹⁰ Matt. 27:46

⁸⁹¹ Matt. 6:28,29

⁸⁹² Matt. 8:20

⁸⁹³ Heb. 12:2

In looking at the record of the crucifixion, it is difficult to determine what is the most moving moment. Jesus' prayer for those who crucified Him,⁸⁹⁴ His promise of salvation, confirmed by an oath, to the murderer next to Him,⁸⁹⁵ and His last will concerning His mother vie for incomparability. It is difficult to imagine anything more poignant than this exchange of a dying Son with His mother.

The NIV correctly renders Jesus' address to His mother as "dear woman." The Greek uses the word *gune* for "woman." In connection with the use of the same word at the wedding in Cana, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* observes: "It is a term not of reproof or severity, but of endearment or respect, Matt 15:28; John 2:4, where the Lord's words to His mother at the wedding in Cana, are neither rebuff nor rebuke. The question is, lit., 'What to Me and to thee?' and the word 'woman,' the term of endearment, follows this. The meaning is 'There is no obligation on Me or you, but love will supply the need.' She confides in Him, He responds to her faith. There was lovingkindness in both hearts. His next words about 'His hour' suit this; they were not unfamiliar to her. Cana is in the path to Calvary; Calvary was not yet, but it made the beginning of signs possible. See also 4:21 John 19:26."

First of all, Mary's coming to the cross speaks of an almost superhuman courage. What mother could bring herself to witness the execution of her son? Simon's prophecy was being fulfilled at this moment: "And a sword will pierce your own soul too."⁸⁹⁶ It could be that it was this very prophecy that drove Mary to the foot of the cross. Simon's word had been to Mary one of all these things she had "treasured up and pondered in her heart."⁸⁹⁷ It may have given her, in this moment of the deepest fellowship with her crucified Son, a spiritual understanding of the mystery of His suffering that had not been given to any other human being at that time. She could not understand the "how" of this suffering but she knew that the purpose of the sword that pierced her soul was "so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."⁸⁹⁸ And those who understand the "why" can also bear the "how."

We understand from Jesus' words that, up to that time, He had been responsible for the support of His mother. With the death of her Son, Mary also loses the security of life in this world. This may not have been the factor that weighed heaviest at that time but it was a factor nonetheless. How Jesus had practically supported His mother up to that point, we do not know. He had been poor Himself. Or rather, He had lived by faith in the good cares of the Father. The incident of the empty fig tree⁸⁹⁹ indicates that there was not always an abundant supply or a savings account to fall back on. Much of Jesus' care for His mother, therefore, must have consisted of His prayers for her. In that manner the Father had taken care of her needs. The fact that this support ceases to exist amounts to a much greater loss than the cessation of a fixed income. Mary would henceforth go through life without this spiritual support. The Lord now gives to John the task to continue His ministry to Mary. Jesus demonstrates in this, not only a deep love for His mother, but also a deep confidence in His intimate friend.

It also shows Jesus' obedience to the command: "Honor your father and your mother."⁹⁰⁰ Earlier, Jesus had indicated the practical implications of this "honor your father and mother." In a conversation with the Jews, He had said: "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition."⁹⁰¹ How far we have strayed from God's law in our Western society on this point!

This transfer of responsibility is Jesus' last official act on earth. It cannot be separated from the total work Jesus accomplished at the cross; it is part of the atonement. As children, we are responsible for our parents in this regard; it is part of our trust of faith. If, as parent, we arrive at a stage in our life where we become dependent, we become our children's responsibility, however unpleasant this may be. God gives this trust to His children to test and strengthen their faith.

This, however, is not all that Jesus says here; it is not even the primary part. Jesus' first word is addressed, not to John, but to His mother. Jesus provides her with the best consolation a person can receive. Thus far, Jesus had been the object of the fullness of her motherly love. When that is taken from her, she needs another person on whom she can bestow her love. This was not to be a separation in death, although Mary must have felt it that way. The separation would last no longer than 36 hours in this case. But after the resurrection, Mary does not receive Jesus

⁸⁹⁴ See Luke 23:34

⁸⁹⁵ See Luke 23:43

⁸⁹⁶ Luke 2:35

⁸⁹⁷ See Luke 2:19

⁸⁹⁸ Luke 2:35

⁸⁹⁹ See Matt. 21:18,19

⁹⁰⁰ Ex. 20:12

⁹⁰¹ Matt. 15:3-6

back in the same manner as she had given Him up. Our Lord knows that she will need someone she will be able to hug and cherish. In John, she receives a legitimate and healthy consolation. God wants people who give up their sons and daughters to be comforted. I remember a dear brother in the home in which I found Jesus, who had lost his wife. When she died, he had said to God: "Where do I go now with my love?" The Lord gave him a counseling ministry in which hundreds were blessed. In all our testing of faith, we should always remember that God never takes a step back.

We read: "From that time on, this disciple took her into his home." Mary and John were united together in their love for Jesus. That is the basis for all mutual affection.

John is the only one who records Jesus' fifth utterance at the cross: "I am thirsty," or "I thirst." Matthew and Mark state that Jesus was given to drink but not that He had asked for it. John explains that Jesus asked for a drink in order to fulfill the Scriptures. Most commentators mention, in connection with John's text, David's statement in the psalms: "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst."⁹⁰² Although this reference has validity, we observe that John usually does not refer to the fulfillment of specific prophecies in his Gospel, as does Matthew. His reference is often to the Scriptures as a whole. An example is Jesus' earlier statement: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."⁹⁰³ The Scriptures foretold that the source of living water would thirst. The Bible also reveals that there is in the heart of God a deep unfulfilled longing, of which thirst is an image.

Jesus' request for a drink is an indication that the Kingdom has come. During the celebration of the Last Supper, He had said: "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."⁹⁰⁴ This is what John means when he states: "knowing that all was now completed... Jesus said." David had sung: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty--he is the King of glory."⁹⁰⁵ The ancient doors and eternal gates were opening to let the King of glory enter. Jesus' Nazirite vow had been fulfilled. This period of abstinence was meant to indicate precisely where Jesus' actual work on earth began and ended. However important Jesus' preaching may have been and however sensational the miracles He had performed, those were not the actual reason for His coming to earth. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁹⁰⁶ It is literally a fulfillment of Scripture that Jesus said: "I thirst." It is not only that certain things that had been predicted in the Scriptures came to pass, but the dying of Jesus Christ means the fulfillment of the Word of God as a whole. Everything that had been written would have been meaningless without the death of Jesus Christ. This was God's last Word. This is what God had to say. In the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."⁹⁰⁷ The moment of Jesus' death was the climax of world history. This is the moment God's thirst was quenched.

Jesus' utterances must have followed each other in rapid succession. John only mentions the great cry of victory: "It is finished." The Greek word is *tetelestai*, which is the third person singular of the perfect passive tense of *teleo*, meaning, "to complete," "to execute," "to conclude," or "to discharge or pay a debt." It means that something has taken place in the past that makes its influence feel in the future. This cry is the turning point in creation. Time stands still and turns on its hinges. All of creation, which up to that point had moved away from God, is stopped in its fall and begins moving back. Jesus has paid the debt in full. This is the end of what Jesus had said earlier in His ministry: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."⁹⁰⁸ The work is finished; the enemy is vanquished. Jesus' own faith that had reached out to this moment in the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead is validated. God's demand of holiness and love has been satisfied in full. The reproach is rolled away;⁹⁰⁹ the honor of man is restored because the honor of God is restored. Obedience has proven itself.

John does not record any further Word from our Lord. He states: "With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." He also does not mention any of the other events that accompany the death of Christ, such as the earthquake, the tearing of the veil in the temple, and the reaction of the bystanders. He is the only one who notes the

⁹⁰² Ps. 69:21

⁹⁰³ ch. 7:38

⁹⁰⁴ Matt. 26:29

⁹⁰⁵ Ps. 24:9,10

⁹⁰⁶ Matt. 20:28

⁹⁰⁷ Heb. 1:1,2

⁹⁰⁸ ch. 5:17

⁹⁰⁹ See Josh. 5:9

piercing of Jesus' side. Jesus died on a Friday, which is the day on which the Sabbath began at six o'clock in the evening.

