

# **EXPOSITORY NOTES**

## **GOSPEL OF JOHN**

**Gordon Lyons**

# Expository Notes

*Gospel of John*

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# Introduction and Background

## ***Author***

John has no desire to identify himself explicitly as the author of this glorious Gospel. He is content to exalt the name of the One who alone is worthy—Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. John records his namesake's testimony (John the Baptist) to the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The writer of this Gospel does not identify himself by name in these pages. However, from the internal evidence, and from the general view of the ancient church, it was considered to have been written by the apostle John; known as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2 )

John was the younger brother of James, and both were the sons of Zebedee and Salome. Like their father, James and John were engaged in the family fishing business, and it is probable that the father and sons owned their own fishing vessel. (Mark 1:19) The family lived in the town of Bethsaida near the Sea of Galilee.

## ***Purpose***

Writing his account later than any of the other Gospel writers, the apostle John does not intend to cover the same themes in the same way as they had done already. Rather, whereas the other evangelists have emphasised the humanity of the Lord Jesus, although never to the exclusion of his deity, it is John's purpose to speak of the One who is the Eternal Word or Logos. This is the One who is at the Father's side from eternity, and yet who came into the world, assuming the form of a true man (sin apart) in order to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of all his people worldwide.

In order to emphasise the Son's deity and equality with the Father, and to demonstrate something of Jesus' sovereign and almighty power, John highlights some of the miraculous signs that demonstrate the inexpressible glory of God. The beloved disciple tells us of the turning of water into wine; he tells us of some outstanding miracles of healing; and he tells of how Jesus raised Lazarus from death to life.

Again, the apostle records in some detail many of the events leading up to and including the crucifixion of the sinless Redeemer, omitting only the details of his appearance before Caiaphas which had been covered already by the other evangelists. He includes important teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit, and he includes also the Lord's high priestly prayer in the garden shortly before his sufferings and death on the cross. (John chs. 14,16,17)

John records Peter's denial of his Lord on three occasions. However, the beloved apostle also leaves on record the circumstances of Peter's restoration to the service of his Lord and Master. (John 21:15-19)

One of the reasons that John may have had for writing this Gospel was to refute the errors and false teaching that was beginning then to infiltrate the church—especially those errors and heresies concerning the deity or divinity of Christ.

According to church history, the apostle John outlived the other apostles and was the only one of the apostles not to suffer martyrdom for the sake of the cross; although, of course, John was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he wrote the book of Revelation.







# John Chapter 1

## The Word is God

### **John 1:1-18**

The apostle John presents to his readers a picture of God's eternal Son in all his glory. From the very outset of this Gospel, John asserts unambiguously that the Son of God existed with the Father from all eternity. Thus, concerning this majestic and glorious Person, the apostle writes in verse 1:

#### **John 1:1**

*(1a) In the beginning... (ESV)*

This reflects the opening words of Genesis: '*In the beginning, God...*' (Gen. 1:1). The phrase refers to the eternal ages prior to the creation of the universe, and leading up to that magnificent creation by God, acting through his Son and through his Holy Spirit.

Moreover, just as the opening verse of Genesis chapter 1 emphasises the pre-existence and pre-eminence of God the Father from eternity, so the opening verses of John's Gospel emphasise the pre-existence and pre-eminence of God the Son from eternity.

*(1a) In the beginning was the Word...*

The apostle John refers to the Son of God as the eternal Word (Gk., *λόγος*). *In the beginning was the Word*. It is impossible for finite human minds to comprehend the full import of this statement. We cannot analyse it, or explain it satisfactorily. Suffice it to say that the Son of God has existed with his Father from the eternal ages. This much we must accept by faith: but we may do so with absolute confidence, since our faith is in the infallible and unchanging Word of God.

The ordinary Greek word 'logos' is used commonly throughout the New Testament in various forms. However, the apostle John was not using it in its ordinary and general sense, but in a very specific sense—as we shall see shortly.

Again, the concept expressed by the Greek word 'Logos' was a concept that was familiar to the Jews. The idea of God represented as 'the Word' was used in Jewish wisdom literature. In these writings, it was understood as the wisdom and reason of God as the Creator of the universe and as the One who had called and redeemed Israel for himself.

The expression 'the logos' was common also in the writings of Jewish and non-Jewish philosophers and educated Greeks, where the 'word' or 'logos' was understood as the principle of order controlling the entire created universe. In neither of the foregoing cases, however, was the 'word' or 'logos' understood to refer to the Son of God, the only true Word or Logos. However, the Jewish philosopher, Philo, used the term 'logos' when speaking of the God of Israel, and in relation to God's divine word or truth.

As we have said, however, the apostle John was not using the term 'Logos' (meaning, 'speech', 'word' or 'message') either in a general or in a philosophical sense. Rather, John was using the expression 'Logos' to refer to the Son as the Eternal Word of God (i.e., the One who—from eternity—embodies and expresses the wisdom, thoughts, words, or

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speech of the Father, and reveals them to mankind in accordance with the determined will and purposes of God).

To this end, the Eternal Word—or Logos—became the visible expression of the invisible God. This same eternal Word or Logos expresses to us the very thoughts and words of God the Father, insofar as God wills to reveal his counsels to mankind. (John 3:34; 14:10,24; Heb. 1:2; see also Prov. 8:22-31)

In the beginning—i.e., from eternity, and before the commencement of God's creation—the Word or Logos already existed. The Word had no beginning. He has existed from eternity, and he will exist forevermore.

Thus, in John chapter 17, the Eternal Son of God prays:

*(5) And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you **before the world existed**. (John 17:5 ESV; bold emphasis added)*

Thus, from the very outset, the apostle John establishes the Lord's essential and eternal deity, together with his distinct personality, and his full equality with the Father.

Turning our attention back to the first chapter of John's Gospel, and looking again at verse 1, we read:

*(1b) ...and the Word was with God...*

A phrase meaning that they are 'face to face with each other' (A.T. Robertson).

This Word was eternally present with God the Father. From before the beginning of time, the Word or Logos was perpetually at the Father's side; and through this eternal Word the Lord God created the heavens and the earth (v.3; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2).

The fact that the verse says that the Word was *with* God, indicates clearly that the Word was not another name for God the Father or another mode of his eternal Being, but was—and is—a distinct Person within the Godhead. The Word (Gk., *λόγος*, *Logos*) is the Second Person of the Godhead or Trinity.

*(1c) ...and the Word was God.*

Furthermore, says John, this Word was God [lit. *God was the Word*]. In power, glory and eternity—i.e., in all his attributes—the Son was, and is, co-equal with his Father. (John 1:18; 16:28; 17:5; 1 John 1:1-2; John 10:30-33; 20:28; Matt. 1:23; Phil. 2:5-11)

(The translation that renders the above phrase as, '*and the Word was a god*', is based on a serious misunderstanding of the underlying text and grammar. This translation fails to take into account that the literal Greek rendering places 'God' first in this phrase of the sentence for emphasis (viz., *God was the Word*), and does not require the article.)

Thus, we see from the very beginning of John's Gospel that Jesus Christ is the Most High and Holy One of God. He is very God himself. However, he is not the same Person as the Father, but a distinct Person within the Godhead who is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit.

The Eternal Son of God dwelt with his Father in the highest heights of heaven. Yet, out of his immeasurable love for fallen mankind, the Word or Son of God was willing to leave his place of supreme majesty and glory with the Father in order to come into this sin-filled world. Then, as the living Word, he would declare to men and women the express word or teaching of his Father in relation to sin, judgment, grace, mercy, forgiveness and eternal life through the message of the Gospel.

**John 1:2**

Lest there should be any misapprehension in regard to the Son's deity, eternity, power, glory, or distinct personality, John repeats that the Word, or Son of God, *was with God from eternity*. The Son did not have his origins at his human birth. His human birth marked his incarnation into this world. Before his incarnation, however, the Son of God had been in the presence of his Father from all eternity.

**In Him was Life****John 1:3-5****John 1:3**

God made the entire creation. From this, we see that everything in the universe originated from God, and that nothing came into existence independently of God or independently of the Sovereign Creator's express will and command.

However, when the Lord God created the heavens and the earth, he did so through his Son and by the agency and Person of his Holy Spirit. Everything in creation owes its existence to the power of God's Son (The Eternal Word). He is the One through whom all creation came into being, and he is the One who gives life to every living thing. (John 1:10; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2,10) Thus, we see that the Son exercises the same almighty sovereign power and dominion over the entire created world as does his Father. This one example demonstrates that the Son of God is eternally divine; and, as such, he is omnipotent.

Not satisfied, however, with declaring that God made the entire creation through his Son, John adds in the latter part of verse 3:

(3) *...and without him was not any thing made that was made. (ESV)*

Apart from the Son of God, nothing in the entire creation came into existence. Everything that exists was brought into being through the will of the eternal Father and through the almighty power exercised by his Son. This, of course, excludes the presence of sin in the world. Sin resulted only from the fall of the rebellious angels originally, and from the fall of man subsequently.

**John 1:4**

In the Son of God was life. In him was the *origin* of life. In him, was the *fullness* of life. In him was *eternal* life. As the one who embodied life, the Son was the only one who could impart that life to fallen mankind. Just as the Lord God 'breathed' life into Adam, so—through the Holy Spirit—the Lord Jesus 'breathes' or imparts new spiritual and eternal life into all those who are called to believe on him.

The life of Christ was the light of men. Through beholding this glorious light—a light reflecting the resplendent glory of God—men and women could see (i.e. understand) spiritual realities or eternal truths as never before. All those who—by God's grace—received Christ as the light of their lives, would find their lives illuminated, renewed and transformed by the purity and truth of the eternal Word and by the regenerating and sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit. (Isa. 9:2; John 8:12; 12:35-36,46; cf. Eph. 5:8)

Once again, the essential and eternal deity of the Son of God is demonstrated in this verse: For only One who is divine has the origin of life within himself, and only One who is divine can impart spiritual and eternal life to others. Thus, again, we see that the Word or Logos was (and forever remains) co-equal and co-eternal with his Father.

### John 1:5

This Light of life shone into the darkness of men's sinful lives.

The word translated '*shines*' (from a word meaning, '*to shine brightly*', '*to appear*' or '*to make known*') is a word meaning that the truth from God, and concerning God, has been illuminating mankind's heart and conscience continually from the very beginning of his creation. This constantly shining and penetrating Light of God's truth exposed sin for what it was. Yet, in their morally and spiritually darkened state of mind, men could not understand the significance of the Light. They could not see that the Light was exposing (i.e., revealing and condemning) their sins in order that they might seek the mercy and forgiveness of God. Men and women refused wilfully to see or acknowledge the Light of the world because they had no desire for that Light to reveal their sinful deeds, nor did they desire to repent of their wicked and ungodly way of life. Thus, because they chose deliberately to remain in darkness or ignorance of God's ways, and instead to practise their sinful way of life, they remained inexcusable and fully accountable to God for their sin. (John 1:10; 3:19-20; 12:35-40; see also Job 24:13-17; 1 Cor. 2:14)

Throughout the ages, sinful men and women have attempted to stifle and extinguish the light of Christ, because his holy life and teaching reveals and emphasises the very moral and spiritual truths that they are trying to evade. The light of Christ also makes known in unmistakable terms the Almighty and Most Holy God's standard of righteousness for all mankind.

Yet, fallen and sinful humanity's most determined efforts to extinguish the Light of life have failed utterly. Even today, this Light still shines unabated into their hearts and minds, convicting and convincing them of sin, righteousness and judgment. This inextinguishable and penetrating light shines through the Word of God, and through the operations of the Holy Spirit upon a person's heart (or mind) and conscience.

Yet, God's Word cannot and will not return to him without accomplishing its intended purpose. By the grace and mercy of God, multitudes of men and women will yet see and acknowledge Jesus as the Light of the World, and so will be saved from eternal judgment. Thus we see how important it is to bring the eternal living Word of God to bear upon a sinner's heart and conscience whenever God gives us opportunity—no matter how rebellious and sin-stained that person's life and mind may appear to be at the present time.

God is sovereign, and he can subdue even the most rebellious spirit and bring it into subjection to his Son. We need only consider the example of the blasphemous and murderous Saul of Tarsus, who later became the apostle Paul; or the example of the profligate or dissolute son who returned repentant to his father's home. In both examples, we see that no class or category of sinner is beyond the reach of God's love, or of God's saving grace and power.

## John the Baptist Testifies to the Light

### John 1:6-9

#### John 1:6

Before The Son of God—the Light of life—appeared publicly to men and women, God appointed and sent a man to prepare the way. This man was John the Baptist. John was the forerunner or herald of Jesus, the Son of God. Very soon now, the Lord Jesus would begin his public ministry. To this end, John began preparing the people by administering a baptism of repentance. (Isa. 40:3-5; Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6; Matt. 3:1-3; 11:10)

**John 1:7**

The mission of John the Baptist was to bear witness to the Christ. God had sent him ahead of his Son to testify to the people that the promised Messiah was about to appear. The Old Testament prophets had announced the coming of the Messiah, to save God's people from their sins. Now, God had sent John to announce to the people that the coming of his Anointed One was imminent, and that they should prepare their hearts and minds for his appearing. John's purpose in bearing witness to Christ was that men and women might believe in God through placing their faith in God's Son and their appointed Messiah, the Lord Jesus. (John 1:19-27,32-34; 3:28; 5:33-35)

**John 1:8**

The Gospel writer—the apostle John—emphasises that John the Baptist was not himself that Light. He came only for the express purpose of bearing witness to the Light. John bore witness to this great event by testifying to the people of the coming Messiah. Again, the Baptist would bear witness to the Son of God when he would point out the Saviour as the Lamb of God—the One who would take away the sin of the world. (John 1:20; 3:28; Acts 19:4)

**John 1:9**

The true Light that illumines the darkness of everybody's heart and mind was about to appear publicly. Here was the way of truth and holiness emulated in the Man of Truth. This Man was in every respect genuine. In him there was—and is—nothing insincere, pretended or unreal. (John 1:4-5; 14:6)

Through this true and perfect Man—Jesus, the Son of God—sinful but repentant men and women would find eternal salvation and reconciliation with God in heaven. Through Jesus—the Light and Giver of life—they would come to understand spiritual truths, as they had never before been able to understand them. (1 John 2:8-11; 5:20)

Through the Light of life in Christ Jesus, the message of the Gospel would penetrate and permeate people's hearts and minds. This illuminating message would completely displace the veil of darkness formerly blinding their unspiritual minds. (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:44-46; cf. 2 Cor. 3:16)

**The Right to Become God's Children****John 1:10-13****John 1:10**

Even although Jesus, the Light and Giver of life came into the world of mankind, the world of mankind failed to recognise him. Even although he was the world's Creator, yet his own creation failed to acknowledge him. So great was the darkness in the hearts and lives of a sinful world, that even the Light of life escaped their notice. So far had they alienated themselves from God by their sinful deeds that they failed to notice the Light of salvation shining in all his resplendent glory. (John 1:4-5; 17:25; 1 Cor. 1:21; see also Matt. 11:27; 1 John 3:1)

In truth, however, the world did not recognise the Son of God because it *did not want* to recognise him; in other words, they *refused* to recognise him. A sinful world knew that God called for repentance and holiness of life. The vast majority of people were not willing to repent, however. Therefore, they attempted to hide from, or extinguish, the Light. Were

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it not for the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, men and women everywhere would have chosen to remain in the moral darkness and spiritual death brought about by their sin. (John 3:19-20; Rom. 1:18-32)

### John 1:11

It was bad enough that the world in general did not receive the Son of God. However, even his own people rejected him. He came to seek and to save that which was lost—firstly, from among his own people, the Jews. Yet, his own people refused to acknowledge him as the Son of God or as their Messiah and Saviour. Overall, men and women rejected the Light of life. They preferred to remain in spiritual and moral darkness. (Matt. 15:24; Acts 13:46-48; Luke 20:13-15)

### John 1:12

Most people refused to receive God's Son; yet, to everyone who did receive him—to every person who wholeheartedly and unreservedly believed on his name—he gave the right to become God's children. (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 3:26)

'Believing in his name' implies believing in everything which that name represents. The name *Jesus* means *YHWH (Jehovah) is salvation*. Those who believed in the name of Jesus believed in him as their Messiah and Saviour. They believed in him as the Light of life, and as the One who taught them the truth concerning the Father. They believed in his name—and in everything for which that majestic, holy and glorious name stood. (Isa. 9:6; John 14:9-10; 1 John 5:12-13)

To everyone who thus believed in him, Jesus gave the right to become the children of God. This means that God grants to every individual believer the power, right, privilege or authority to be known as his own child. The children of God are especially dear to their heavenly Father. Because of their union with his Son, they stand in a particularly close relationship to God—and in this privileged position they will always remain. (2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 John 3:1-2)

As God's redeemed children, believers share in an entitlement to the inheritance of God. This inheritance includes the gift of eternal life, and a place and position in heaven. (Rom. 8:16-18; Gal. 4:6-7)

### John 1:13

The children of God did not become God's children after a human manner, or because of any human effort on their part, or because of their obedience or submission to rules, regulations or traditions.

Again, it was not because of natural descent or blood relationship that they became God's children. It was not natural relations between a husband and his wife that made them the children of God. Neither natural descent nor natural relations ever makes a person a child of God.

Those who become God's children must do so in an entirely different manner. Instead of being born of human parents, they must be born of God. Instead of being born *physically*, they must be born *spiritually*. They must be born from above. They must be born again by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, and by the Holy Spirit's application of God's living and life-giving Word to their souls. (John 3:3-8; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; see also Titus 3:5-7)

Only those who have been thus born of God's Holy Spirit can be properly termed the children of God, (or 'Christians'). According to the Bible, no others can ever be known as God's children. (Rom. 8:9)

## **The Word Became Flesh**

### **John 1:14**

#### **John 1:14a**

The Word—the eternal Logos—became flesh. At his incarnation, the Son of God took upon himself a true human nature—sin apart. Thus, the writer of Hebrews says:

*(26b) [He is] ...holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. (Heb. 7:26b ESV)*

Although remaining truly God, the Son also became truly Man. Thus he is known as the *Theanthropos* or God-Man. (Rom. 1:3-4; 9:5; 1 Tim. 3:16)

The Son of God descended from the majestic heights of heaven to this lowly earth. He, who dwelt with God in heaven, came to dwell among us on earth.

Originally, the word translated 'dwelling' (or 'dwelt') was derived from a word meaning 'to spread a tent' or 'to tabernacle' (Gk., ἐσκήνωσεν). Possibly, the apostle John is using this word in allusion to the temporary but magnificent tent of meeting (or tabernacle) in the wilderness, where the Almighty Sovereign God 'descended to' and made known something of his resplendent glory, power and presence in the holy of holies. There, God Most High was present among his people—although concealed behind the veil within the tabernacle—and his majestic and holy presence, power and glory remained with his people Israel throughout their journeys.

During that period, however, no one could ever behold the glory of the LORD, nor could anyone enter his most hallowed and glorious presence within the tabernacle—with one exception: The high priest alone could enter the most holy place once a year with the blood of the atonement. Now, by contrast however, the holy, glorious and majestic Son of God—himself the High Priest of our profession (Heb. 3:1)—tabernacled in the midst of the people. On this occasion, no veil concealed him from the view of the people. Rather, they were able to behold his holy, glorious and majestic Person; for he dwelt where the people dwelt, and he walked where they walked. (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20-23)

#### **John 1:14b**

'We disciples', says John, 'have seen the Lord's majestic glory: not the fullness of glory belonging to the Son from eternity, but such measure of the Lord's glory as a human being could look upon. We have looked upon and beheld most attentively the One whom God has sent. We have recognised him as the Messiah of God; the One whom God has anointed with kingly majesty, dignity, power and glory. This glory, however, has not been the transient glory of earthly monarchs and dignitaries. Rather, we have seen the glory of the *heavenly* King—the King of kings, the King of righteousness.' (Isa. 40:5; Matt. 17:1-2; Heb. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:16-19)

#### **John 1:14c**

The Word is the '*Only*' (or the '*Only Begotten*') Son of the Father. The Word or Son is the only Person in all creation whom God has sent, or will send, to redeem fallen men and women, and to act as Mediator between God and man. There is no other saviour for

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mankind and there is no other intermediary between God and man. In every respect, the eternal Son of God is utterly unique. (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5)

In Christ, all glory dwells. In him, all the attributes of God shine forth in all their fullness. Such attributes include God's love, grace, mercy, compassion, justice, righteousness, truth and holiness. All these and more are comprehended by the glory of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ. (John 11:40; Phil. 2:6-11; see also 2 Cor. 4:4-6)

The Bible says of God's Son that he is full of *grace*... He is filled with the good will, loving-kindness and favour of God toward men and women. From him, comes the fullness of God's eternal love toward a lost and perishing world.

The Bible also tells us that God's Son is full of *truth*. He is free of all deceit and all pretence. He is absolutely upright in his character and in his conduct. Everything he says is truth—truth that is free from all insincerity, and truth that is absolute and unchanging. (Col. 1:19; 2:3; 1 Tim. 1:14)

## Grace and Truth Come through Christ

### John 1:15-18

#### John 1:15

Concerning the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist declared that God's Anointed was pre-eminent above all others. Although the Lord Jesus came after John the Baptist, yet—as a person—Jesus was before him.

John the Baptist was God's appointed human messenger to proclaim the coming Christ. Jesus, however, was God himself—God manifest in the flesh. Therefore, John declares that the Son of God surpasses him immeasurably, because of who the Son is. In addition, Jesus is before John the Baptist because he was—i.e. he existed—long before the birth of John the Baptist; indeed, the Son is from eternity, the Eternal One. (John 1:19,26-27; 8:58; Col. 1:17; see also Micah 5:2)

The Baptist demonstrates humility here: John the Baptist acknowledged that he was only God's messenger, and unworthy of the One whom he proclaimed. In like manner, each servant of God should acknowledge humbly before God that they are merely unworthy servants (although highly privileged by God) proclaiming the Majestic Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ—not man—must be highly exalted in the message that we preach!

#### John 1:16

The apostle John, the writer of this Gospel, continues with his account: Out of the abundant fullness of his grace, we have all received manifold blessings. In him and from him, all blessings flow. These blessings include the blessings of receiving and believing the truth as it is in Jesus (salvation), blessings of the Holy Spirit (gifts and fruit), blessings of heaven above and blessings of the earth below (all other spiritual and temporal blessings). All these things come from God's hands through his Son, and are apportioned to his people as God determines. (1 Cor. 1:4-5; Eph. 4:7-13; see also Rom. 5:17-21)

#### John 1:17

God gave his law—his standard of perfect righteousness—to his people Israel through Moses. By means of the law, people became much more fully aware of their sin. However, unless a person could keep God's law perfectly throughout his or her life, the law could never become the means of that person's justification. This was not its purpose. Its



purpose was to reveal God's glorious standard of righteousness, to provide God's standard of morality for Israel, to show the people their own total inability to keep God's commands, and to cause them to seek the mercy of Lord. (Exodus 20:1-17; Rom. 3:19-20; Gal. 3:10-14)

The law came through Moses. Grace and truth, however, came through Jesus Christ. People could never merit salvation by keeping the law, simply because they had neither the will nor the ability to do so. Now, however—through the fullness of grace and truth in Christ Jesus—God granted salvation to people as a gift. By the inward working of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and through receiving Christ—through believing in his name—God would grant to people the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of eternal life. (Rom. 3:21-26)

Such is the nature of the grace and truth that came by the Son of God. God's *grace* provided all the blessings of a full and free salvation. God's *truth* fulfilled every aspect of God's law and every word of promise connected with his salvation. (2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 6:17-18)

### John 1:18

No one, at any time, has ever seen God. No human being could look upon the 'face' of God and live. The resplendent glory of God would cause the death of any earthly creature who looked directly upon him. Those who 'saw' God did not see him 'face to face'. They saw a manifestation of God. They saw something of God's goodness—but not the absolute fullness of his glory. (Exodus 33:18-23; Deut. 4:12; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12)

Yet, although no person on earth has ever seen God in all his glory, the Son has witnessed that glory. Indeed, the Son of God possesses the same glory as the Father. Therefore, since no one else is capable of revealing the glory of God to our minds, the Son of God has come from the Father's presence to accomplish this very thing. Jesus has made his Father's glorious nature known to us in a way that we can understand and believe. (John 1:14; 6:46; 1 John 5:20)

*(18) No one has ever seen God; the only God,<sup>12</sup> who is at the Father's side,<sup>13</sup> he has made him known. (ESV)*

Verse 18 says that Jesus is '*the only God, who is at the Father's side*'—thereby asserting the Lord Jesus' individual personality and deity, distinct from the Father.

The Lord Jesus is God's one and only Son *by nature*. Believers, by contrast, are God's sons and daughters *by grace*. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have become God's children by regeneration and by adoption.

<sup>12</sup> **1:18** Or *the only One, who is God*; some manuscripts *the only Son*. [ESV footnote]

<sup>13</sup> **1:18** Greek *in the bosom of the Father*. [ESV footnote]

## Priests and Levites Question John

### John 1:19-23

#### John 1:19

When the Jewish religious authorities learned that John was baptising in the River Jordan, they sent a delegation of priests and Levites to interrogate the Baptist. Among other duties, it was the responsibility of the priests and Levites to examine anything to do with ceremonial cleansing or purification, and to administer the prescribed rites according to the Law of Moses. John's baptism was considered to fall within the category of purification. For this reason, it attracted the interest of the priests and their assistants, the Levites. (Cf. Deut. 24:8)

The priests and Levites knew, too, that John was calling people to repentance, and that many were seeking baptism. Again, they knew that the religious authorities had not authorised John to proclaim repentance to the people, or to baptise them. Since unauthorised by the religious establishment, the Jewish leaders would view John's baptism as a rite that initiated its recipients into some new fellowship or form of religion. Therefore, they were exceedingly anxious to find out more about this man. (Cf. Matt. 21:23)

#### John 1:20

Probably because John had been preaching the way of God, and calling people to repentance, the religious establishment may have suspected that the Baptist was connected in some way with the coming Messiah. Some of their leaders might even have believed that John was claiming to be the Anointed One himself. When the delegation of religious leaders arrived to question John, however, the Baptist told them plainly that he personally was not the long-expected Messiah. (John 3:27-30)

#### John 1:21a

When the priest and Levites questioned him, John immediately denies that he is the Christ. Therefore, the priests begin to think of other possibilities. Is he the prophet Elijah? The priests would recall that—at the end of his ministry—Elijah had not died, but the LORD had taken him into his presence in a whirlwind. Some Jewish theologians, therefore, believed that Elijah would reappear around the time of the Messiah's coming. (2 Kings 2:1,11)

The prophecy of Malachi lent support to this view. Malachi had declared that God would send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the Lord to his temple. This, however, was intended to be understood—not of the Old Testament Elijah in person—but of one who would come *in the spirit and power* of Elijah. According to the Lord Jesus, John the Baptist fulfilled this role. John was not Elijah—therefore, he told the priests and Levites this fact truthfully. Nevertheless, he was the prophet sent *in the spirit and power* of Elijah to prepare the way of the Lord. (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:7-14; Luke 1:16-17)

(We might however remember that, when Jesus was transfigured in the presence of Peter, James and John, both Moses and Elijah appeared in person with him on the mount. (Matt. 17:3))

#### John 1:21b

Having had their question answered concerning Elijah, the religious delegation then asked John whether he was the Prophet spoken of by Moses. In Deuteronomy chapter 18,

Moses had said that the LORD would raise up a prophet for his people from among their own brothers. The Baptist, however, denied that he was this Prophet. Many interpreters understand this Prophet, of whom Moses speaks, as the Anointed One of God or the Messiah himself. Thus, John was again denying that he was the Christ of God. (Deut. 18:15,18-19; see also Acts 3:22; 7:37; John 6:14)

### John 1:22

So far, the priest and Levites had failed to elicit the type of answer from John that would satisfy those who had sent them (i.e., the chief priest and other members of the Sanhedrin). John was not Elijah, nor the Prophet spoken of by Moses. Who, then, was he? Almost in exasperation, the delegation said to the Baptist,

*(22) ... "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (ESV)*

'We have asked you repeatedly about your ministry, but we have not been able to discover who you are, or by what authority you are acting. We, however, cannot return to our superiors without some kind of answer or explanation. Therefore, tell us who you are. What do you have to say about yourself?'