John mentions that the Jews observed a preparation for the Sabbath. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on this: "Every Sabbath had a preparation which began at the ninth hour (that is, three o'clock) the preceding evening. Josephus, Ant. b. 16 c. 6, s. 51, recites an edict of the Emperor Augustus in favor of the Jews, which orders, 'that no one shall be obliged to give bail or surety on the Sabbath day, nor on the preparation before it, after the ninth hour.' The time fixed here was undoubtedly in conformity to the Jewish custom, as they began their preparation at three o'clock on the Friday evening." The law forbade that the bodies of the hanged be left hanging in the opening during the night. This prompted the Jews to request Pilate to have the bodies removed from the cross. It was not merely a matter of desecration of the Sabbath. According to the law it was forbidden to leave bodies hanging overnight on any day. The law reads: "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance."⁹¹⁰ But this does not seem to have bothered the Jews on other days. The unusual feature of this particular Sabbath seems to have been that it coincided with the beginning of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. It often took the victims of a crucifixion days to die. So what was done in this instance was that, before they were removed from the cross, their bones were smashed with clubs, which precipitated death. It was a terrible way to finish off a person. When the soldiers came to Jesus, they noted that He was already dead. That is the reason one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side.

In connection with the piercing of Jesus' side, John mentions the fulfillment of the Scriptures. There is no reference in the Old Testament to any mixture of blood and water; the reference, therefore, cannot apply to that. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "[That the scripture should be fulfilled] See Ex 12:46. John here regards the paschal lamb as an emblem of Christ; and as in the law it was commanded that a bone of that lamb should not be broken, so, in the providence of God, it was ordered that a bone of the Savior should not be broken. The Scripture thus received a complete fulfillment respecting both the type and the antitype." Some commentators suppose, however, that John referred to: "He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken."⁹¹¹ And too: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."⁹¹²

The reason given for John's elaborate testimony is "so that you also may believe." In the next chapter we find a similar statement: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."⁹¹³ This formulates the purpose for which this Gospel was written. The main feature of this faith in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, is His resurrection from the dead. There could hardly be any proof of Jesus' resurrection without proof of His death. This must be the reason that John declares under oath to have been a witness of Jesus' death. We can say "under oath" because the words "He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe" constitute an appeal not to only John's trustworthiness but also to God.

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5. The Burial of Christ

ch. 19:38-42

Enters Joseph of Arimathea. This is the only time Joseph appears in the Gospel story. He was a high-ranking individual, a member of the Sanhedrin. Matthew calls him "a rich man," who had become a disciple of Jesus.⁹¹⁴ And Luke mentions that he had voted against the council's guilty verdict.⁹¹⁵ John states that Joseph was a "closet Christian." The death of Jesus made him come out of the closet. His going to Pilate constituted an act of courage, more because of the resistance from the side of the Jews than of the governor. John also mentions Nicodemus as a member of the delegation and he refers to Nicodemus' visit with Jesus recorded in chapter 3. It could be that, had Pilate known that there were such high-placed and influential members of the Sanhedrin who were against Jesus' condemnation, the case could have taken a different turn.

⁹¹⁰ See Deut. 21:22,23

⁹¹¹ Ps. 34:20

⁹¹² Zech. 12:10

⁹¹³ ch. 20:31

⁹¹⁴ Matt. 27:57

⁹¹⁵ Luke 23:51

All the actions taken give proof of the fact that Jesus was dead beyond the shadow of a doubt. No one demonstrates any sign of hope in a resurrection at this point. Whatever trace of expectation there may have been during Jesus' life is gone in the face of the hard reality of death. Preparations are made for Jesus' eternal rest. Nicodemus' purchase of seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes can hardly be interpreted differently. This is not preparation for Jesus' resurrection. They wanted to give Jesus a burial fit for a wealthy person. Normally, the bodies of the crucified were dumped in a hastily dug hole. One of such holes must have been prepared already for Jesus' body. Isaiah's prophecy was literally fulfilled: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death."⁹¹⁶

All this is done in a hurry, but the prophetic Word had foretold this hasty business about 500 years before. Joseph had probably had this grave cut out in the rock for his own funeral. The sacrifice of his own grave is the best thing he had ever done as a preparation for his own resurrection from the dead. John does not particularly mention that the tomb belonged to Joseph; Matthew confirms this.⁹¹⁷

I remember my visit to the grave in the rock at the foot of Gordon's Calvary and my conversation with the fellow Dutchman who was the warden of the garden. There is not undeniable proof that this is the place where Jesus was buried and rose from the dead, but if it is not, the place was similar to this one. The experience made the greatest moment in world history very much alive for me.

In spite of the great hurry with which they were brought, the spices came about one full week too late. The only one whose timing had been right was Mary of Bethany. When she anointed Jesus, He had said of her: "When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial."⁹¹⁸ People have commented on the huge amount of spices mentioned here. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Some have objected that a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes was enough to embalm two hundred dead bodies; and instead of *hekatón*, a hundred, some critics have proposed to read *hekateroon*-a mixture of myrrh and aloes, of about a pound EACH. ... But it may be observed that great quantities of spices were used for embalming dead bodies, when they intended to show peculiar marks of respect to the deceased."

All this must have happened on Friday afternoon before 6 o'clock. Jesus' resurrection would occur on Sunday morning, barely 36 hours later. The fact that the Jews call such a frame of time "three days and three nights" is due to their way of time reckoning. The Jewish day begins at 6 o'clock in the evening. Everything that happens before 6 PM is counted as one day. Even if Jesus had only been in the grave from 5:55 PM till 6:05 PM, it would have been called "two days." So Friday afternoon was one day, Saturday, the whole day, was the second day, and Saturday evening after 6 o'clock was the third day.

In our time reckoning, Jesus was only in the grave during the Sabbath, which fact is of great importance. This Sabbath stands opposite to the Sabbath on which God rested of His works to rejoice in His creation. We read in the Genesis account: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."⁹¹⁹ What happened on this Sabbath is the culmination of Jesus' Word: "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."⁹²⁰ The Son finished here the work the Father had begun immediately upon man's fall into sin. This is the day on which the Sabbath begins and ends.

The Bible does not specify what actually happened during this Sabbath. But it must have been that when Jesus' body died, His soul entered the kingdom of death, which the Greek called "Hades." This is the place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched."⁹²¹ In his book *The Suffering of Christ*, Dr. K. Schilder proposes that the fire did not affect Jesus Christ because there was no worm in Him. The fires of hell had no affect upon Him whose soul knew no corruption. This is the moment of which the Hebrew Epistle states "that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-that is, the devil."⁹²² Our Lord could therefore say to His bosom friend John: "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."⁹²³ This is the victory won on this greatest of all Sabbaths. The greatest of all dead bodies was placed in the grave of all graves in which, on the Sabbath of all Sabbaths, He wrested the key of death and Hades from the

⁹¹⁶ Isa. 53:9

⁹¹⁷ See Matt. 27:60

⁹¹⁸ Matt. 26:12

⁹¹⁹ Gen. 2:2,3

⁹²⁰ ch. 5:17

⁹²¹ Mark 9:48

⁹²² Heb. 2:14

⁹²³ Rev. 1:18

jailor's hand in order to rise from the dead and live for ever and ever. If ever the devil thought that he could intimidate this soul that entered his realm, he was sorely wrong. When Jesus entered his prison, the prison exploded.

Ever since sin entered the world, the Sabbath had been a day of death. People who violated the Sabbath command faced the death sentence. God told Moses: "For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death."⁹²⁴ The record shows that this death sentence was in fact carried out. We read in Numbers: "While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.' So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses."⁹²⁵ It is fitting, therefore, that Jesus, the greatest "transgressor" of the Sabbath would lie in the grave on the Sabbath day in order to perform His great work of snatching the key of death and Hades out of the devil's hand. No one ever worked so hard on the Sabbath as Jesus in His death. In doing this He made it possible for each of us to enter into the rest of God.

6. The Resurrection (The First Day)

ch. 20:1-23

It is remarkable that there were no eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matthew tells us: "There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men."⁹²⁶ But even he does not mention the actual event, only the accompanying phenomenon. It is uncertain whether the guards saw Jesus come out of the grave. The Gospels all take us to the open grave after the fact.

It is obvious that Jesus did not need an angel to roll away the stone for Him to leave the grave. John tells us how Jesus came into a room of which the doors were locked. We read later in this chapter: "On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!'"⁹²⁷ It is quite likely that, when the angel came down, Jesus had already left the grave.

The majestic event took place, first of all, in the heavenly places. What happened on earth had already occurred in the spirit world. Before the guards became like dead men, Satan and his demons had already taken to their heels. Jesus had been led as a lamb to the slaughterer but He rose from the dead as the Lion of Judah in great power, full of the majesty and glory of God. The coming of the angel and the rolling away of the stone were not for His benefit but to show the elect of this world that the resurrection had taken place.

The records of the resurrection in the Gospels seem to differ widely from each other, each giving an eyewitness account by different persons. There was probably a group of three or four women who went to the grave on Sunday morning, among them Mary Magdalene. When the other women see the stone rolled away they approach the grave and see the angel, but Mary Magdalene does not come close enough to see anything. She jumps to the conclusion that the open grave can only mean one thing, that Jesus' body is stolen. So she runs away to tell John and Peter. Mary Magdalene never bothered to investigate, on the basis of her womanly intuition she draws her conclusion and runs away. This explains why the other women saw the angel and Mary Magdalene did not.

It is possible that Peter and John spent the night in Jerusalem while the other disciples may have been in Bethany. John limits himself to the testimony of this one woman, and he describes the events as if Mary were the only witness. Actually, John takes this opportunity to report his own findings in detail.

It is amusing to see the difference between Mary Magdalene's impulsive behavior, reporting unproven supposition as proven facts, and the logical male approach John and Peter take in their investigation. John's description of the behavior of the two men in going to the grave has given rise to much speculation among Bible scholars. Proponents of "Higher Criticism" have seen in the fact that John ran faster than Peter a suggestion of the weak relationship between the churches in Rome and Ephesus. Apart from the nonsense this theory proposes, we ask ourselves then what is meant by John's hesitation to enter the grave before Peter's arrival. John's details are obviously meant to give us a vivid eyewitness account. It is often the small details, which have little bearing on the flow of events that burn in our memory in connection with crisis experiences. This is the way John has replayed the events of his discovery of the empty grave for the rest of his life. Why he walked faster and then hesitated to enter,

⁹²⁴ Ex. 31:15

⁹²⁵ Num. 15:32-36

⁹²⁶ Matt. 28:2-4

⁹²⁷ vs. 19

we are not told. Maybe John was younger than Peter, or he had better breath control, or maybe Peter's sense of guilt made him slow down.

Peter is the first one to enter the grave to study the evidence; John follows. They both must have come to the conclusion that grave robbery was out of the question. Any thief stealing a body would have taken the burial cloths with him. Not only that, but the position of the cloths must have given the impression as if the body was still inside. The cloths were there, but the body seemed to have evaporated and disappeared. The only possible conclusion was that something supernatural had happened with the body of Christ. The cloths lay there as an empty cocoon.

John tells us that he "saw and believed." Those words can be interpreted in two ways: faith in the resurrection or belief that the body was stolen. The latter can be safely excluded. Even if a thief had moved the body and had taken the pains to unwrap the cloths, he could never have put them back in the form of an empty cocoon. We have to understand that if Jesus' resurrection body could move through walls of heavy rock, it could certainly rise from some grave cloths, leaving them in the shape in which they were when the body was wrapped in them. What John confesses in "He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.)" is that his faith ought to have been based on the Scriptures and not on the shape of some pieces of fabric. All of a sudden, all of Jesus' predictions of His resurrection flash back in John's mind, as well as the Old Testament prophecies. He realizes that he should have spent the night at that grave to witness the moment His Lord would rise from the dead instead of being convinced by what he saw in the empty grave. In connection with Jesus' later reprimand to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,"⁹²⁸ we understand what John says here, that he believed in the resurrection but that his faith was built on the wrong premises. We do not read anything about Peter's reaction.

It is interesting to observe that John places so much emphasis on the knowledge of the Scriptures in connection with the resurrection. Proof verifiable by our senses is insufficient for the truth of the Gospel. This is the reason the apostles emphasized so strongly the fact that the Gospel was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

According to Mark's Gospel, Jesus appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene. We read: "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons."⁹²⁹ That verse is found in the section of Mark's Gospel that is not in the most reliable manuscripts but there is no reason to disregard it. Luke's Gospel also confirms this.⁹³⁰

For someone who had a previous history of demon possession, the death of Jesus must have been a fatal blow. Mary Magdalene must have feared that the demons would return. This may account for the fact that she was obviously the most confused of all the people present that morning.

She must have been a woman of means, because Luke mentions her with the women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples and who helped to support them out of their own means.⁹³¹ Mary Magdalene had given herself to Jesus with all her heart and everything she possessed.

She had assumed correctly that her freedom was bound up with her living Lord, and since Jesus was now dead, she was utterly absorbed by her sorrow and fear. This isolated her completely from the world around her. She saw two angels without realizing it. She heard the voice of those extra-terrestrials without being affected by it. Her strange words indicate that she wept more for Jesus' body than for the fact that her Lord was dead: as if the body had been stolen from her. In her exchange with Jesus also, this fact is preeminent. She sees herself playing the central role in this drama. The fact that Jesus is her Lord does not mean primarily that she belongs to Him but that He belongs to her. "They have taken *my* Lord away." How devious is the human heart! Even in the holiest of all matters, Mary Magdalene is not ashamed to claim her possession before angels and before the Lord Himself. We could ask ourselves the question why the angels did not announce Jesus' resurrection to Mary Magdalene as they did to the other women. Mary Magdalene probably never gave them a chance. She would not have heard them, had they told her. Only those who are ready for it can hear the Word of God.

Mary had already begun to lose her grip on reality. Satan may have tried to draw her into the sphere of his influence. Whatever we may think of Mary Magdalene, we ought to judge her kindly. We may question her behavior but in all she does, her motivation is her deeply wounded love for her Lord. We don't know how she could have carried the dead body of Jesus all by herself or what she would have done with it had she found it. It would have been almost as difficult to carry Jesus' body as to roll away the stone, about which the women had been so concerned earlier. But God had solved Mary Magdalene's problems already for her in a most glorious way.

⁹²⁸ ch. 20:29

⁹²⁹ Mark 16:9

⁹³⁰ Luke 8:2

⁹³¹ Luke 8:3

As usual, Jesus' question penetrates to the core of the matter: "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" She was looking for a Jesus that did not exist. Many people look for a God who doesn't exist. As soon as we understand who it is we are looking for our search has come to an end.

The fact that Mary Magdalene was looking for a Jesus who had already begun to decompose was related to the process of decomposition that had started in her own soul and spirit. During her experience of demon possession, she must have suffered from a loss of identity. The devil has no respect for our individuality or for God's image in us. He tries to reduce man's value to a digit, a number. Jesus stops this process that had begun in Mary Magdalene by calling her name. All the love God has for her person, all honor and respect He wants to demonstrate to this human being is expressed in this one word: "Mary." On hearing this, Mary knows immediately, not only "That is I," but "That is He." Self-knowledge and knowledge of God are always related. This dialogue is beyond doubt the most moving part of the whole resurrection. Jesus' resurrection becomes the personal experience it ought to be for each of us. As we can see a sunrise in one single dewdrop, so the whole glory of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is revealed in this single incident. A human being who had been isolated by the effects of death is set free because the Word of God reaches her. In one of Goethe's poems we read the line: "Is there in your Psalter, of Father of Love, a tone his ear can hear, then quicken his heart with it." Such a tone reached Mary's ear.