### John 1:23

'You desire to know who I am? You are anxious to know what to say to those who sent you? Then,' says the Baptist, 'I will answer you in the words of the prophet Isaiah—words that ought to be very familiar to you and to your superiors:

*(23b) ... "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness..." (ESV)*

'I am a voice—only a voice. I am the voice of one calling out in the desert. What am I calling? I am calling out to the people,

*(23c) "... 'Make straight<sup>14</sup> the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." {Isa. 40:3} (ESV)*

'I am the herald of the Lord. I am the one sent before the Lord to prepare the way, and to announce his imminent arrival. Yet, if you knew your Old Testament Scriptures—and this passage in particular—you should have known that I was fulfilling the ministry of the herald prophesied by Isaiah. Similarly—and according to the prophet Malachi—you should have known that the Lord himself would follow the herald. As the Lord God declares through Malachi:

*"Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." (Mal. 3:1 ESV)*

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<sup>14</sup> 1:23 Or *crying out, 'In the wilderness make straight...* [ESV footnote]

Sadly, however, these priests and Levites did not understand what John was saying to them. They may have been steeped in the knowledge of the law regarding sacrifices and offerings, and they may have been acquainted with every ordinance, ritual and ceremony of the law. However, they did not understand their own Scriptures. Their knowledge of God's Word amounted to an intellectual knowledge only. Like their superiors in the Sanhedrin, they failed completely to understand the spiritual significance of God's Holy Word, or the true meaning of the Scriptures.

The same was true of the Pharisees. Although they may have been well versed in the most minute details of the law, and of the traditions of men, these Jewish theologians and teachers possessed only a head knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. They could not see their spiritual significance or understand their true meaning. In each case, this was because these individuals—although outwardly very religious—lacked the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Even so, a few of these religious teachers—such as Nicodemus—would seek later to learn the truth from the Son of God himself. (John 3:1ff)

### Pharisees Question John

#### **John 1:24-28**

##### **John 1:24-25**

At this point, it is not altogether clear whether verse 24 is saying that the priests and Levites had been sent by the Pharisees ('*Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.*' ESV), or whether a separate group of Pharisees was present in the delegation. The various translations are divided on the issue. However, in the view of this author, it seems unlikely that the strictest sect of the Jews (the Pharisees) would entrust the task of examining John the Baptist to the priests and Levites alone. This is because the priests and Levites were more concerned with sacrifices and offerings than with the minute details of the law or with the traditional understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. Strict matters of the law were the province of the Pharisees and scribes; therefore, it seems more probable that a separate group of Pharisees was present with the priests and Levites.

The *priest and Levites*, it seems, had no more to say to John—at least for the present. However, at this point, the *Pharisees* in the delegation now become involved in questioning John. Representing the most powerful and influential body in the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees were the strictest sect of the Jewish religion. They adhered steadfastly to rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. To these rites and ceremonies, they had added a multitude of man-made rituals and traditions. This group placed great emphasis on keeping every last letter of God's law, of practising good works, and—very importantly—of observing meticulously the traditions of the Jews; many of which were man-made.

These Pharisees began to question John concerning his baptism.

'By your own admission, they inferred, you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet. By what right, then, do you baptise people? Only those specially appointed by God, or ordained by the Jewish religious authority, have the right to administer such ordinances in the name of God. Clearly, you are administering an ordinance that you are associating with God himself. This is evident by the fact that you are calling people to repentance in the name of God, and in his name, you are baptising people. You are doing this even although we have not ordained you to this office. What right, then, do you have to administer baptism?'

**John 1:26**

John had no need to defend his office or his ministry. God had set him apart from birth to that work upon which he was now engaged. (Luke 1:11-17,76-80)

John's answer was straightforward:

*(26a) ...'I baptize with water'...*

'—Only with water. I administer a rite that symbolises—but cannot effect—cleansing. Yet, even at this very moment, One is standing among you whom you do not recognise.'

Therefore, John continues:

*(26b) ..."but among you stands one you do not know." (ESV)*

'I have called people to repentance—but I have no authority to grant forgiveness to repentant sinners. He who now stands among you, however, will not only call people to repentance and faith, but also is authorised to forgive their sins.' (John 1:10-11; Matt. 9:6)

Yet, John was right in saying that these religious leaders did not know Christ. They did not know or understand their own Scriptures. How, then, could they have known or recognised the One of whom their Scriptures spoke and of whom their prophets had long foretold?

**John 1:27**

Who is this One who now stands among them?

'He is the One who comes after me,' says John the Baptist, 'but who is before me. He is the One so highly exalted that I am not even worthy to fall down on the ground at his feet to loosen his sandal thongs. He is above all, for he comes from above—from the Eternal Father's immediate presence. Yet, you would not understand these things, because you have set your hearts and minds on the ceremonies, rules and regulations of men, rather than on the things of God. You have placed your traditions above God's truth. Therefore, you have failed to see or understand the Truth that comes down from God.' (Matt. 3:11)

**John 1:28**

All these things took place at Bethany (or Bethabara) on the other side of the Jordan. The exact location is unknown, but it seems clear that this Bethany is not the same as the one near Jerusalem. (Cf. Judges 7:24)

**Jesus, the Lamb of God****John 1:29-31****John 1:29**

On the following day, John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching him. Addressing the people, John declared,

*(29b) ..."Behold, the Lamb of God..." (ESV)*

'Here is the One whom God has sent as a sacrifice for sin. This is he who will fulfil all the types of the Old Testament—the spotless, sinless Lamb of God. This is he who has come to take away the sin of the world. All our sins will be laid on him. By the shedding of the

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blood of the Lamb, atonement will be made for the sins of all his people.’ (Exodus 12:3-7; Isa. 53:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6-14; 1 John 2:2)

The Jews, of course, were very familiar with the concept of the sacrificial lamb. A lamb, slain and eaten at the Passover, commemorated their deliverance (or salvation) from slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 12:3-11) A lamb had been offered every day—morning and evening—in the tabernacle and temple as part of the prescribed worship of God. (Exodus 29:38-39) A lamb was emblematic of innocence, purity, suffering, patience, meekness and gentleness. Thus, as the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus was the true Lamb of offering and sacrifice. He was the only Lamb whose shed blood could atone for, and take away, once-for-all, the sin and guilt of all those for whom he would offer up his life as a perfect and final sacrifice to God.

### **John 1:30**

This was why John the Baptist had said that the One who came after him would surpass him. In every respect, the Lamb of God was greater than John. The Baptist was merely the human forerunner announcing the coming of God’s Anointed. Jesus was the eternal Son of God, and the Messiah sent by God. This was the Anointed of the Most High. Therefore, above all others, Jesus was—and is—the pre-eminent One. (John 1:15; cf. Col. 1:18)

Again, John the Baptist said that Jesus surpassed him because he was before him; i.e. the Son of God existed before John was born. The Word or Logos has existed from eternity. He is the One who dwelt with the Father from before the beginning of time. He has neither beginning of days nor end of life. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the eternally living One. Therefore, in this respect too, Jesus is before John. (John 1:1; 8:58; Rev. 1:8, 21:6; 22:13)

## **The Holy Spirit Descends on Jesus**

### **John 1:32-34**

#### **John 1:31a**

When John first came baptising with water, he did not recognise Jesus as the Messiah sent by God. Yet, God had sent John to baptise, to prepare the people’s hearts for repentance, and to point out the Messiah when he appeared. Therefore, according to God’s own promise, the Baptist knew that, when the right time came, the Lord God would make known to him the One who was his Anointed. Then, John would be able to point out to Israel the One who was God’s Messiah.

Therefore, in verses 31b-33, John says:

#### **John 1:31b-33**

Yet, how would John recognise the Christ when he appeared? God had revealed to the forerunner that the Christ would come to him for baptism. Granted, John could not have distinguished him from many others coming for baptism. However, the Lord had added that—when the Christ presented himself for baptism—the Holy Spirit would descend upon him in the form of a dove, and would remain upon him.

This is how John the Baptist recognised Jesus as the Christ. When Jesus came for baptism, the Holy Spirit—in the form of a dove—descended upon him, and remained upon him. John saw this happen during Jesus’ baptism; therefore, the Baptist was able to affirm

positively that Jesus was the Christ—the appointed Lamb of God who would bear away the sin of the world. (Matt. 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22)

Among other things, the dove symbolised purity, peace, beauty or perfection, salvation (as in the ark), and sacrifice (as in the sin offering)—all of which were associated with the Son of God.

Therefore, the Baptist concludes:

### **John 1:34**

*(34) “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”  
(ESV)*

John saw these events with his own eyes and gave solemn testimony to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah whom God had promised to send.

Thus, John the Baptist—the last of God’s old-style prophets—proclaims the appearance of the Christ. But more than this: he announces with all the authority of an inspired prophet that Jesus is the Son of God.

Here we see God’s servant, John the Baptist, witnessing to the truth concerning the Person of the Christ. As the Messiah, he will save his people from their sins. But, as the Son of God, Jesus is no ordinary man: rather, he is to be worshipped and adored, revered and obeyed, together with God the Father.

## **John, Andrew and Peter Follow Jesus**

### **John 1:35-42**

#### **John 1:35-37**

On the following day, John was again baptising with two of his disciples. Just then, he saw Jesus passing by. As the Lord passed, John the Baptist proclaimed:

*(36b) ...“Behold, the Lamb of God!” (ESV)*

This was the One concerning whom John had been preaching. This was he who would take away the world’s sin. This was the holy, perfect, spotless Lamb that God had provided as a sacrifice for sin.

This was a concept with which Israel was very familiar. For centuries, they had known that the only way of approach to God was through sacrifice and the shedding of blood. They knew, too, that forgiveness of sins was typified by the sacrifice of a perfect, spotless lamb from the flock, offered by the priest on their behalf. Now, they heard John proclaiming:

*(36b) ...“Behold, the Lamb of God!”*

‘Behold—the Lamb of God’s providing! He is the Sacrifice for your sins! Heed and follow him!’ (John 1:29; cf. Isa. 45:22; 1 Pet. 1:18-19)

Upon hearing John’s testimony concerning Jesus the Lamb of God, two of the Baptist’s disciples left their master to follow Jesus.

### **John 1:38**

(Cf. Luke 18:41)

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As they drew closer to Jesus, the Saviour turned around and saw John's disciples following him. Gently, the Lord enquired what they sought in coming after him. Perhaps taken aback by Jesus' question, the disciples ask the first thing that came into their heads: Rabbi—or Honoured Teacher—where do you live?

By using the title, Rabbi (lit., *a great one*), the two disciples were acknowledging Jesus as an honoured religious teacher. This title is similar to our present title 'Doctor' (of Divinity, etc.).

Implicitly, the disciples of John may have been asking Jesus, 'May we come to your home to learn more about you? John the Baptist told us that you are the Lamb of God. However, we would like to learn more about what this means. May we come home with you, so that you can tell us about these things?' (Cf. Luke 24:27-32)

In verse 39, Jesus responds to the disciples' question about where he was staying:

### John 1:39

The Lord Jesus graciously answers their question concerning his temporary place of residence. He invites the two disciples of John the Baptist to come with him to see for themselves. On arriving, they spent the remainder of that day together. The Scripture says that it was now about the tenth hour; i.e., 4 pm (or 16.00 hrs) if John was following Jewish time, but 10 am (or 10.00 hrs) if he was following Roman time.

During their time together, Jesus would have been able to teach these disciples something about himself and his ministry. He would be able to tell them something of the significance of the term, *'the Lamb of God.'* The disciples probably would be present with Jesus when the lamb of the daily sacrifice was offered up that evening. Such an event would provide the Lord with the opportunity to explain to them the full significance of that daily sacrifice, and his fulfilment of all typical sacrifices as the spotless, sinless Lamb of God.

### John 1:40

One of the two disciples who had followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Andrew (meaning, *'manly'*) came from the fishing village of Bethsaida situated on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. (Cf. Matt. 4:18-20) Although not expressly named, we may assume that the other disciple who followed Jesus to be John, the writer of this Gospel and the brother of James. Both were the sons of Zebedee and Salome. (Later, and more formally, Jesus would call James and John from their tasks as fishermen to leave their nets to follow him.)

### John 1:41

Whenever Andrew discovered that Jesus was indeed the Christ, he went, at the first opportunity, to find his brother Simon. When he had found him, Andrew told Simon that he had met and talked with the Messiah, the Anointed One of God (Gk., *Christos*, Christ).

This must have caused a great deal of consternation and mixed emotions on the part of Simon. Could the Anointed of God have come? Would he have made himself known to such an ordinary person as his brother Andrew? Surely, this could not be true. If the Messiah had really come, he would never have associated with such humble lowly fishermen as these. Simon Peter would need to be convinced of the truth of Andrew's hasty, and seemingly rash assertion.



**John 1:42**

What better way to convince his brother than by taking him to meet the Messiah? Therefore, Andrew duly brought Simon Peter—a married man—to meet Jesus. (Mark 1:30)

When Simon arrived, Jesus looked at him intently. Before Andrew had been able to introduce Simon to Jesus, the Lord declared,

(42b) ...“So you are Simon the son of John?...”

The Lord Jesus knew who Simon was—even if Andrew had not previously told the Lord about his brother. (John 2:25)

Still addressing Simon, the Lord continues,

(42c) ...“You shall be called Cephias” (which means Peter<sup>15</sup>) (ESV)

(In Aramaic, the name ‘Kephias’ (or *Cephas*) means ‘rock’ (i.e., large rock fragment or detached mass or rock) or ‘stone’. In Greek, the name Πέτρος, *Petros* (*Peter*) has the same meaning.)