Jesus' calling Mary by her name means that He knows her through and through. Jesus' revelation of Himself to Mary is ultimately due to the fact that Mary loved Jesus with all her heart. The apostle Paul states: "The man who loves God is known by God."⁹³²

Mary answers Jesus with the word: "Rabboni." *Barnes' Notes* explains: "Rabboni, my great master the most honorable of all. This title, among the Jews, was only given to seven persons, all persons of great eminence. As given by Mary to the Savior, it was at once an expression of her joy, and an acknowledgment of him, as her Lord and Master. It is not improbable that she, filled with joy, was about to cast herself at his feet." The interpretation John gives himself of the word suggest more that Mary learned a lesson than that she acknowledged Jesus' lordship, but that is of course not excluded from the text. The KJV's rendering "Master" covers both. *Rabboni* was probably the affectionate name Mary used for Jesus, which expressed all her love and obedience to Him. The essence of Easter is that God calls us by name and we acknowledge Him for who He is. Thomas would do this a few days later, exclaiming: "My Lord and my God!"⁹³³

It seems that Mary Magdalene was about to take anew possession of her Lord but this Jesus does not permit. Jesus says: "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father." Strangely enough, when the other women who had been at the empty grave meet Jesus on the way, we read: "They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him."⁹³⁴ Some people have concluded from this that Jesus had gone to heaven and returned in the short time between the two incidents. That seems highly unlikely. I understand that Jesus permitted to the other women what he did not allow Mary Magdalene to do, because she had to learn that His resurrection introduced a completely new phase of intimacy and a different kind of relationship. Mary Magdalene would not be able to manipulate her risen Lord. To use C. S. Lewis' language about the lion Aslan from *The Chronicles of Narnia*: "He is not a tame lion, you know." Mary's experience corresponds to the transformation that took place in the heart of the girl in the Song of Solomon. From saying: "My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies," she came to the point of surrender: "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me."⁹³⁵ From someone who thought to have equal rights, she became someone who surrenders like a slave who has no rights.

The reason Jesus gives Mary Magdalene for not holding on to Him is that He had not yet returned to the Father. Jesus did not say to Mary: "Don't touch Me," but "Do not hold on to Me." The point was not that holding on to Jesus would put too much of a claim upon Him but that it would not constitute enough of a claim. Our possessing the Lord Jesus Christ now in a spiritual sense goes much deeper and is much more glorious and complete than would ever have been possible had we grasped His feet while He was still on earth. Our intimacy on a human level barely goes beyond a handshake, a hug, or a kiss. Real intimacy, such as we may know with our Lord goes way beyond what we will ever be able to express on earth. What keeps Mary Magdalene from taking a hold of her Lord was not our Lord's condition but hers.

This is the reason the Lord of Glory, the Second Person of the Trinity gives to this woman a message for His brothers: "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." It is as the author of the

⁹³² I Cor. 8:3

⁹³³ vs. 28

⁹³⁴ Matt. 28:9

⁹³⁵ Song 2:16; 7:10

Epistle to the Hebrews who says: "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers."⁹³⁶ Satan has imposed upon us a whole complex of feelings of inferiority to which God pays no attention whatsoever. As far as He is concerned, He treats us as equals. For us, finite mortals, it is difficult to imagine how glorious and triumphant Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene must have sounded. This was a shout of victory. We tend to look at the risen Lord as if He were above human emotions, elevated above both sadness and joy. The person Mary Magdalene encountered was excited and exuberant, shouting for joy. As such He spoke to John, who was in shock, in Revelation: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."⁹³⁷ It would have been difficult to proclaim without exuberant joy the fact that the first human being ever to leave this fallen world victoriously was entering the glory of the Father.

The Lord emphasizes that what is happening to Him concerns us all. We do not read how Peter and John, who already must have believed in Jesus' resurrection on the basis of their personal observations, reacted to Mary Magdalene's message.

It is important to note that, as a woman was the first human being to fall in sin, so the risen Lord appears, first of all, to a woman. The fact that the testimony of a woman had no value for the apostle Paul or for the other apostles cannot change this historical fact.

John again omits a series of events recorded in the other Gospels and moves from the morning of the day of resurrection to the evening. This is the evening of the first day of the new creation. As on the evening of the day, in the cool of the day, God came to Adam and Eve, so our Lord comes here to meet the ones He loves. This is the hour of fellowship.

Peter had already met Jesus during the day and had received the pardon for his sin of denying his Lord.⁹³⁸ The two who had met Jesus on the road to Emmaus were there with their hearts still burning within them.⁹³⁹ And then all of a sudden the room where the disciples were gathered was filled with the overwhelming presence of the Lord Himself. Henry Kissinger, in his book *Whitehouse Years*, describes his encounter with Mao Dze Dung as so impressive that it felt as if the center of gravity in the room had shifted to the place where Mao was standing. This vaguely describes what must have happened when Jesus appeared in the upper room. Added to this was the astounding fact that something happened that was impossible according to the laws of nature. John states that the doors were locked. Yet, Jesus entered. There is no explanation for this supernatural phenomenon. Here is a man who died before their very eyes and whom they probably helped bury. The reaction of the disciples must have been beyond description. Luke tries to describe their emotions: "They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost."⁹⁴⁰ John merely states: "The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." According to Luke, Jesus tries to demonstrate to His disciples that His body is the same as the one they had been familiar with, the one that had died on the cross. He showed them His hands and feet, which bore the marks of the crucifixion, and ate a piece of broiled fish in their presence.

We know nothing about the resurrection body. Jesus' body must have had the same dimensions and the same recognizable physical characteristics as had His mortal frame. Even the scars were there! Whether this means that the scars of our own mortal bodies will survive the resurrection, or whether this was only the case in the Lord's resurrection, I don't know. It is possible that the infirmities of our mortal bodies will be transformed in such a way that they glorify God in our new bodies. In a poem by a Dutch poet, the author describes a charwoman who enters heaven with her broom and dustpan, walking on the golden streets, beating the dustpan with her broom. The poet says: "The symbols become cymbals in the hour of death."⁹⁴¹ Somehow the scars of sin can become monuments to God's eternal glory. We see this principle already in Matthew's genealogy in the fact that Tamar and Rahab are mentioned in the list.⁹⁴²

We will probably never cease to wonder about the marvel of the resurrection body. If our mortal bodies are already such wonderful creations, what will our imperishable body be like! Our new body will not merely be a newer model of the old type. The difference between the old body and the new will be greater than the difference between the steam engine and a nuclear reactor. The resurrection body will be the perfect vehicle for expressing the

⁹³⁶ Heb. 2:11

⁹³⁷ Rev. 1:17,18

⁹³⁸ Luke 24:34; I Cor 15:5

⁹³⁹ See Luke 24:32

⁹⁴⁰ Luke 24:37

⁹⁴¹ Gerrit Achterberg – *De Werkster*.

⁹⁴² Matt. 1:3,5

glory of God for whom we are created and for the character of the new man into which we are made. Our enthusiasm when we move into our new abode will never cease throughout eternity.

Jesus' greeting: "Peace be with you!" is the customary Hebrew greeting translated in Greek. The Greek *eirene* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *shalom*. It was the common greeting such as "Good Evening" would be in modern times.

John contents himself with a sketchy description of this first meeting, and he omits most of the details Luke provides for us. Luke records Jesus' emphasis on the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in those beautiful words: " 'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.' " ⁹⁴³ John limits himself to the detail about the commission to preach the Gospel of forgiveness of sin and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

We can understand the confusion in the minds of the first witnesses of Jesus' resurrection. They were afraid of seeing an optical illusion. This was the gist of Thomas' argument. It must have been the reason for the disciples' reluctance to believe the eyewitness account of the women. This is one of the reasons why Jesus put such emphasis on the fulfillment of the Scriptures, as we read in Luke's account. The testimony of the Scriptures had preeminence even over the physical observations of the disciples. Jesus' whole human life had been guided by the prophecies of the Old Testament. The truth "that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" ⁹⁴⁴ had been literally applied to His daily life. It had also guided Him through His suffering, death, and resurrection. We are rarely disposed to interpret the experiences of our lives so radically in the light of the Scriptures as Jesus did. This is one of the most important things Jesus wants us to learn. It is a lesson we never seem to be able to grasp and retain.

Luke's statement: "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" corresponds to John's: "Receive the Holy Spirit." On this evening of the first day of resurrection, Jesus makes already mention of the great commission. Actually, there are three things that are closely connected with each other that Jesus communicates to His disciples. First, there is the opening of the Scriptures through the working of the Holy Spirit. This opens the way for a call for action, the obedience to which endows with spiritual authority. The sequence is just as important as the connection among the three. Call and authority are based on the Word of God. Only after Isaiah became aware of the reality of the cleansing of his sin, which is nothing else but understanding the Scriptures, did he hear the voice of God calling: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" ⁹⁴⁵ It is impossible to serve without this fundamental understanding.

Then Jesus clarifies that He Himself is the model for service: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." The first implication of this is that we come into the same kind of relationship with the written Word as Jesus had stood. His life motto had been: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come--it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.'" ⁹⁴⁶ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews quotes these Scripture verses with a slight alteration: "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God.'" ⁹⁴⁷

There is of course a fundamental difference between Jesus' coming into the world and our being sent. Jesus did not mean that we would be sent into the world as a Messiah, as He was, or that we would take upon ourselves the sin of the world. But He wants our being and acting to be a demonstration of the Kingdom of God, as was the case in His life. It also means that we enter into the same kind of relationship to Him as He is with the Father: a relationship of willful obedience and purposeful dependence. His statement: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do

⁹⁴³ Luke 24:44-49

⁹⁴⁴ Deut. 8:3

⁹⁴⁵ Isa. 6:5-8

⁹⁴⁶ Ps. 40:6-8

⁹⁴⁷ Heb. 10:5-7

nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does”⁹⁴⁸ is formulated for us in the words: “Apart from me you can do nothing.”⁹⁴⁹ It also implies humbling ourselves and being obedient unto death.⁹⁵⁰ Peter writes that Christ’s suffering serves as an example for us: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”⁹⁵¹ According to the testimony of the apostles, it is on the basis of this kind of absolute obedience that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts: “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”⁹⁵²

The words John records in this chapter would not become a complete reality until the day of Pentecost. The disciples were not sent until the Holy Spirit had come upon them. The command to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, we read about elsewhere,⁹⁵³ is just as much part of the obedience as responding to the great commission to go into all the world.

Jesus’ breathing on the disciples evokes the image of the first creation of man. We read in the Genesis account: “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”⁹⁵⁴ Here we witness the creation of the new man in whom, not only the broken image of God is being restored, but who will also bear the glory of the risen Son of God.

Thus Jesus offers us His Spirit as a sacrament, endowing us with an authority that ought to take our breath away. The new man in Christ not only receives the power over Satan to bind and loose but also the power to forgive or not forgive the sins of his fellowmen. Jesus had said earlier to His disciples: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”⁹⁵⁵ We have to be very careful how we apply this rule in a limited way in the present time. Jesus probably spoke primarily about the time when “the saints will judge the world.” As Paul writes to the Corinthians: “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?”⁹⁵⁶ There will be instances, however, when we will be allowed to reach out for this mandate and apply it to the present, as Jesus did Himself in the healing of the paralytic. We read in Mark: “When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’ ... But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...’ He said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.’”⁹⁵⁷

It is difficult to figure out how this mandate that Christ has given us can be applied in this dispensation of grace. It is obvious that the use of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is subject to the law of righteousness and love. The purpose is that human souls are saved. It is obvious that we cannot say, “your sins are forgiven” to someone who does not make a confession of faith or doesn’t repent from his or her sin. If the sin committed is done to us, we have the right to state that the guilt not be used as evidence against the offender on the Day of Judgment. Jesus gives us an example in praying for those who crucified Him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”⁹⁵⁸

The question remains, does man have the right to forgive sins that are committed against God? The Pharisees were of the opinion that only God could forgive sin.⁹⁵⁹ Most protestant Christians tend to agree with them. An important factor in the opinion of the Protestants is the practice of the Roman Catholic Church, in which sometimes a farce is made of the right of the priests to forgive sin. But the proof Jesus gave to the teachers of the law that, as the Son of Man, He had the right to forgive sin⁹⁶⁰ implies that this is also part of the privilege of the new

⁹⁴⁸ ch. 5:19

⁹⁴⁹ ch. 15:5

⁹⁵⁰ See Phil 2:5-8

⁹⁵¹ I Pet. 2:21

⁹⁵² Acts 5:32

⁹⁵³ See Acts 1:4

⁹⁵⁴ Gen. 2:7

⁹⁵⁵ Matt. 16:19

⁹⁵⁶ I Cor. 6:2

⁹⁵⁷ Mark 2:5,10,11

⁹⁵⁸ Luke 23:34

⁹⁵⁹ See Mark 2:7

⁹⁶⁰ See Mark 2:10

man in Christ. In our present dispensation, in most cases this will take the form of the words of the prophet Nathan who said to David: "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."⁹⁶¹ But I see no fundamental objection to the words the Roman Catholic priests used to pronounce: "Ego absolvo."⁹⁶²

What Corrie ten Boom once said about missionaries can be applied to Christians in general, that we may have given all to the Lord but we have not taken all from Him. That, which will be part of our glory at the return of Christ, can be part of our ministry of healing in this present dispensation. It is part of the preaching of the Gospel of forgiveness of sin, as well as part of our being filled with the Holy Spirit.

7. The Resurrection (One Week Later) ch. 20:24-29

John is the only Gospel writer who tells us that Thomas was not present when Jesus appeared to His disciples on the first day. Thomas' reaction of unbelief to the report of the appearance, which John describes in verses 24 and 25, dates probably from that same evening or the day after.

Thomas' negative reaction demonstrates two things: First, that he did not take his fellow disciples seriously; which is probably an indication that he had never taken them seriously before. Secondly, it shows that the death of Christ meant for him the complete collapse of his inner being. It had left Thomas totally depressed. He had withdrawn from fellowship with others and, as far as reality is concerned, he had established his own norms. Thomas' foregone conclusion is that the other disciples were victims of a hallucination. According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, a hallucination is a "perception of objects with no reality due usually to use of drugs or to disorder of the nervous system." Thomas admits that he could succumb himself to hallucinations, for which reason he would only trust his senses if his hands could touch what his eyes thought they saw. This kind of exaggeration is an indication of the depth of his uncertainty and of the hunger of his heart. The "God-shaped vacuum in his heart" had been almost completely filled in his daily fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ and now, with the death of his Lord, it has emptied. It is a miracle in itself that Thomas could even continue his daily life. His heart had been full with a positive philosophy of life, which was closely linked to the person of Jesus Christ. Now, all that is left is the despair of nihilism. We cannot imagine how terrible it must have been for Thomas when his world collapsed.

But what made Thomas think that the scars of the crucifixion would not have been erased from Jesus' body in the process of the resurrection? The disciples must have told him specifically about Jesus showing them His hands and His side. Those scars must have haunted Thomas for the rest of the week. They expressed for him the horror of the crucifixion and the deep anguish that had filled his soul. The mystery remains, however, as to why Thomas had never considered the possibility of a resurrection and why he completely rejected it when the possibility became a probability. As far as the other disciples are concerned, we can say that the horror of the crucifixion had dimmed the memory of Jesus' promise of a resurrection. With Thomas, the memory had been erased completely. Thomas' depression was a very deep one from which he did not even wish to be healed. He seems purposely to have avoided contact with the others. He joins the others one week later in spite of himself. Or was this after all a sign of hope?

Thomas' seeking again of fellowship with the other disciples is the first step on the road of receiving the following special revelation. When Jesus appears one week later, it is specifically to meet Thomas. After the customary "Shalom," Jesus shows Thomas that He knows him through and through. Thomas could have quoted David's beautiful Psalm: "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD."⁹⁶³ At the moment when Thomas had twisted himself into such a knot, he came to the point where he realized that, not only Jesus knew what Thomas had said to the others, He also understood why he had said it. Jesus understood about Thomas what Thomas did not understand about himself. It was Jesus who touched the scars in Thomas' life in order to heal them.