Jesus knew who Peter was, and he knew exactly what kind of man he was. The Lord was fully aware that Peter was an impetuous man; a man who tended to be changeable and unsettled. But, by the Lord’s grace, and by the power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter would become a man of steadfast courage. He would become a man of great stability. Later, he would become one of the pillars or leaders of the church at Jerusalem. (Gal. 2:9)

Alluding to the meaning of his name, Jesus would make Peter a rock upon which he would found his church. This, however, was never intended to mean that Peter would become the Patriarch or Ruler over the church universal. Nor did it imply that Peter would have any successors in this office, deriving their authority from the apostle or from the Lord Jesus. If such had been intended, this would have been taught unequivocally in the New Testament, especially in the epistles. Again, had this been intended, Peter would have made clear reference to this in his own epistles. However, in his epistles, Peter classes himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus, and an apostle in exactly the same manner as the other apostles. (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:1)

Peter was a ‘rock’ in the early church, in allusion to his name. (Matt. 16:15-20) He was also one of the leaders of that church, along with James and John. (Gal. 2:9) He was a foundation of the church—in common with all other holy prophets and apostles. (Eph. 2:20) However, the Rock of Ages upon which the Church is founded is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one and only foundation and cornerstone of his Church worldwide. (Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11; 1 Cor. 3:11-12; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6-7)

When the Scriptures refer to the apostles as the ‘foundation’ of the church, this should not be understood to mean that the church was founded upon the apostles as individuals.

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<sup>15</sup> 1:42 *Cephas* and *Peter* are from the word for *rock* in Aramaic and Greek, respectively. [ESV footnote]

(Eph. 2:20; cf. Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 3:10-11; Heb. 6:1) The church was founded upon Christ as a Person and an individual. However, when we speak of the foundation of the apostles, we are not referring to the apostles as individuals but to the foundation that they laid by their preaching and teaching. The apostles proclaimed and exalted the Lord Jesus Christ. They preached the Gospel; they taught the way of the Lord; they established and built up the churches, and they carried the Gospel to foreign lands. Thus, by their preaching and teaching, the apostles were establishing, strengthening and building up the church, the true and sure foundation of which was laid on the Person and work of Jesus Christ himself. The Lord Jesus was, and is, the Chief Cornerstone or the Head of the Corner. (Isa. 28:16; Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6)

### Philip and Nathanael Follow Jesus

#### **John 1:43-51**

##### **John 1:43,44**

The Lord Jesus intended to leave this area for Cana in Galilee. (v.43; John 2:1) However, before departing, the Lord planned to call another person to follow him—namely, Philip (meaning, *'lover of horses'*). Having sought out Philip, Jesus commanded this man to follow him. Thus, Jesus added a fourth disciple to the number of his followers. Like, Andrew and Peter, Philip came from Bethsaida (possibly meaning, *'house of fishing'*) close to the Sea of Galilee.

##### **John 1:45**

Immediately upon being called to follow Jesus, Philip went off to find Nathanael (meaning, *'God has given'* or *'gift of God'*). Nathanael belonged to the town of Cana in Galilee. Probably, he is the same person as the Bartholomew mentioned in the synoptic Gospels and in Acts. (John 21:2; Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18)

When Philip found Nathanael, he told him the good news concerning Jesus. 'At last, he has come,' Philip declared. 'The very one of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and concerning whom the prophets wrote—the Messiah of God. We have found this Messiah. He is here in our midst. Come now and meet him. His name is Jesus. He comes from Nazareth, and he is the son of Joseph.' (Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Deut. 18:18-22; Isa. 53:1-12; Micah 5:2; Zech. 9:9; Matt. 2:23)

##### **John 1:46**

Nathanael seemed unimpressed. 'The Messiah of God comes from Nazareth! This is the most unlikely place on earth for the Anointed One of God to come from. Nothing good ever comes out of Nazareth. It is the most insignificant town in the whole country! It is certain, therefore, that the Messiah will not come from there. Whoever he is, this person Jesus cannot be the promised Christ.' (Cf. John 7:41-42,52)

It seems that Nathanael had some kind of prejudice against Nazareth—the town where Jesus had been raised, and in which he had worked as a carpenter. However, it is possible that Nathanael understood Philip to be saying that the Messiah had come from—in the sense that he had been born in—Nazareth. Philip, of course, would realise that the Messiah was prophesied as coming from Judah; and, specifically, from Bethlehem, in accordance with the prophecy of Micah. (Micah 5:2)

Philip, therefore, invites Nathanael to come and see for himself. Since he doubts Philip's testimony, then Nathanael should go with him to meet Jesus. Then, he would know the truth. (Cf. John 8:31-32)

**John 1:47**

Reluctantly, perhaps, Nathanael agrees to accompany Philip. However, when Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, the Lord declared,

*(47b) ...“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” (ESV)*

Once again, by his divine omniscience, the Lord Jesus could see what was in a man. He showed to the highly sceptical, but nevertheless sincere, Nathanael that nothing of his thoughts, of his character or of his personal circumstances could remain hidden from his eyes. (Cf. Rom. 2:28-29)

Nathanael doubted whether anything good could ever come out of Nazareth. He doubted whether Jesus could really be the Messiah of God. Now, he had to judge for himself. Jesus had just demonstrated that he knew a man’s heart, including his most intimate thoughts; he knew a person’s true character. Clearly, nothing could ever be hidden from his sight. Should not Nathanael now believe that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah or Christ?

**John 1:48**

Yet, still puzzled by Jesus’ revealing statement concerning him, Nathanael asked the Saviour,

*(48a) ...“How do you know me?” ... (ESV)*

Nathanael could not understand how the Lord Jesus knew so much about him, unless someone had informed him. By whom, or by what means, therefore, had the Lord discovered the truth concerning Nathanael’s character?

Jesus, of course, did not need anyone to tell him about Nathanael—or about anyone else. He knew everything about everyone. Therefore, instead of answering his question directly, the Lord says to Nathanael,

*(48b) ...“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” (ESV; see John 2:25; Ps. 139:1-2)*

Philip had gone off in search of Nathanael to tell him about Jesus (v.45). However, before Philip had discovered where Nathanael was, Jesus already knew. The Lord had seen him under the fig tree.

Even although Nathanael had not been identified to Jesus, the Lord knew him. He knew that his name was Nathanael, and that he was the person for whom Philip was searching. Jesus saw him then, and he knew all about him; even before Philip found him and told him about the Lord Jesus. The Lord was aware also of Nathanael’s unfavourable remarks concerning Nazareth. Furthermore, the Son of God was aware of everything that passed between Nathanael and Philip during their conversation together.

Could not Nathanael, therefore, now appreciate more fully how it was that Jesus knew everything about him?

**John 1:49**

Nathanael’s answer speaks for itself:

*(49b) ...“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.” (ESV)*

Utterly amazed at Jesus’ knowledge of his personal life and circumstances, Nathanael is constrained to confess his faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Only the Most High God

could know things of which he had never been told. Only God could see a man's heart and reveal to him his inmost thoughts and attitudes.

Yet, not only is Jesus the Son of God, he is also the King of Israel. Nathanael concedes that Philip had been right in what he had been saying about Jesus—that he was God's promised Messiah. None other than the Anointed One of God could possibly have told Nathanael, or anyone else, such things concerning his personal life and character. (John 1:34; Ps. 2:6-7)

Nathanael's confession of faith is very like that of Thomas' much later in this Gospel. Initially, Thomas had doubted the resurrection of his Lord. However, when presented with living, irrefutable proof, he believed with all his heart—professing Jesus to be his Lord and his God. Similarly, when presented with the living proof of Jesus' Messiahship, Nathanael believed in the Son of God with all his heart. (John 20:28-29)

### **John 1:50**

Jesus says to his fifth disciple, 'You believe because of what I said to you, and because you realised that I knew you even when you were still sitting under the fig tree. Greater things are yet to come—and you, Nathanael, will see them with your own eyes.'

### **John 1:51**

A time would come when Nathanael would witness the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. He would see this for himself. Then, he would realise even more that Jesus—the Son of Man—had come down from heaven, and would ascend again into heaven. Then, Nathanael would be assured beyond all doubt that the Lord Jesus was who he said he was—the Christ of God. (Cf. John 11:40; 20:29; Acts 1:10-11)

The allusion here would have been to Jacob's ladder, appearing to reach from earth to heaven. (Gen. 28:12) The Son of God was the one who descended from heaven to communicate with mankind, and the Son would be the one who would ascend again to heaven, having achieved redemption for lost men and women and now being exalted to his Father's own right hand in glory. Just as the heavenly host of angels celebrated Jesus' birth, so also the holy angels would celebrate his glorious exaltation.

## John Chapter 2

### Jesus Turns Water into Wine

#### **John 2:1-11**

##### **John 2:1,2**

On the third day, a very happy occasion took place at Cana, a Galilean village about 4-6 miles north-east of Nazareth. Mary, the mother of Jesus had received an invitation to attend a wedding. Jesus and his disciples also had accepted invitations to the wedding. On this occasion, no mention is made of Mary's husband Joseph. It is possible, therefore, that Joseph had died in the intervening years.

##### **John 2:3**

Eventually, the wine began to run very low. This may reflect the number of guests present on this occasion and the length of the celebrations. In these parts, wedding festivals could extend to several days or even a week. It may also imply that the person in charge of the tables had underestimated the amount of refreshments required for such an event or for such an extended period. In any event, the present supply of wine was nearly exhausted. Again, in these parts, wine may have been the only safe and acceptable table refreshment.

Seeing their dilemma, Mary says to Jesus,

*(3b) ...“They have no wine.” (ESV)*

##### **John 2:4**

The Lord, of course, would be fully aware of this situation without being told. Jesus says to his mother,

*(4a) “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” ... (ESV)*

In effect, the Lord is asking his dear mother why she is involving him in this situation. Important as it was in itself, Jesus had not come into this world to attend to such mundane matters. The Lord Jesus had come to accomplish his heavenly Father's express will and purposes, and to do so strictly in accordance with God's own timetable. Jesus could not permit anyone to attempt to interfere with the execution of God's plans and purposes for him. Furthermore, no one—not even his own mother—could be permitted to influence Jesus in order to take advantage of any of his divine attributes, if it were not in accordance with God's express purposes and timing. Thus, in the latter part of verse 4, the Lord Jesus adds:

*(4b) ...“My hour has not yet come.” (ESV)*

There would indeed come a time and an hour when the Lord Jesus would deal with such matters—but only within the context of fulfilling the greater will of his Father in heaven. The time for the full manifestation of the Lord Jesus' divine power and glory through (for example) the general demonstration to the people of his miraculous signs had not yet come. (Cf. John 7:6,30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1)

### John 2:5

Mary believed that Jesus would attend to the needs of their hosts. Therefore, she advises the servants accordingly. Probably, Mary did not know how Jesus would meet the need for wine: for, as far as we know, the Lord Jesus had not performed any miracles up to this point. Nevertheless, Mary must have believed that he would be able somehow to remedy this embarrassing shortage. Therefore, she advises the servants to do whatever Jesus told them. Perhaps she suspected that the Lord would instruct the servants to do something for which they would not be prepared.

The miracle that Jesus was about to perform was the first of his recorded miracles. Whether Mary had witnessed any previous unrecorded miracles is unknown. Perhaps, however, Mary had witnessed other manifestations of Jesus' glory; and, on this basis, she believed that he could meet the present need for wine.

### John 2:6

In the immediate vicinity, stood six very large water jars, each capable of holding 20 to 30 gallons. Normally, these jars would be used for the ritual washings of the Jews, to cleanse them from ceremonial uncleanness. Copious supplies of water were required for the more zealous Jews. Upon contamination of any kind, they would seek to cleanse themselves according to the strict religious laws and ceremonies then prevailing among the Jews. (Mark 7:1-8)

### John 2:7,8

Jesus instructs the servants of the feast to take these large vessels, and fill them to the brim with water. Nothing else was present in the jars at the time, and nothing else was added.

Next, the Lord tells the servants to draw some of the water out, and take it to the master of the feast. As they poured the water from these large jars into their smaller serving vessels, the water was transformed into wine. The servants then took this wine to the tables, and began serving.

### John 2:9,10

Not realizing where it had come from, the table-master—or master of the feast—decided to taste this new supply of wine for himself. On tasting the wine, the table-master was surprised and delighted.

The guests present at the wedding feast noticed immediately that a much superior quality of wine was now being served to them. Indeed, they remarked to the table-master that he could have served this high quality wine first, as was the common practice. Then, when the guests were less able to distinguish the quality, he could have brought out the inferior wine.

Both the assembled guests and the table-master, however, were unaware of the source of this new wine. Only the servants knew. The bride and bridegroom, too, must have been greatly puzzled over the provision of this new superior and copious supply of wine.

### John 2:11

According to this verse, this was the very first of Jesus' miraculous signs.

*(11b) ...and manifested his glory.... (ESV)*

This sign demonstrated something of the deity, power and the glory of the Son of God. It demonstrated the ability of Christ to take that which was ordinary and transform its character completely—without making use of intermediate means. It demonstrated his power over nature, and over natural effects. It demonstrated that he, who created the natural world, could effect changes to the world of nature simply by his word of command.

After the disciples had witnessed this manifestation of Jesus' glory, they believed in him even more. This was a real indication to them that Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be—the Son of God. (John 1:14; cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)

## **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

### ***John 2:12-22***

#### **John 2:12**

Following this first miracle, the Lord Jesus went down with his mother, brothers and disciples to Capernaum. At that time, Capernaum was a flourishing lakeside town, within the province of Galilee. It lay on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee, near where the River Jordan flows into this Lake. (Matt. 4:13-16; cf. Matt. 11:23-24; 13:54-58)

In this verse, the apostle John informs us that Jesus had brothers (or half-brothers). According to Matthew, the names of Jesus' brothers were James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. Matthew tells us also that Jesus had several sisters. However, the apostle does not tell us the names of Jesus' sisters. (Matt. 13:55-56; Gal. 1:19)

#### **John 2:13**

A few days before the celebration of the Jewish Passover,<sup>16</sup> Jesus left Capernaum to journey to Jerusalem. Every year, the Passover feast would be celebrated. Every male over a specified age was required to travel to Jerusalem for this most important occasion. (Luke 2:41)

The Passover commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, after the angel of God killed all the firstborn of Egypt—both men and animals. The people of Israel had obeyed God's command to sprinkle the blood of the sacrificial animal on the lintel and doorposts of their houses. When the destroying angel saw the blood, he '*passed over*' these dwellings, sparing the firstborn of every Hebrew household. Therefore, in commemoration of this event, the Jewish people observe the feast of Passover every year. (Exodus 12:6-14; Num. 28:16-25; Deut. 16:1-8,14-16)

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<sup>16</sup> *Passover*: Its celebration begins on the evening of the 14th of Nisan (the first month of the religious calendar, which corresponds approximately to March–April). The Passover celebration lasts seven days in Israel, but eight days in the Diaspora (Reform Jews observe a seven-day period).