Thomas' spontaneous confession is an indication that Thomas had found infinitely more than he had sought: "My Lord and my God!" The key to Thomas' complete healing was not merely his recognition of Jesus' character, but his act of complete surrender. As his lack of surrender had been the core of his depression and frustration, so his owning Jesus as his Lord and God is his deliverance. The key is in the possessive pronoun "My." Owning God is not a claim to ownership but a giving away of oneself. Thus Thomas formulates for the first time what the church of Jesus Christ has confessed throughout the ages that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord and God. The

⁹⁶¹ II Sam. 12:13

⁹⁶² I absolve you

⁹⁶³ Ps. 139:1-4

reality of Jesus' words, spoken to Philip a few days earlier, penetrated to Thomas: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?"⁹⁶⁴ The blessing for Thomas consisted of the fact that "this was not revealed to [him] by man, but by [the] Father in heaven."⁹⁶⁵

The divine motion of confidence follows this, which is the basic principle of faith. Throughout the ages, God has put this question of trust to every individual. Ever since sin came into the world because of a lack of confidence in the Word of God, the touchstone for fellowship with God has been the matter of trust in the Word of God. The Word of God must be rehabilitated. We will learn to trust God more as we learn to know Him better. And as we know Him better we will build more and more on His Word. Trust in the Word of God means trust in His character. This is the reason that being occupied with the Word of God plays such an important role in our spiritual fellowship with Him. It will be impossible for us to function spiritually without making the Word of God our treasured possession. In Jesus' words: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."⁹⁶⁶

Jesus said to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." The little word "yet" is not in the original Greek text. There is no contradiction between not seeing and believing. The actual contradiction is between seeing and believing. Not seeing creates the ideal circumstance for faith. This doesn't mean that sensual observation and faith are irreconcilable. The question is what is the basis for our certainty? Is it the fact that we can see and touch, or is it the fact that God's promises are backed up by God's character? After all, there is sufficient tangible proof for the fact that God is reliable. We do well to take possession of this last beatitude in Jesus' words to Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen and (yet) have believed." As with all the beatitudes, the Word of our Lord creates what it says. Believing without seeing is blessedness. It is not a matter of receiving a blessing but of being blessed. Our problem is that we are not sufficiently aware of what we have received. What our Lord says to us is that we are, at present, more blessed than the apostles were when they saw Jesus. We ought to fully rejoice in our present blessedness.

Faith is here not a vague religious feeling without a specific basis. The basis of our faith is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It is our confidence that the report of the Evangelists and apostles about this historical event is true and that the event is in accordance with God's promises in the Old Testament as well as with the character of God who "is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁹⁶⁷ He is "the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."⁹⁶⁸ It also means drawing the practical conclusion that if Jesus has done this for me, He is in fact my Lord and my God.

The last verse of this chapter corresponds with the last two verses that conclude the whole Gospel of John. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes that: "Grotius has conjectured that the Gospel, as written by John, ended with this chapter, and that the following chapter was added by the church of Ephesus. This conjecture is supported by nothing in antiquity. It is possible that these two last verses might have formerly been at the conclusion of the last chapter, as they bear a very great similarity to those that are found there; and it is likely that their true place is between the 24th and 25th verses of the succeeding chapter; with the latter of which they in every respect correspond, and with it form a proper conclusion to the book. Except this correspondence, there is no authority for changing their present position." But the fact that we find these words at this place instead of at the end of the whole Gospel does raise some questions.

Scholars have discussed the meaning of the words "other miraculous signs" to determine whether John means signs that Jesus performed between His resurrection and His ascension or whether he speaks of all the miracles performed during the years of His public ministry. Some believe that the signs pertain to what Luke states in the Book of Acts: "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."⁹⁶⁹ It is obvious that, for the composition of his Gospel, John carefully chose his material, usually avoiding statements, scenes, and miracles that are recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. Only eight miraculous signs are reported in this Gospel. But John makes allusion to other signs which he does not record. We read for instance: "Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and

⁹⁶⁴ John 14:9,10

⁹⁶⁵ See Matt. 16:17

⁹⁶⁶ ch. 15:7

⁹⁶⁷ Matt. 22:32

⁹⁶⁸ Rom. 4:17 (RSV)

⁹⁶⁹ Acts 1:3

believed in his name.”⁹⁷⁰ And: “When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.”⁹⁷¹ And: “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”⁹⁷²

Barnes' Notes observes that the purpose of John's record of the miracles is “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” We read: “This is a clue to the design which John had in view in writing this gospel. The whole scope or end of the book is to accomplish two objects: 1. To prove that Jesus was the Messiah; and, 2. That they who looked at the proof might be convinced and have eternal life. This design is kept in view throughout the book. The miracles, facts, arguments, instructions, and conversations of our Lord all tend to this. This point had not been kept in view so directly by either of the other evangelists, and it was reserved for the last of the apostles to collect those arguments, and make out a connected demonstration that Jesus was the Messiah. If this design of John is kept steadily in view, it will throw much light on the book, and the argument is unanswerable, framed after the strictest rules of reasoning, infinitely beyond the skill of man, and having throughout the clearest evidence of demonstration.”

John deliberately chose his material for the purpose of demonstrating beyond the shadow of a doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was not a mere human being but the incarnation of God Himself. In the Prologue to his Gospel he had set out to present this truth. Jesus Christ is the Creator who became a creation. He came to share our human existence for the purpose of taking upon Himself the sin of this world. He was not the victim of a Roman execution, but He laid down His life for the whole human race in order to take it up again in the resurrection. Everything He said and did was proof of this. This is not the place to make a comparison between the picture of Christ drawn for us by the Synoptics and John's Gospel. In all of them we find a combination of Jesus' features as a human being and of His divinity. John's point is that our recognition of the truth about Christ will have an everlasting effect upon our personal life. Jesus came to share in our humanity so that we could share in His divinity.

8. At the Shore of the Sea of Tiberias ch. 21:1-25

Scholars have argued whether this chapter really belongs to the Gospel of John or whether it is a later addition, either by John or by someone else. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “That this concluding chapter is an appendix by the Evangelist's own hand was never doubted by Christians until the days of Grotius... Credner, the most searching investigator of the language of the New Testament, bears the following testimony, which, from him and in the present case, is certainly an impartial one: ‘There is not a single external testimony against the 21st chapter; and regarded internally, this chapter displays almost all the peculiarities of John's style.’ There is positively no other objection to it except that the Evangelist had already concluded his Gospel at the end of John 20. But neither in the Epistles of the New Testament nor in other good authors is it unusual to insert supplementary matter, and so have more than one conclusion.”

Whether this is the record of the meeting of Jesus with His disciples to which they had been invited, according to Matthew's Gospel,⁹⁷³ is doubtful. John only mentions the presence of seven of the disciples, and Paul speaks of an encounter in which more than 500 people were involved.⁹⁷⁴

This is the last and most elaborate report of Jesus' revelation of Himself to His disciples as a group after His resurrection. G. Campbell Morgan, in his *Commentary of the Gospel of John*, suggests that the fact that we meet these disciples at the Sea of Tiberias is proof of their disobedience to Jesus' command to remain in Jerusalem. This may not necessarily be true. Jesus had also told them to go to Galilee. The command to remain in Jerusalem was probably given in Galilee.

Peter's decision to go fishing also does not necessarily constitute a denial of his call or a fall from grace. Waiting for the Lord does not mean sitting still. We can wait and be busy at the same time. Peter may have wanted to make a “sentimental journey” to the place where it all began, where he had experienced one of the most dramatic episodes in his life. The amazing feature of this story is that, in fact, history repeats itself.