**John 2:14**

At Jerusalem, the temple was divided into several distinct areas. The temple building proper comprised the holy place and the holy of holies. Only the priests could enter the holy place, and only the high priest could enter the holy of holies (or most holy place). In the latter case, the high priest could enter only once a year—on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*).

External to the temple building proper, were the temple courts. These included the courts where the Lord Jesus later taught, the court of the Gentiles, and the court of the women.

In the court of the Gentiles, a number of market stalls had been set up to provide animals for the sacrifices, to exchange foreign currency, and to provide the requisite half-shekel temple tax. Other items, such as incense oil, were also available from these market stalls.

As can be imagined, the stalls became extremely busy during the Passover feast, and probably during the two other major festivals. People would be coming and going constantly; they would be buying and selling, bartering and arguing. The Lord God permitted his people to buy animals for sacrifice, and to exchange their foreign currency—but *not within the temple precincts*. (Deut. 14:23-26)

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus arrived at the temple for the Passover, he found these men selling cattle, sheep and doves for the sacrifices. Others were sitting at tables, exchanging money—almost certainly at a hefty profit. (Jer. 7:11)

**John 2:15**

Putting together a whip out of some cords, the Lord Jesus began to drive out the animals from the temple courts. He expelled the sheep and cattle from the precincts of God's house, together with those responsible for bringing those animals in, and for desecrating the temple grounds. Jesus also scattered the coins of the moneychangers, and overturned their tables. (Cf. Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46)

**John 2:16**

Then, turning his attention to those who sold doves, he commanded them,

*(16b) ...“Take these things away...” (ESV)*

‘Remove these creatures immediately from these sacred precincts!’

Then, the Lord adds these solemn words:

*(16c) ...“do not make my Father's house a house of trade.”*

‘How dare you desecrate the courts of God's sanctuary! This is hallowed ground. It is no place for the buying and selling of common merchandise!’ John 2:1-2.

**John 2:17**

{Ps. 69:9}

In cleansing the temple, the Lord Jesus was demonstrating something of his holy ardour for the sanctity of God's house. As the Son of God, he was not prepared to permit anyone or anything to desecrate that temple—for whatever reason. This sacred building had been set up and dedicated to God as a place of worship and as a house of prayer for all nations. The court of the Gentiles was intended for non-Jewish people to pray and to seek



the Lord. It was never intended as a common courtyard, to be used as a market or for any other purpose. (Isa. 56:6-7)

On witnessing this event, the Lord's disciples recalled the words of their (Old Testament) Scriptures. Centuries earlier, the Psalmist had written,

*(17b)...“Zeal for your house will consume me.” {Ps. 69:9} (ESV)*

Now, this Scripture had been fulfilled. The strong emotions evident in the Lord's actions, demonstrated that he had indeed been consumed—or eaten up—by zeal, or fierce and righteous indignation, over the desecration of his Father's house.

### John 2:18

The Jewish authorities—probably, priests and Levites—were incensed with Jesus when he expelled the merchants from the temple courts. Perhaps the priests and Levites had been benefiting financially or materially in some way from the presence of these merchants. Again, no doubt, the religious leaders felt some sense of guilt themselves, for having permitted the desecration of the temple courts in the first place. It was their responsibility to ensure that such abuses did not occur. Clearly, they had failed in this respect. Now—because Jesus had done what they had failed to do—they became extremely perturbed and angry with him.

‘Since you have taken it upon yourself to set God's house in order,’ demanded the Jewish religious leaders, ‘show us some sign of your authority to do this. We are the authorised keepers of this temple. By what authority do you presume to usurp our position? If you are from God, prove it by showing us a miracle that demonstrates God's power and therefore your God-given authority to act in this manner!’ (Matt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4; 21:23-27)

### John 2:19

Jesus gave them his answer: No demonstration of God's power or of his (divine) authority would be given to them. Even if they witnessed such signs, they still would not believe that God had sent Jesus, or that he was acting with God's full authority. Yet—as Jesus intimates—on a coming day he would provide these people with a sign or a demonstration of his power and authority from God. Thus, in the latter part of verse 19, the Lord declares most solemnly:

*(19b)...“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (ESV; cf. Matt. 26:60-61; 27:40; Mark 8:31; Acts 2:23-36)*

### John 2:20

On hearing these remarks from Jesus, the Jews retorted to the effect that it had already taken forty-six years to build this temple (i.e., Herod's temple; parts of which even then were still under construction). Even if it were possible for the Lord to destroy this solid and magnificent edifice, how could he possibly expect to raise it up again within three days?

### John 2:21

From this verse, it becomes evident that the Lord was not speaking of the literal temple of stone, but of a far greater temple—the temple of his own body. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, the temple of his body was destroyed—at least, in the eyes of men. However, in fulfilment of his word, that same temple was raised again on the third day, at his resurrection. This was the sign to which the Lord Jesus had been referring. (Col. 2:9; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17)

### John 2:22

The apostle John notes that the disciples of Jesus recalled these very words, after their Lord and Master had been raised from the dead. This convinced them of the truth of all the other Scriptures that spoke of the sufferings of Christ. It convinced them, too, of the truths of Jesus' own words to them while he was yet alive, concerning his coming sufferings, death and resurrection. (Luke 24:6-8,44-48)

At the time Jesus told them these things they neither understood nor believed them. After the resurrection, however, when they saw the Lord's words literally fulfilled, they believed everything else that he had spoken, and everything that the Scriptures had said concerning him. (Ps. 16:10; John 12:16; Acts 2:27-36; 13:35-37)

## Jesus Knows All Men

### John 2:23-25

#### John 2:23

While Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover, many people witnessed the miracles that he was performing. John says that—because of seeing these miracles—many people believed in his name.

In these days especially, 'to believe in the *name*', normally meant to believe in everything that this name represented, including his person, character, work, power and authority. In this case, the name Jesus meant *Yahweh [is] Saviour*. To believe in the name of Jesus, was to believe in Jesus as God and Saviour. It was to believe that he was the Messiah or Anointed of God, and it was to believe that the Son was acting in the name of, and by the power and authority of, God the Father.

There could be no excuse for refusing to believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus in the light of the miracles of grace and of glory that he was performing. These demonstrations of omnipotence testified unmistakably to his commission from God the Father and to the fact that he possessed the same power as the Almighty God himself.

#### John 2:24,25

The word translated '*entrust*' here is the same word translated '*believed*' in verse 23.

From these verses, we know that Jesus did not entrust himself to these people. The Lord knew the hearts of all men. He knew why they had professed faith in him. Clearly, many believed because of the miracles, not because they saw Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. They believed in a remarkable man—not in the Son of God. (John 7:31; 16:30; see also Matt. 9:4)

Such faith is not saving faith. The vast majority of these professing believers would ultimately forsake Jesus. Therefore, Jesus did not entrust himself to these so-called 'believers' or 'disciples'. (Matt. 13:20-21; cf. Jas. 2:19)

Yet, among the many who professed to believe in him at this time, were his true and faithful followers. These were his own, and he would keep them forever secure in his eternal love, mercy and grace.





## John Chapter 3

### A Pharisee Comes to Jesus

#### **John 3:1-15**

##### **John 3:1**

The Pharisees were members of the ruling body of the Jewish Sanhedrin or national religious court. This group formed the most powerful and influential body of the council. The Pharisees observed very high moral standards—outwardly, at least. They taught the people to observe every last letter of God’s law, plus a vast amount of man-made rituals, ceremonies and traditions.

Overall, the Pharisees maintained a hostile attitude to Christ and to his cause. They tried everything in their power to stop the Lord from carrying out his Father’s will—even to the point of seeking to bring about his death. This demonstrated how far removed from God were many of these pious and highly esteemed religious teachers, that they could even think of inflicting such extreme physical violence on the holy, sinless Son of God. Yet, no individual, group, or authority could lay hands on the Son before God’s appointed time. (Matt. 12:14; John 7:30)

Among the Pharisees was a man named Nicodemus. Evidently, Nicodemus—and a few other religious leaders—were not of the same character as most of their colleagues in the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was willing to examine the situation openly and honestly. He was willing to seek information, and to learn the facts. He was a teacher, yet—like the best of teachers—he was also a person who was willing to listen and to learn. (John 3:10)

##### **John 3:2a,b**

One night, in search of real answers to his spiritually hungry soul—answers that he had been unable to find from any of his learned colleagues in the Sanhedrin—Nicodemus approached Jesus.

Several explanations have been offered as to why this religious leader came to Jesus at night:

- Some say that his religious duties prevented him from coming by day.
- Others say that he did not wish to interrupt Jesus while he was teaching and healing the multitudes during the day.
- Yet others say that he waited until night, so that he might speak to Jesus alone.
- Still others say that he came at night because he did not want other members of the Sanhedrin to know that he had spoken with Jesus.

Whatever the reason—or combination of reasons—Nicodemus made his way to Jesus to seek the truth. On approaching the Son of God, he addressed him as *Rabbi*—meaning, *My Great One*, or *My Honourable One*. As John records in the latter part of verse 2:

### John 3:2b,c

Lit., *'Rabbi, we know that from God you have come'*...etc. (In the Greek, 'God' is placed near the beginning of the sentence for emphasis.)

We should note here the significance of the term 'Rabbi', as used by Nicodemus. This was a distinguished title among Jewish religious leaders (akin to *Doctor of Divinity*), and it would not have been used by a meticulous Pharisee like Nicodemus unless he had been utterly convinced of its appropriateness. The Pharisees in particular would never have addressed any ordinary teacher by such a title unless they were convinced of his credentials and qualifications; e.g., as one who had studied under Hillel, or his grandson Gamaliel.

However, when Nicodemus used the title 'Rabbi' to address Jesus, he was not doing so because he recognised that the Lord Jesus had passed through one of the Jewish theological schools. Rather, Nicodemus would have been using this title of honour and respect because he had become convinced that Jesus' teaching and works were greater by far than that of any of their theologians, and that the term 'Rabbi' could be applied appropriately and rightly to the Lord Jesus. Indeed, Nicodemus believed that Jesus' teaching had derived from the Sovereign Lord God himself.

But what had convinced this respected and very strict Pharisee of such a profound truth?

According to Nicodemus, he knew that Jesus had come from God because of the miracles that he was able to perform in God's name. These miraculous signs testified to the Lord Jesus' divine commission—and Nicodemus acknowledged this. (Acts 2:22; cf. Heb. 2:4)

By using the plural, *'we know'*... Nicodemus may have been implying that other members of the Sanhedrin also knew that Jesus had come from God. Many, however, would be afraid to admit this openly. Others—although knowing this truth—were still openly hostile to the Son of God, and to everything that he was doing. (John 9:16; 12:42-43)

Jesus replied to Nicodemus' confession:

### John 3:3

The opening expression, *'Truly, truly, I say to you...'* (*'Verily, verily...'* or *'Amen, amen...'*) indicates that what follows takes the form of a most important and solemn statement of truth, which must on no account be disregarded.

By nature, all mankind since Adam had been born physically into the world. All mankind were of the earth, 'earthy'. All mankind had fallen in Adam and had incurred sin, pollution and guilt. Thereby, all mankind had become dead spiritually; they were dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God, and abiding under his holy wrath and just condemnation. (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:21; 2:13-14)

To be reconciled to God, a person had to experience a complete transformation of life—a spiritual renewal of the whole person and personality, or a new creation from spiritual death to spiritual life. But how could any sinful man or woman experience this new creation?

Jesus provided the answer to Nicodemus, and therefore to all who would seek to enter God's kingdom. 'It is the most solemn and absolute truth (*'Truly, truly, I say to you ...'*) that no one can enter God's kingdom in his present sinful state and condition. He must be born anew. No person can ever enter the kingdom of light, life and love unless he has been born from above.'

The Pharisees, including Nicodemus, had been teaching the people that they must earn their salvation through the observance of the most stringent rules, rites and ceremonies—particularly in relation to keeping the Mosaic Law. Now, Jesus was telling Nicodemus that no-one could see (i.e., *experience* or *be accepted into*) God's kingdom, *unless he is born again*. (John 1:12-13; Gal. 6:15)

This was a totally different concept from a works-based method of salvation. From a human perspective, a person could do something to attempt to earn salvation (although, not in God's sight). However, if a person were to be born again in order to enter God's kingdom, then there was nothing he could do to help achieve his salvation. A birth—or a new birth—were matters over which he had no control.

There is no need to debate whether the expression 'born again' should be so rendered, or whether it should be rendered 'born from above'. Both expressions are true and valid. A person must be born again (spiritually); and, for this to happen, he must be born from above: That is, he must be born again from the one who is the source of all life including spiritual life—God above, operating through his Holy Spirit, who is sent from above.

#### **John 3:4**

Clearly, Jesus had startled Nicodemus with this remark. Yet, this should not have occurred. The idea of being born again was not new or foreign to the ears of a Jewish person. It was a figure of speech meaning to be converted to another way of life and thinking. Indeed, when a Gentile was converted from paganism to Judaism, the Jews referred to this proselyte as having been 'born again'.

Again, from his knowledge of the OT Scriptures, the concept of spiritual regeneration should have been clear to Nicodemus. However, this religious leader thought that Jesus had been speaking of a second *physical* birth, and therefore could not understand how he could be born again physically. Therefore, the Pharisee exclaims,

(4b)...*"Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*  
(ESV)

This religious teacher of Israel is at a loss to understand the basics of God's way of salvation. Apparently, he knew little or nothing about the meaning of spiritual conversion. (Cf. John 6:53-58; 1 Cor. 2:14)

From this, we learn that it is entirely possible to hold an eminent position in the religious hierarchy, to be extremely well versed in theology and all matters of religious affairs, to be considered as a holy and pious leader of God's people, and yet to be completely alienated from God, without any experience of God's Holy Spirit, or of the new birth that he imparts to the children of God alone. However exalted such a person may be in the church, he is still in his sins, abiding under the wrath of God, and facing the eternal judgment of God for his sins—unless, like Nicodemus—he endeavours with all his heart and soul to seek the truth as it is in Jesus, and to call upon the Lord for mercy.