Peter also had things to sort out inwardly after his denial of the Lord. The best way to clear up the knots in our life is often to return to the place where the first major breakthrough had taken place. This is the place where

⁹⁷⁰ ch. 2:23

⁹⁷¹ ch. 4:45

⁹⁷² ch. 12:37

⁹⁷³ See Matt. 28:10,16

⁹⁷⁴ See I Cor. 15:6

Peter had said: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"⁹⁷⁵ and Jesus had begun to restore him by saying: "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."⁹⁷⁶ Peter's denial had blurred the reality of that early incident. Jesus' resurrection had removed the despair from his heart, but the fact of the resurrection was so fantastic that Peter was still in the process of regaining his foothold. Peter was like Abraham who, after having slipped away into Egypt, away from fellowship with God, had to return to the place of previous fellowship. We read in Genesis: ">From the Negev [Abraham] went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD."⁹⁷⁷

The repetition of the miracle must have made a deep impression on Peter. As with the first miraculous catch of fish,⁹⁷⁸ it was the same lake, the same fruitless night of toil, maybe even the same boat. And as, after three-and-a-half years the same net comes up full of fish, there must have been the same association with the initial reaction: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

Strangely enough, it is John who first recognizes that the stranger at the shore is the Lord Jesus. Love creates the conditions for recognition. At that point, John had an almost female intuition. Yet, Jesus' appearance here seems to have been less tangible than at previous occasions. We read: "None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?' They knew it was the Lord." There seems to be a suggestion of doubt in those words. When the disciples come ashore, breakfast is all ready with fish and bread.

There is something deeply touching in these small details. The risen Lord has made some very practical preparations for this encounter. He has built a fire of charcoal, fried some fish, and baked some bread. Fellowship with God is never purely spiritual; it takes place on a practical level also, on a level on which we experience human fellowship over a meal. There are several places in the Bible where fellowship is associated with eating together. In His invitation to the church of Laodicea, Jesus invites us to supper with Him: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."⁹⁷⁹ It is this very fact Peter emphasizes in his sermon at the home of Cornelius: "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen-by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead."⁹⁸⁰ That is the way the moment of Peter's rehabilitation remained burned into his memory.

In this story, we see both the unchanged and the changed Peter. There is the same impulsiveness which makes him throw himself in the water when he realizes that the one standing at the shore is Jesus. The changed Peter comes through during the conversation with Jesus, following the meal. In this conversation Jesus brings Peter's rehabilitation to completion. When Israel entered the Promised Land, God made them perform the rite of circumcision. We read: "And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed. Then the LORD said to Joshua, 'Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.' So the place has been called Gilgal to this day."⁹⁸¹ Here, Peter has come to his Gilgal; this is his place of circumcision where the Lord rolls away the reproach of Egypt from his life. Here Peter becomes, by the hand of Jesus, the man God can use. At the first miraculous catch of fish, Peter "left everything and followed [Jesus]."⁹⁸² At this second catch of fish, Peter leaves himself behind. The first experience became Peter's call to become a fisher of men; the second was his "crisis of the deeper life."⁹⁸³ From a fisherman Peter becomes a shepherd. This crisis is an obvious condition for shepherding. It is the first place of rest to which the shepherd must bring his sheep. We can only lead others to places where we have been ourselves. No one can bring his fellowman beyond where he himself has gone.

Both incidents of a miraculous catch have meant moral defeats for Peter. Corrie ten Boom once said: "With God you must fail your exams." Spiritual growth and human failure always go together.

⁹⁷⁵ Luke 5:8

⁹⁷⁶ Luke 5:10

⁹⁷⁷ Gen. 13:3,4

⁹⁷⁸ See Luke 5:1-11

⁹⁷⁹ Rev. 3:20

⁹⁸⁰ Acts 10:41

⁹⁸¹ Josh. 5:8,9

⁹⁸² Luke 5:11

⁹⁸³ Title of a book by Pardington, which became a favored expression in the Christian & Missionary Alliance.

Peter's exam consisted of three questions. Jesus' first question is: "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" *Barnes' Notes* makes the following observation: "There is a slight ambiguity here in the original, as there is in our translation. The word 'these' may be in the neuter gender, and refer to these things his boat, his fishing utensils, and his employments; or it may be in the masculine, and refer to the apostles. In the former sense it would mean, 'Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these objects? Art thou now willing, from love to me, to forsake all these, and go and preach my gospel to the nations of the earth?' In the other sense, which is probably the true sense, it would mean, 'Lovest thou me more than these other apostles love me?' In this question Jesus refers to the profession of superior attachment to him which Peter had made before his death (Matt 26:33): 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.' Compare John 13:37. Jesus here slightly reproves him for that confident assertion, reminds him of his sad and painful denial, and now puts this direct and pointed question to him to know what was the present state of his feelings. After all that Peter had had to humble him, the Savior inquired of him what had been the effect on his mind, and whether it had tended to prepare him for the arduous toils in which he was about to engage. This question we should all put to ourselves. It is a matter of much importance that we should ourselves know what is the effect of the dealings of divine Providence on our hearts, and what is our present state of feeling toward the Lord Jesus Christ."

Two different Greek words for "love" are used in this exchange: *phileo* and *agapao*. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* explains: "Phileo is never used in a command to men to 'love' God; it is, however, used as a warning in 1 Cor 16:22; agapao is used instead, e. g., Matt 22:37... The distinction between the two verbs finds a conspicuous instance in the narrative of John 21:15-17. The context itself indicates that agapao in the first two questions suggests the 'love' that values and esteems (cf. Rev 12:11). It is an unselfish 'love,' ready to serve. The use of phileo in Peter's answers and the Lord's third question, conveys the thought of cherishing the Object above all else, of manifesting an affection characterized by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration."

Jesus asks Peter: "Peter, do you love me with that unselfish divine love, which is willing to sacrifice itself, with the love with which I love you?" Thus far, Peter had only compared himself to the other disciples. Now, Jesus wants Peter to compare himself with Jesus. Those who look in someone else's mirror always see a nice picture of themselves. Consciousness of sin is the result of a comparison of ourselves with the character of God. That is the way we ought to judge ourselves.

Peter even failed in his comparison with the other disciples. His denial of Christ was proof of this. They had all fled and left Jesus but, except Judas, no one had done as poorly as Peter. If Peter already failed the comparison with the other disciples, how much more when he is forced to compare himself with Christ! Peter actually never comes to the point of comparing himself with Christ. When the first rung of the ladder is broken, it is impossible to climb to the top. Yet, Peter does not answer negatively, as we would have expected. In the comparison, he does not measure up to God's standard, but at least he moves toward it. He does not disregard God's criterion. Using the word *phileo*, he answers: "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." TLB and the J. B. Philips translation bring out the nuance more clearly: " 'Yes,' Peter replied, 'you know I am your friend.' " Peter does not say that he doesn't love Jesus, but his love is insufficient in God's measurement of love. Peter's victory is not only in his honesty but also in his positive acknowledgement. His appeal to Jesus' omniscience is also an indication of a fundamental change of attitude. He is not longer the Peter who knows better. ("Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!")⁹⁸⁴

On the basis of this acknowledgment of helplessness, Jesus gives him the charge: "Feed my lambs." The greatest hindrance to the exercise of spiritual influence is trust in one's own strength. Feeding Jesus' lambs consists in bringing them to the point where trust in self disappears. The acknowledgement that the Lord is the strength of our life and that without Him we can do nothing opens the door to the receiving of a spiritual mandate. Feeding lambs is not something we can do in our own power. It is a God-given task. It comes to us from above; it begins with Jesus, not with us. It is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The definition of "lamb" is a sheep that has not yet reached adulthood. Spiritually, it means a person who has recently come to believe in Jesus: someone who has not yet reached spiritual maturity. God's primary intention with Peter's fall and resurrection was that his experience would help others to grow. Before the denial had taken place, Jesus had indicated that the purpose of it would be for Peter to "strengthen your brothers." We read in Luke's Gospel that Jesus told Peter: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."⁹⁸⁵ Our personal experience of being forgiven must be an important substance in our feeding of young fellow-Christians. It means more than just

⁹⁸⁴ Matt. 16:22

⁹⁸⁵ Luke 22:31,32

telling others about our failures. Our attitude always speaks louder than our words. If our failures make better Christians out of us, other will know it.

In Jesus' second question to Peter the comparison with others is omitted. This shifts the emphasis to a comparison with the Lord Himself. What is our love in comparison with the love of Christ? Can we call "love" the emotions and desires we feel toward Jesus, when compared with the sublime proof of God's eternal love, as demonstrated on the cross of Golgotha? We can only say about our love for Him: "We love because he first loved us."⁹⁸⁶ In Peter's answer, he again uses the word *phileo* instead of *agapao* which Jesus used.

None of us can predict how we would react when our life is in danger. Those who believe of themselves that they can bring the supreme sacrifice are usually the ones who recoil first. Years ago, a plane crashed after taking off from an airport in Washington, DC, and landed in the frozen Potomac River. One of the passengers was seen helping others get ashore from the freezing water of the river. When the rescue crew arrived to save his life, he had disappeared below the ice. It is quite probable that this man had never considered the possibility of giving his life for others in the way he did. I like to see myself in this role, but I have no guarantee that I will not buckle when circumstances call for it.

This kind of self-doubt is expressed in Peter's exchange of *phileo* for *agapao*. If ever we come to the point where we give our life for someone else, it will be by the grace of God, not because of the strength of our human character. Peter again confesses in his answer that he fails in the comparison. He remains below God's standard. He falls short of the glory of God.⁹⁸⁷

Jesus' answer to this confession is: "Take care of my sheep." We will probably never get used to the fact that God builds His gifts upon our failures. It is, of course, not God's will that we fail, but His goal is that in our failure we learn not to trust ourselves. In Paul's words: "This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."⁹⁸⁸ That is the important substance of the shepherding of the sheep.

When Jesus puts the third question to Peter, He uses the same word Peter used: *phileo*. Thus Peter's skin is peeled off, layer after layer until there is nothing left of his boisterous arrogant self. Even Peter's human sympathy for Jesus is put under the loupe and scrutinized. It is as if Jesus asks Peter, are those feelings of friendship genuine or are they also the product of your lack of a sense of reality? Peter has to learn that nothing can be taken for granted. Our fellowship with Christ cannot rest on supposedly solid factors. Everything has to be tested. Peter chokes up when he sees that Jesus comes down to his own level. It isn't so much that fact that Jesus asks Peter the same question three times, although that suggests an association with Peter's threefold denial of his Lord, but that Jesus uses Peter's word *phileo*, instead of *agapao* that touches Peter so deeply. We cannot really say that Peter fails this third test question, but what is still left of his former bravado? From the earlier statement: "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death,"⁹⁸⁹ nothing is left but some human sympathy. The core of what remains is hardly worth keeping. Jesus gives Peter His third charge, not on the basis of his human feelings toward the Lord but because of his honesty. Not what we have is important, but what God does with it is. The little oil the widow possessed was merely an excuse for God's miracle.⁹⁹⁰

In vs. 18 Jesus uses a short parable. Things on a spiritual level are like things in a physical realm. A person surrenders the control over his life to God spiritually, as an elderly person does physically to a nurse when he becomes incapacitated. The difference is that, spiritually we have a choice, which is usually not the case when physical ailments disable us. The condition Jesus describes here for Peter is that same as the one Paul expresses with the words: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live..."⁹⁹¹ This means death to our self-will, to our rebellious nature. Jesus does not refer primarily to Peter's ultimate mode of dying but to the death he would die daily. It always glorifies God if we die for Him spiritually. As David states in the Psalms: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."⁹⁹²

This sums up the meaning of the experience of Peter's failure. This was necessary, not only for his own sanctification, but also for the feeding of the lambs and sheep of the Lord. Dying to self is the general principle that

⁹⁸⁶ I John 4:19

⁹⁸⁷ See Rom. 3:23

⁹⁸⁸ II Cor. 1:9

⁹⁸⁹ Luke 22:33

⁹⁹⁰ See II Kings 4:1-7

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⁹⁹¹ Gal. 2: 20

⁹⁹² Ps. 116:15

is at the basis of all spiritual growth. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "Ancient writers state that, about thirty-four years after this, Peter was crucified; and that he deemed it so glorious a thing to die for Christ that he begged to be crucified with his head downwards, not considering himself worthy to die in the same posture in which his Lord did." We have to remember, however, that if Peter did in fact die by crucifixion, he died as he had lived. God was glorified both by the way he lived and he died. His was, like Paul's, a desire that "Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."⁹⁹³

It is obvious from what follows that Peter had not immediately died to self one hundred percent. His desire to meddle in the lives of others is proof that dying is a slow and difficult process. We see at the same time how the process works in one's life. Jesus says twice to Peter: "Follow me." It is impossible to follow Jesus without self-denial and death to self. Jesus had said earlier: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."⁹⁹⁴ Following Jesus does not only consist in self-denial and cross bearing, but our following Him is the catalyst in this process; it provides the needed strength for it. Following Christ consists of an exclusive concentration upon His person. This becomes evident when Peter turns around and looks at John. It is possible that John knew a more intimate relationship with Jesus than Peter did. This may be implied subtly in the reference to the incident during the Last Supper, when John inquired about Judas' betrayal. Now, Peter wants to know what Christ is going to do with John. Jesus' answer is that this is none of Peter's business.

We don't know what prompted Peter's prying. It was not part of Peter's shepherd's heart concern. Paul advises us not to judge someone else's servant.⁹⁹⁵ A critical spirit can drive a wedge between the Lord and us. We do well to heed the advice given by C. S. Lewis to only judge those whom the Lord places directly under us and for whom we are responsible, such as parents and children, teachers and pupils, shepherds and sheep. The judgment over others we ought to leave to the Lord.

It could be that Peter's nosiness is fed by spiritual pride over the fact that now he has reached the same level of intimacy with the Lord as John enjoyed earlier. We hardly ever draw up the balance of our failures. When we begin to add up our winning points, however, the effect may be counteractive.

It has been concluded from vs. 23 that this is a later addition to the text, after the death of Peter and John. That is quite possible. There must have been fables spun around the lives of both apostles that had no relationship to reality. The fact that Peter's death is mentioned does not automatically exclude the possibility of a prophecy, but it does not necessitate it either.

It seems as if the ending of John's Gospel is not the worthy conclusion of a book that opened with the majestic statements about the Logos. It almost fizzles out instead of presenting us with an impressive conclusion. I therefore believe that the actual conclusion penned down by the apostle's own hand is found in the last two verses of the previous chapter. It is true though that John sometimes seems so overwhelmed by the material he deals with that the thought of a well-rounded ending may never have entered his mind.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about the last two verses of John's Gospel: "The concluding verses (24,25) of this chapter read: 'This is the disciple that beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his witness is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did,' etc. 'We know that his witness is true' seems to be a testimony on the part of those who knew as to the identity of the disciple, and the trustworthiness of his witness. ... The present tense, 'beareth witness,' indicates that the 'disciple' who wrote the Gospel was still alive when the testimony was given."

In conclusion to our study of John's Gospel we copy the last statement from *Barnes' Notes*: "This gospel contains in itself the clearest proof of inspiration. It is the work of a fisherman of Galilee, without any proof that he had any unusual advantages. It is a connected, clear, and satisfactory argument to establish the great truth that Jesus was the Messiah. It was written many years after the ascension of Jesus. It contains the record of the Savior's profoundest discourses, of his most convincing arguments with the Jews, and of his declarations respecting himself and God. It contains the purest and most elevated views of God to be found anywhere, as far exceeding all the speculations of philosophers as the sun does the blaze of a taper. It is in the highest degree absurd to suppose that an unlettered fisherman could have originated this book. Anyone may be convinced of this by comparing it with what would be the production of a man in that rank of life now. But if John has preserved the record of what has occurred so many years before, then it shows that he was under the divine guidance, and is himself a proof, a full and standing

⁹⁹³ Phil. 1:20

⁹⁹⁴ Mark 8:34

⁹⁹⁵ Rom. 14:4

proof, of the fulfillment of the promise which he has recorded that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth, John 14:26. Of this book we may, in conclusion, apply the words spoken by John respecting his vision of the future events of the church: 'Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this book, and keep those things which are written therein, for the time is at hand,' Rev 1:3."

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