#### **John 3:5**

Jesus rephrases his remarks to Nicodemus. The Lord tells this religious academic most solemnly that no person can enter God's kingdom unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Jesus explains to Nicodemus that he had not been speaking to him about being born again physically—as the Pharisee had imagined. The Lord had been speaking to him about being born again spiritually; i.e., from above, by the operation of God's Holy Spirit. He must be born again 'of water and the Spirit'.

From his undoubtedly comprehensive knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, Nicodemus should have known that, in these Scriptures, the Lord God had promised to sprinkle clean water on the dry and thirsty land; i.e., *on the people* of the land. Thus, in Isaiah it is written:

*(3) For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. (4) They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. (Isaiah 44:3-4 ESV)*

This was a clear illustration of, and allusion to, spiritual regeneration.

Again, in the Old Testament Scriptures, God had promised to satisfy those who were thirsty, fulfilling their desires for spiritual refreshment from the wells of salvation. Thus, again, God declares through Isaiah:

*(3) With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. (Isaiah 12:3 ESV)*

Similarly, Nicodemus should have recalled the Lord God's word concerning the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon spiritually thirsty men and women. The water typified what the Spirit effected—inward spiritual cleansing and regeneration. Yet, for all his great learning, Nicodemus seemed oblivious to these wonderful spiritual truths.

To this end, Isaiah had written:

*(1) "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1 ESV; see vv.2-3)*

And again, Ezekiel had declared:

*(25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (26) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV)*

(See also John 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5)

Although many commentators link the expression '*born of water...*' with baptism, there is no direct reference to the rite of baptism in the immediate passage or context. Baptism, of course, is extremely important. Among other matters, it typifies the cleansing effected by, and the new life in Christ imparted by, the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, this writer does not believe that baptism is in view in this immediate passage. Rather, the allusion seems more appropriate to the Old Testament uses of the word 'water', with which Nicodemus would be very familiar, and some of which passages this writer has quoted in the preceding paragraphs.

The Lord Jesus continues:

### John 3:6

Nicodemus had imagined that the Lord Jesus had been talking about a second physical birth. However, the Pharisee had not realised that like produces like:

*(6a) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh..." (ESV)*

Flesh (human nature) produces more of the same—and nothing else. It can produce only that which is earthly or which results from human effort. By its very nature, flesh can never



produce anything else or anything higher than the natural realm. Furthermore, that which is born of flesh is corrupted by a fallen, sinful nature, and subsequently by individual acts of sin. Thus, because of their sin, unregenerate mankind stands justly condemned by, and utterly alienated from, God. Being born of the flesh (or being born physically), therefore, can never be the means of acceptance into God's kingdom.

However, by the same token:

(6b) "...that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."<sup>17</sup>

It was not physical birth to which Jesus was referring, but spiritual birth. The Holy Spirit regenerates the spiritually dead soul. Nothing else can give new life to the soul. This is what Jesus meant when he said to Nicodemus that he must be born again. His soul must be renewed by divine power from above. Nicodemus already possessed physical life. Now, however, he must be born from above. He must be born again spiritually—not by human means or effort, but by the power of God's Holy Spirit: For it is the Spirit of God alone who regenerates the soul. (Gen. 5:3; 1 Cor. 15:47-49; cf. Ezek. 11:19-20; 1 Cor. 6:17)

### John 3:7

These things ought not to have surprised Nicodemus, or caused him amazement. As a learned teacher of Israel, this Pharisee should have been familiar with everyday figures of speech. One such figure of speech concerned being born again. Among Jews, this expression meant 'to be converted'. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke to Nicodemus about being born again. This Pharisee had to be converted—spiritually and morally. In character and conduct, he had to be 'about turned' completely. His inward life had to be transformed or created anew; and this could be done only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus meant by saying that a person must be born again.

### John 3:8

The words translated, 'wind', 'breath' and 'spirit' are from the same Greek word (πνεῦμα, *pneuma*)

Like the wind, so is the work of the God's Holy Spirit in regeneration. We cannot see the wind—but we can see the *effects* of the wind. Similarly, we cannot see the Spirit of God—but we can see the unmistakable effects of his regenerating power in the transformed lives of men and women. (1 John 2:29; 3:8-9)

The wind blows where it wills—or rather, where God wills. So, too, the Spirit operates where God wills—on the hearts and minds of men and women. Through the living Word of God, the Holy Spirit convicts men and women of their sin, convinces them of their need of salvation and converts them to Christ. This is regeneration or the new birth. This is what it means to be born again—born from above. (John 16:8-11; see also Ezek. 37:1-14)

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<sup>17</sup> **3:6** The same Greek word means both *wind* and *spirit*. [ESV footnote]

### John 3:9

Still utterly bewildered by all these things, the learned teacher of Israel gives expression to his ignorance of spiritual matters.

*(9) Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" (ESV)*

This Pharisee could not understand these things. Jesus had been talking to him about things that his highly intelligent—but unspiritual—mind could not comprehend.

How true it is that the natural man cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit of God! They remain foolishness to him, because these things are spiritually discerned. Only by the grace of God and by the gift of the Holy Spirit can a person's understanding be enlightened to the truths of salvation. Only by the work of the Holy Spirit can he be led to see the significance of that truth, to confess his need of Christ and to seek him with all his heart and soul. Repentance and faith, therefore, are the gifts of God's sovereign grace—as are all other blessings of salvation. (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2 Cor. 3:14-18)

### John 3:10

Yet, here was a teacher of Israel who could not understand the things of God! How, then, could he lead other people into a right knowledge and understanding of God's truths? In his spiritually darkened state of mind, was not the blind leading the blind? And would not both this Pharisee and his pupils fall into the ditch? (Matt. 15:13-14)

Nicodemus still could not see the significance of what the Lord Jesus had been saying to him. For all his great and undoubted intellectual abilities, the truths of spiritual regeneration eluded him. Yet, perhaps in course of time, Nicodemus would come to understand the things of the Spirit of God: For the Lord never refuses those who seek him earnestly. Although we are not told expressly that Nicodemus was regenerated and believed on Christ, yet his subsequent actions may imply faith in Jesus as the Son of God and as his personal Saviour. (John 7:47-53; 19:38-39)

### John 3:11

The Lord Jesus continued speaking to this Pharisee. Jesus told Nicodemus that all the things of which he had spoken were absolute certainties. They were things that reflected the truth of God, and not the opinions of men. They were spiritual truths. The essence of these great spiritual truths had found expression in the OT Scriptures. Now, their full significance was being conveyed to men and women by the one who had come from the very presence of God—the Son of God himself. (John 1:18; 7:16-17; 8:28-29,38)

Yet, although Jesus was speaking of the things that he had seen and heard in his Father's presence, people did not accept the Lord's testimony. Although, of course, unable to believe unto salvation without the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, these people were unwilling to believe even the basics of what Jesus had been saying to them. This was partly because much of what the Lord Jesus was telling them ran counter to their ideas of God, and of what God required of mankind. (John 3:31-36) Their minds were still firmly imbued with the fallacious concept of salvation by works or deeds of merit.

### John 3:12

Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus about things relating to this world and he had not believed even these most elementary truths. How, then, could he believe if the Lord spoke to him about things relating to heaven? If this Pharisee could not understand earthly truths, how could he possibly hope to understand heavenly truths?

Flesh and blood (here, the unspiritual and unconverted mind) cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit of God. A person can see and believe spiritual truths only if and when the Spirit of God reveals these truths to him or her. Without regeneration there can be no spiritual understanding or illumination of the mind to these eternal truths. And without this spiritual understanding there can be no exercise of faith. All depends, therefore, on the sovereign working of God's Holy Spirit to impart spiritual life and understanding to an individual, thus enabling that person to exercise true saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

### **John 3:13**

No one has ever ascended into the presence of God to discover these truths. Only Jesus—the Son of God and Son of Man—has unlimited access to the full counsel of God. (John 6:46; cf. Deut. 30:12-14; Rom. 10:6-7; Eph. 4:8-10)

The eternal Son of God had come from his Father's immediate presence in heaven to reveal certain of these truths to lost men and women, including Nicodemus. These were the truths that this Pharisee was now hearing from the Son of God. They related to the gift of the Holy Spirit and to a full and free salvation. They related to repentance toward God and to faith in the Son of God. They related to the forgiveness of sins and to the gift of eternal life. (John 6:33-35)

Although omitted by the ESV text (but noted in the footnotes), some manuscripts add this phrase at the end of verse 13:

*...who is in heaven.*

If this clause is genuine, Jesus is here making it plain that—although now incarnate on earth—he is nevertheless also present with God in heaven: an unmistakable allusion to the Son's deity and omnipresence.

### **John 3:14**

In what way does God provide the new spiritual life of which Jesus had been speaking?

At this point, the Lord Jesus refers to an incident in Israel's early history: the bronze serpent in the desert. At that time, the people had complained bitterly against Moses and had rebelled against the LORD. Because of their sin, the Lord had punished the people by sending fiery serpents or poisonous snakes into the Israelite camp. Inevitably, everyone bitten by these snakes would die.

However, with God, mercy triumphs over judgment. The Lord God commanded Moses to make a serpent of bronze, and to lift up this serpent on a pole so that everyone throughout the vast and sprawling camp could see it. Then the LORD told Moses to command the people who had been bitten by the poisonous snakes to look at the brazen serpent. Those who looked would live. By looking in faith, they would be delivered from God's judgment which was bringing upon them certain death for their sin.

Moses commanded the people according to the word of the LORD. Then, everyone who had been bitten, and who believed the command of the LORD, looked to the serpent lifted up on the pole—and because they looked in faith, they lived. However, those who disbelieved the word of the LORD, and did not look in faith to the brazen serpent, perished on account of their sin. (Num. 21:4-9)

*(14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up... (ESV)*

Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so that those who looked would live; i.e. those who responded to God's grace and mercy and who believed the LORD, lived as a result of

their obedience to God's command. Similarly, the Son of Man must be lifted up (on a cross), so that—by God's grace and mercy—those who believed on him would live. Those, however, who refused to hear the word of the Lord or to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only means of salvation, would perish in their sin. (John 8:28; 12:32)

However, there may be more than one meaning to the sentence quoted above:

- For the salvation of sinners, it was imperative that the Lord Jesus be *lifted up* on the cross.
- However, following his death and burial, and for the sinner's justification, it was imperative that the Lord Jesus be raised again or '*lifted up*' from death.
- Again, in order to mediate for all his people, it was imperative that the risen Lord Jesus ascend or be '*lifted up*' again to heaven.
- Furthermore, and in order to demonstrate that the Father had accepted his Son's sacrifice of atonement and reconciliation of sinners to himself, it was imperative that the Son of God be exalted or '*lifted up*' in his Father's glorious presence.

This multiple interpretation may be seen to agree more closely with Jesus' remarks in verse 13 about descending from heaven, and ascending again to heaven.

### John 3:15

Those who look in faith to the Son of God will live. This means that all those who call upon the name of the Lord will receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. The Holy Spirit then seals them as belonging eternally to God, and sanctifies them.

The indwelling Holy Spirit provides each believer with power to live to God's glory. The Spirit of truth guides them into all truth. He takes of the things of God and reveals them to his people. (John 3:36; 6:40; Rom. 10:9-13; Eph. 1:13-14; John 16:13-14)

From a human perspective, the promise of eternal life is conditional: It is conditioned upon a person's faith in the Son of God. Everyone who believes in the Son of God receives eternal life. However, the Scriptures also make it plain that a person is brought to faith in the Son of God, only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without this preceding work of grace in their hearts and minds, people would remain spiritually dead. They would remain alienated from God by their evil deeds, and unable to turn to God in true repentance and genuine saving faith. As with every other aspect of salvation, faith, then, is a gift of God's sovereign and unmerited grace. The ability and willingness to exercise faith is dependent on the prior operations of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. (Matt. 11:26; Eph. 2:4-5,8-9; see also Rom. 9:11-16)

## For God So Loved the World

### John 3:16-21

#### John 3:16

This, perhaps, is the best known and best loved verse in the Bible.

*(16a) "For God **so** loved the world..."<sup>18</sup> (ESV; bold emphasis added, here and below)*

The word 'so' emphasises the extent and degree of God's love. It is immeasurable, imperishable, inextinguishable, inexhaustible.

He so loved the world... *Thus, or In this manner*, God loved the world...

*(16a) "For God so **loved** the world..."*

This is the demonstration of the height, depth and breadth of God's love for the world. God so *loved* the world. God's love is so great that it is beyond human comprehension. Nevertheless, it is the true expression of God's intense, unfathomable and divine love for fallen, sinful men and women.

*(16a) "For God so loved the **world**..."*

Here we see that God's love is not limited to one nation, race, colour, class or creed. God's eternal and immeasurable love for fallen mankind extends to all nations and all classes of people on earth. No nation and no class or condition of people is excluded. God's love is truly universal. Every single person who calls upon the name of the Lord will experience the fullness of God's love in their hearts through the forgiveness of their sins.

The Spirit of God does not limit himself to any one nation, race, colour, class, or condition of people. The Holy Spirit works sovereignly—wherever he will—upon the hearts and minds of men, women and children throughout the entire world. He convicts them of their sin, convinces them of their need, and converts them to Christ.

*(16a,b) "For God so loved, the world that he **gave** his only Son..."*

God so *loved* the world that he *gave*. He gave all that love could give. God gave that which was closest to his heart—that which he loved most dearly. He so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son (or his Only Begotten Son). So intense was the love of God for the world—even for a sinful world—that he yielded up his one and only Son that sinners might be saved. (Rom. 5:6-11; 1 John 4:9-10)

*(16c) "...that **whoever believes** in him..."*

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<sup>18</sup> **3:16** Or *For this is how God loved the world.* [ESV footnote]

## Expository Notes

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This relates to anyone without exception who *believes*: That is, anyone whom the Spirit of God effectually calls. It relates to anyone whom God's Holy Spirit enables to understand the truths of the Gospel and whom he makes able and willing to believe.

An unregenerate person remains spiritually dead. It requires the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit to regenerate him and to bring him to true repentance and genuine saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Isa. 55:1,6-7; John 6:37,40; 7:37-39)

(16c) "...that whoever believes **in him**..."

Anyone who believes wholeheartedly on the Son of God and on what he has accomplished on the sinner's behalf... Anyone who accepts Christ as their Saviour and Lord... Anyone who commits themselves without reserve to the Lord Jesus Christ, and who follows him and his ways with all their heart and soul...

Like every other element of salvation, saving faith is a gift of God. The Holy Spirit enables a person to see and understand the truth, and to repent and believe on Christ. However, although faith is God's gift, all those who come to faith in Christ do so *freely and willingly*. Once the Spirit of God has enlightened their minds to the truth, they gladly and willingly embrace the one who is the Way the Truth and the Life. (Acts 16:29-31; Rom. 10:9-13; see also Matt. 11:25-30)

(16c,d) "...whoever believes in him **should not perish**..."

This is the solemn assurance and promise of God. No one who believes in God's Son shall ever perish. God will never condemn him or consign him to a lost eternity. Through faith in Christ, the abiding wrath of God and the sentence of condemnation have been removed forever from the repentant sinner. He will never perish. He can never be lost. (John 3:36; 5:24; Rom. 8:1)

(16c,d) "...whoever believes in him should not perish but **have**..."

Believers *have*—i.e. they now hold or possess... Here, the verb (to) *have* is used in the sense of 'to *have and to hold*'... as in the marriage covenant.

(16c,d) "...whoever believes in him should not perish but have **eternal life**."  
(ESV)

This is the gift of God. All those whom God's Spirit calls to repentance and faith in his Son, receives the gift of eternal life.

Eternal life means much more than living for ever—although this is certainly included. In giving us eternal life, God is guaranteeing to us a heavenly inheritance. This inheritance includes a place in our Father's house. It includes everlasting fellowship with our Father in heaven and with his Son. It includes the fullness of love, joy, peace and every other spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. It includes the absence of all sin, sorrow, suffering, pain, death and everything else that disturbs our communion with God in this present life. Such is but a foretaste of the joys laid up for the believer in his Father's house above. (John 14:1-3; Rom. 8:16-17; Rev. 21:4)

### John 3:17

In sending his Son into this world, it was not the purpose of the Father to condemn the world. The day of final judgment has yet to come. Christ came into this world to provide salvation and forgiveness of sins to all who would believe on him. The Father's intention was that—through his Son—the message of eternal salvation should be proclaimed throughout the whole world. (Luke 19:10; John 12:47-48; 1 John 2:2; 4:14)

As we have seen, this does not imply the salvation of every single individual in the world. It implies merely that a countless multitude of individuals out of every tongue, tribe, people

and nation will be brought to repentance and faith in the Son of God. The contrast is between the way of salvation provided under the old covenant through Judaism exclusively, and the universal proclamation of eternal salvation provided under the new covenant: namely, by means of the Gospel. Now, any individual whom God calls, of any nation, can receive God's salvation through faith in his Son. There is no longer any need for them to accept the Jewish faith, or the rite of circumcision.

As has been noted, the term '*world*' is not necessarily all-inclusive. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, it becomes evident that when God speaks of sending his Son to 'save the world', he means he has sent his Son to save individuals out of every nation on earth; i.e. his elect. This election accords with the sovereign will of a holy and righteous God.

### John 3:18

Anyone who believes in the Son of God is no longer condemned. He no longer remains alienated from God and at enmity with God on account of his sin. Because of his faith in the Son of God as his Saviour and Lord, the repentant and believing sinner has been acquitted—or justified. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Those whom God justifies cannot be condemned. (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1,28-34)

Anyone, however, who does not believe in the Son of God stands condemned already. He stands condemned because of the unforgiven sin in his life. He stands condemned for refusing to accept the atoning sacrifice for his sin that God has provided—Jesus, the Lamb of God. Such people—and this includes everyone who has not believed in Christ—remain under the enduring wrath of God. (John 3:36; Heb. 2:3; 12:25)

This verse tells us further that these people stand condemned because they have refused to believe in the name of God's only Son (or 'one and only Son', or 'only begotten Son'). To believe in the *name* of someone, is to believe in everything which that name represents. The name of *Jesus* means *Yahweh [is] Saviour*. To believe in the name of Jesus, therefore, is to believe in him as God and as Saviour. Much more is implied. This, however, would be as much as the people would be required to understand about the name—and to believe.

Such terminology was not unfamiliar to Jewish ears. It is used in the Old Testament of the Lord God himself. Faith in the *Name* meant faith in the God whom the Name represented. The Name speaks of the character or attributes of the Almighty God. It represents the 'I AM'—a phrase that all Jews knew referred to the unpronounced name of YHWH (or Yahweh; transliterated, *Jehovah*). (Exodus 3:13-15; 6:3; 34:14; cf. Lev. 24:11,16)

### John 3:19

(19a) "*And this is the judgment...*" (ESV)

— Or this is the verdict and sentence of condemnation...

(19b) "*...the light has come into the world...*"

The light of life in Christ Jesus has come into this sin-darkened world. This penetrating and revealing light shines into every corner of a person's life.

In this context, '*light*' is that which exemplifies and emphasises spiritual and moral purity, holiness, justice and righteousness, and which exposes and condemns fallen mankind's sinful nature together with his sinful thoughts, words, deeds, inclinations and attitudes.

Verse 19 continues by declaring:

(19b) “...the light has come into the world, **and people loved the darkness rather than the light** because their deeds were evil. (ESV; bold emphasis added)

Instead of welcoming the Light of the world, most people hated or despised that Light. This Light was exposing their evil deeds—but they loved (cherished, enjoyed or delighted in) their evil deeds. (John 1:4,5; 8:12)

The word used here for *love* (Gk., ἠγάπησαν, *agapao*) is the same word used to express God’s love for the world. Sinful men and women loved their wicked and ungodly way of life so intensely that they detested the light that exposed their evil lifestyles and condemned their sins.

(19b) ...and people loved the darkness **rather than the light** because their deeds were evil. (ESV; bold emphasis added)

The phrase ‘*rather than*’ implies that people were much more willing to cherish their sins than to seek God’s forgiveness. Their love for their evil way of life was greater by far than their love for God or for his Son. The way of righteousness, holiness and truth was a way with which they had no desire to become too closely acquainted. This, of course, was a judicial consequence of spurning repeatedly the grace of God and refusing wilfully to hear the word of God. (Rom. 1:28-32)

### John 3:20

Verse 20 confirms what has just been said. Individuals who practise evil hate—or detest—the light. They have no desire to encounter the light. They know that this light exposes their sinful practices—and they do not want their deeds to be exposed by the light of truth and righteousness, and to be shown for what they really are.

In this context, *to expose* means not only *to reveal*, but also *to judge*—and to correct or punish accordingly. (Job 24:13-19; John 7:7; Eph. 5:12-14)

In fear of exposure and judgment, therefore, these individuals continue to hide in the darkness: i.e., inexcusably, they seek to remain ignorant of the truth, stifling their consciences in the process, so that they can continue to practise their unrighteous and wicked deeds.

So long as they continue to practise their sins, however, they remain under the wrath and condemnation of an all-seeing and all-knowing God. One day, they will stand before God to give account for every evil thought, word and deed. They will give account also to God for their wilful and inexcusable rejection of God’s one and only Son—the one who is the Light of the world and the Light of life.

### John 3:21

Those who live by the truth of God’s Word, come fearlessly into the light of God’s presence. For them, the Light of the world holds no terrors. He is their joy and all their delight. He is the one who provides them with light and life. He is the one who teaches them the truths of God’s Word. Therefore, those who seek to live by the light of God’s Word come gladly into the presence of their Father in heaven. (Ps. 1:1-3; Acts 17:11; 1 John 1:6-7)

As far as they are able in their present state, they endeavour to honour God’s Son by how they live. Therefore, they know that they have nothing to hide from the all-searching and all-seeing eye of the Lord. When they sin, they can confess their sin to their heavenly Father. From their knowledge of God’s Word of truth, they are aware that God has provided forgiveness for them through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:8-21; 1 John 1:9)



## John Continues to Baptise

### *John 3:22-25*

#### **John 3:22**

Following his discourse with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus and his disciples made their way out into the Judean countryside. During this time, the Lord's disciples baptised other followers. As will be noted from chapter four, verse 2, however, the Lord Jesus himself did not baptise anyone.

#### **John 3:23-24**

While the disciples of Jesus were baptising, John the Baptist was also baptising at a place called Aenon, near Salim. At the time, these locations would be well known and easily identified. Now, however, these names cannot be identified with any degree of certainty. Some commentators (including *Eusebius* and *Jerome*) believed that Salim *may* have been located about 8 (Roman) miles south-east of Scythopolis or Beth Shan (Beth Shean).

The reason given for making use of this location was that there was an abundant supply of water in that area. (The name *Aenon* means *place of springs*.) The Gospel writer tells us that people were constantly coming to John to be baptised. Clearly, then, it was advantageous to John to carry on his work in a place amply supplied with water.

From this, we learn that the message of repentance being preached by John the Baptist was still reaching to the hearts and minds of the people. Challenged by this faithful herald of the Lord, many people expressed repentance for their sins and sought baptism from John. (Matt. 3:5-6)

Again, from John's straightforward preaching, we learn that people are challenged and brought to repentance, not by sweet talk and flowery messages of 'love', but by the plain preaching or teaching of God's Word. Such plain speaking (declared in love), must include a warning of the danger of unforgiven sin. It must include making known the demands of God's holy and righteous law on unforgiven sinners, and of their present lost condition which places them under the wrath and condemnation of God. And it must include the message of God's unmerited and unremitting love, forgiveness and salvation provided by his grace and mercy alone, through faith in his Son.

Shortly after these events, Herod ordered John's arrest and imprisonment—as verse 24 infers. Even now, the Baptist's ministry had almost reached its conclusion. (Mark 6:17)

#### **John 3:25**

While baptising the people, a dispute arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew. This concerned the matter of purifying or ceremonial washing. The Scripture does not provide us with any details. It may have related to the ritual purification or washings, or ceremonial washings before or after meals. (Mark 7:1-9) Again, it may have related to John's baptism. This Jew may have seen baptism as a form of purification for the washing away of sins. Baptism, however, did not wash away sins—it merely typified this cleansing act. The washing away of sins could be effected only by atoning blood, as any Jew ought to have known.

Perhaps, however, this person was disputing with John over the nature and purpose of baptism—or even over John's right to preach repentance and to administer baptism in the

name of the Lord. He may even have been seeking to determine the difference between John's baptism and the baptism of the Lord Jesus. (Cf. Heb. 9:7-28; 1 Pet. 3:21-22)

### Everyone is Going to Jesus

#### John 3:26

About this time, John's disciples came to their master with a report relating to Jesus. They were greatly concerned that the one to whom the Baptist had borne witness was now gaining a greater following than was John himself.

Approaching their master, John's disciples declared rather anxiously that everyone was going to the man, Jesus. Surely, John the Baptist could not allow this situation to continue? John is God's appointed herald and he was baptising people before Jesus appeared on the scene. Why should the Baptist allow people to be drawn away from himself to follow Jesus?

So John's disciples must have reasoned. Clearly, John's followers had failed to grasp the significance of their master's testimony concerning Jesus. John had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. The Baptist had also told people that he himself was only the forerunner or herald of God's Anointed One.

Again, John had insisted repeatedly that he was not the Christ, but that the Christ was coming after him. It seems that his disciples had not grasped what John had meant when he spoke of these things. Again, it seems that they had failed to understand John's remarks when he had identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. (John 1:6-9,15,26-36)

### Jesus Must Become Greater

#### John 3:27-30

#### John 3:27

Observing their deep concern for him, John replies to his disciples:

*(27b) ... "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." (ESV)*

Every good and every perfect gift comes down from the Father above. (Mark 13:34; Jas. 1:17)

Before John was born, God had appointed him to be the forerunner of his Christ. John's gifts and abilities to perform this great task came to him from God. The Baptist had not assumed this work by himself, nor had anyone else commissioned him to carry out this work. God had called and commissioned John. (Matt. 21:24-25)

Like the prophets of old, the Baptist was acting in the Lord's name and by his express authority. God in heaven had appointed John to prepare the way of the Lord. God had given no other work to John, and John did not have the right to assume any other work—nor did he have any desire to do so. (Luke 1:1-25,57-80)

#### John 3:28

Then John reminds his disciples of what he had said so many times previously. He reminds them that he had denied being the Christ. Rather, God had sent John ahead of his Anointed One to prepare the way of the Lord. Perhaps, now, John's disciples would begin

to remember and understand something of the great truths that he had uttered concerning Jesus, the Lamb of God. (Mal. 3:1; 4:5-6 with Luke 1:16-17; Matt. 3:3,11-12)

### **John 3:29**

John now makes use of an everyday occurrence—a wedding. The bride belongs exclusively to the bridegroom. She belongs to him in the sense that the bridegroom *has her and holds her* to himself and for himself alone.

The friend who will attend the bridegroom waits in eager expectation for the bridegroom to appear. He listens for him. Then, when he hears the bridegroom's voice, the friend is overjoyed in the knowledge that he has come for his beloved bride. (Matt. 9:14-15)

Who is the bridegroom? Christ is the bridegroom. Who is the bride? His church is his bride. That is why the people must follow him, and no one else. They belong to him alone. He is the bridegroom. As such, he must *have and hold* his bride; i.e. his church—for it is his exclusive and treasured possession. (2 Cor. 11:2; see also Isa. 54:5-6)

John the Baptist had seen all these events unfolding. As the friend of the bridegroom, it had been John's great privilege and responsibility to prepare the way for the bridegroom's arrival. Now that the bridegroom had come, however, he—Jesus—had become the centre of the people's attention. People were beginning to follow Jesus rather than John. As time progressed, Christ would select his own from among the people. These—the bride of Christ—would constitute his pure and holy church. (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:6-9; 21:9-10)

### **John 3:30**

It is inevitable that Jesus becomes greater and that John becomes less. Now that Jesus had appeared on the scene, the work of his forerunner was ending. John the Baptist had faithfully prepared the way of the Lord. Now, the Lord had come to walk in the way appointed for him by his Father. John's ministry was finishing. The work of Jesus was just beginning. (Isa. 9:7; 53:2-3 with 53:12; Dan. 2:34-35 with 2:44-45; Rev. 11:15)

## **Jesus is Above All**

### **John 3:31-36**

#### **John 3:31**

John expands on what he has been saying to his disciples. Jesus comes from above; i.e. from the presence of God in heaven. He who comes from above is above all. He who comes from God in heaven stands supreme above all others. (Matt. 28:18; John 8:23; Rom. 9:5)

By contrast, those who are from the earth belong to the earth. We come from the earth. We belong to the earth. Therefore, the things we think, say and do are governed by our earthly nature. (Cf. John 3:12-13; 1 Cor. 15:47-49)

On the other hand, he who comes from above is governed by his spiritual and heavenly nature. He reflects this in everything that he thinks, says and does. Therefore, being far superior to any man or angel, the Son of God stands far above all. (John 6:33; Eph. 1:18-23; 4:8-10; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Pet. 3:22)

### John 3:32

Jesus the Son of God stands pre-eminently above all others. As the one who has come from the very presence of his Father in heaven, Jesus is able to testify at first hand concerning everything that he has seen and heard. He is able to make known to fallen mankind all that God wills to reveal to them concerning their present state and the God-appointed remedy for their sin. (Matt. 11:25-30)

Concerning the salvation of lost men and women, Christ came into this world as a shining light; i.e. he brought men and women into contact with the truth. Exposure to this truth revealed mankind's evil deeds for what they were. The pure shining light of Christ showed to men and women the righteous standard of behaviour required of them by God. The truths expounded by Christ exposed mankind's sin, in order that the Holy Spirit might convict them and bring them to Christ for salvation. (John 1:4-13; 3:19,21; 8:12; 9:5)

Instead of seeking the salvation of the Lord, however, sinful mankind preferred to remain in their sinful state—moral darkness and spiritual death. They rebelled against the light (i.e., the Light of life, and the Revealer of God's truth to the world. They rebelled also against the light of God's revelation to their hearts and minds, as found in the Scriptures. From whatever direction it came, sinful mankind resented the presence of God's light in their lives. (John 3:20; 7:7; Eph. 5:12-14)

Therefore, says John to his disciples, Jesus has testified to the truth about God and about mankind's relationship to God. Yet, because men loved their evil deeds more than the truth, they refused to accept the testimony of God's one and only Son. This represents a wilful and inexcusable rejection of Christ and of God's only appointed means of salvation. (John 1:11; 3:11,18,36)

### John 3:33

Not everyone, however, despised and rejected the truth. Many, who heard the Lord Jesus, believed what he said. They accepted the truths that he spoke. They knew in their hearts that these truths applied to them and to their relationship with God. These truths exposed their sins. However, instead of rejecting the truth, these people turned to seek God's mercy. (Isa. 55:1-7; John 6:37-40)

In Christ, they found the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In him, these people found a full and free salvation. They had come to know the truth, and to accept the truth; and the truth had set them free. Therefore, says the Baptist, these individuals certify by their faith and by their actions that God is true, and that his Word is the true Light of life. (John 1:12-13; 14:6; 1 John 5:9-13)

### John 3:34

He whom God has sent into the world speaks the very words of God. Everything that the Son says is what he has heard from his Father in heaven. Every truth that the Son of God reveals to the people is the truth from God himself.

*(34b) "...for he [God] gives the Spirit without measure." (ESV)*

Jesus himself is the truth. He is the very Word of God—the eternal Logos—in human form. The Spirit of God rests upon the Son without any limit. All the fullness of the God-head dwells in him. (John 1:1-2,18; 7:16-18; 8:26-29; Col. 1:19; 2:9)

**John 3:35**

God the Father deeply loves his only Son. The closest and most powerful bond of intimacy exists between God the Father and God the Son. Because of this unparalleled closeness, the Son knows the Father's counsels from eternity, as does no other. (John 10:30; 14:10-11; 16:15; 17:10,21,23)

Everything that the Father does, he accomplishes through his Son. Concerning creation, the Father made the world and everything else through his Son. Concerning providence, the Father upholds all things through his Son. Concerning salvation, the Father provided atonement for the sins of mankind by giving up his only Son. (John 1:10; Col. 1:15-20)

God works through his Son to accomplish all his purposes. However, it is true also that the Father has placed everything into the hands of his own Son. God has given all authority in heaven and on earth to his Son. The Son, therefore, possesses the power and the authority to act in the Father's name, to accomplish the works of the Father, and to fulfil completely the will of his Father in heaven. (Matt. 11:27; John 5:36; 10:32-38)

The Son also has the power to delegate a limited authority to others. For example, he commissioned his apostles to go into the entire world preaching the Gospel and baptising in his name those who repented and believed. (Matt. 28:18-20)

**John 3:36**

Anyone who believes in the Son has—i.e. he *now possesses*—eternal life. God grants eternal life to anyone who believes the truths that Jesus has spoken, and who accepts these truths, together with the Saviour himself. (John 3:15-17; 5:24; 6:47-57; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 5:10-13)

Anyone, however, who rejects the Son, will not see life. Those who reject the truth of God because they prefer their sinful way of life will never experience eternal life. In rejecting the Light of the world, they have rejected God's one and only way of salvation. (John 3:18; Heb. 10:26-31)

Those who reject God's Son remain under the enduring wrath of God. In this life, they remain exposed to God's unremitting, righteous and justified anger. Following death and the final judgment, they will be exposed to the endless and unremitting torments of the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:5-6; Rev. 6:15-17; 21:8)



## John Chapter 4

### Jesus Goes Through Samaria

#### **John 4:1-6**

##### **John 4:1**

The most prestigious and strict members of the Sanhedrin—the Pharisees—learned that the Lord Jesus was gaining even more disciples than John the Baptist. This must have irked the Pharisees vastly. Already, they had taken issue with John the Baptist over his right to preach and to baptise without the authority of the Jewish religious council. John, however, had at least denied being the Christ. Instead, the Baptist had told the Pharisees that the Christ was coming after him. (Cf. John 3:26)

Perhaps, some of these Pharisees had been present when John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Perhaps they had heard him tell people that this was the one who would take away the sin of the world. Now, it seemed that all the people were flocking to Jesus. They had heard that the Messiah had appeared, and they desired to seek out the one who could teach them authoritatively about God (John 1:29,36)

This situation must have caused considerable consternation and unease among the Pharisees and other members of the religious Council. Traditionally, it was the scribes, Pharisees and rabbis who taught the people about the ways of God. What right, then, did this man Jesus have to teach the people, or to draw away disciples after him?

##### **John 4:2**

Verse 2 tells us that Jesus himself did not baptise anyone. On Jesus' authority, his disciples performed all baptisms.

*As a servant of the Lord*, John the Baptist also performed a preparatory baptism unto repentance. However, as *the Lord of the servant*, Jesus baptised only by means of his disciples. (Cf. Acts 10:48; 1 Cor. 1:13)

##### **John 4:3**

When the Lord Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard of the numbers of people coming to him, he left Judea. This was not his appointed time for confronting the Pharisees, or for permitting them to hinder his work. Jesus had to continue his Father's work—not only in Judea, but also throughout the whole land. Taking leave of Judea, therefore, the Lord started north toward the province of Galilee. (Cf. Matt. 10:23; John 2:24-25)

##### **John 4:4**

On his journey to Galilee, the Lord needed to pass through Samaria. It was possible, of course, to circumvent Samaria by taking a longer route around the far side of the Jordan. However, this would not have been in accordance with God's purposes for his Son. Jesus—of necessity—*had to pass through Samaria*.

In his providence, God had decreed specific times for every place that his Son would visit, and for every action that he would take. Primarily, the necessity to travel through Samaria

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was to fulfil one of those appointed times in our Lord's life. (Luke 2:49; 9:51; John 7:8,30; 8:20)

### John 4:5

As the Lord journeyed with his disciples, the group came to a town in Samaria named Sychar—possibly, Shechem of the Old Testament. This was near to the plot of ground that Jacob (i.e. Israel) had given to his son Joseph. (Gen. 33:17-20; 48:21-22; Jos. 24:32)

### John 4:6

Situated in this locality was Jacob's well. Thoroughly exhausted by his long journey, the Lord Jesus sat down by the well. His disciples, meanwhile, had gone into the nearby town to buy food.

John tells us that it was about the sixth hour. By Jewish reckoning, this would be about 12:00 noon; and therefore, the sun would be at its hottest. Because of this, the townspeople generally would avoid coming to the well at this time of day. However, it is uncertain whether on this occasion John is using the Jewish or the Roman civil day. If the Roman day, the time would be 6.00 pm (18:00 hours), the cooler and more usual time for drawing water.

## Jesus Meets the Samaritan Woman

### John 4:7-15

#### John 4:7

As the Lord Jesus sat alone resting by the well, a woman of Samaria came out from the town to draw water. This woman belonged to the *country* of Samaria. It is unlikely however that she had walked from the *town* of Samaria, as this town was located about 8 miles distant from the well. It is much more likely that she came from the nearby town of Sychar.

It was no co-incidence that the woman arrived at the well at this very moment. The Lord had to go through Samaria—to meet and speak to this woman. Jesus knew that she would be coming to the well at this very hour to draw water. However, he intended to be at the well ahead of her to speak to her of a far greater gift. This is why—in fulfilment of his Father's purposes—Jesus had to leave Judea at that time. This is also the reason why the Lord had to journey through Samaria.

The woman had come to the well to find refreshment for her physical thirst. Now, the Lord was saying to her:

*(7b)..."Give me a drink" (ESV)*

This request puzzled the woman, for reasons that we will see shortly.

#### John 4:8

In this verse, John confirms that Jesus' disciples were not present at this meeting. All of them had gone into the nearby town to buy food for themselves and their Master.



**John 4:9**

The woman now states the reason for her surprise and bewilderment at Jesus' request. The Lord had just asked this Samaritan woman for a drink. However, Jesus must have known of the deep antagonism between Jews and Samaritans. Again, Jesus must have been aware that a Jew would never share a drinking vessel with a Samaritan. How, then—the woman must have reasoned—can this Jewish man ask me for a drink?

**John 4:10**

Jesus' answer is simple but profound:

*(10b) ..."If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." (ESV)*

If you could see with your mind's eye... If you could understand what I meant...

*(10b)..."If you knew the gift of God..."*

If this woman had known anything about spiritual matters, and of God's mercy and grace toward lost mankind, she might have appreciated something of what the Lord was saying to her. If she had realised what it meant to become spiritually thirsty, rather than physically thirsty, then she might have believed that Jesus could meet her deepest need. (Isa. 55:1-8; John 6:35)

Again, had she appreciated who it was that was asking her for a drink, she might have desired him to quench the innermost longings of her soul and grant peace to her troubled heart. If she had only known God's gift to this world...

The Lord Jesus knew that these momentous and life-changing truths remained hidden from her. If, however, she could have understood with her mind, she would have *begged* of the Lord, and he would have given her living water. The Son of God would have supplied her with the water from the well that never runs dry. This ever-springing stream never fails to satisfy the deeply thirsting soul. (Isa. 42:6-7; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 9:15; cf. Luke 11:13)

How clearly does this passage teach us that a person cannot comprehend the things of God with his natural mind or understanding! Only by the Holy Spirit illuminating the mind to the significance of these truths, can a person see, understand and believe.

**John 4:11**

At this point, the woman begins addressing Jesus as *Sir*. She still does not know the Lord's identity—but she speaks to him as a *lord*; i.e. as one to whom honour and respect are due. This was the common form of salutation used by servants in relation to their masters.

*(11a) "The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep." (ESV)*

Evidently, the woman still thought that Jesus was speaking about physical water. Jesus had asked her for a drink, yet he had no means of retrieving water from the well. Furthermore—the woman must have thought—this man should know that a Samaritan cannot share the same vessel with a Jew; therefore he cannot be expecting to use my water jar.

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Still deeply puzzled by the expression *'living water'* the woman asks Jesus what he means. Is he referring to spring water, rather than the standing water in the well? Where does this living water come from?

Thus, in verse 11b, she queries:

(11b)...*"Where do you get that living water?"* (ESV; cf. 1 Cor. 2:14)

### John 4:12

'Many centuries ago, Jacob had dug this well. In his day, Jacob himself drank from this well, and so did his entire household and livestock. Many succeeding generations continued to use this well. Now, the Samaritans were making use of this same source of water.

'Had there been a better supply of water in this area, then surely Jacob or his successors would have discovered it by now. Yet, this well remains the best available supply of water in this area. Unless you are greater than our forefather Jacob, how can you expect to provide me with *living water*? Where is the source of this living water?' (Cf. Matt. 12:42; John 8:53; Heb. 3:3)

### John 4:13-14a

All who drank of the water from this well would thirst again. However, none who drink of the water that the Lord Jesus would give them would ever thirst; i.e. they would never—at any time—thirst again. The water that the Son of God would give them would refresh them—not just for a time—but for all eternity. This water would satisfy their thirst, not just for the moment, but forever.

### John 4:14b

(See Isa. 12:3; 44:3; 49:10)

The living water of which the Lord Jesus had been speaking is that 'water' which imparts life to a person's soul. Like a spring of water within, it would well up to produce eternal life.

By this time, it should have been evident to the woman that the Lord was not speaking of meeting a person's *physical* needs, but of meeting a person's *spiritual* needs. That is the purpose of this living water. (John 7:37-39)

In this context, the term 'water' is a spiritual analogy for that which satisfies the *thirst* of the soul; just as the term 'bread' or 'food' is a spiritual analogy for that which satisfies the *hunger* of the soul.

### John 4:15

Still the woman does not understand that the Lord is speaking to her about spiritual truths. Her mind is still thinking of physical water. She is thinking of an endless supply of physical water that will render it unnecessary for her to draw water from the well. Perhaps she is thinking of a mountain spring providing an unlimited supply of clean, fresh water. However, to her knowledge, no such spring existed in that area.

Even so, she says to the Lord,

(15b)...*"Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."* (ESV; cf. John 6:34)

## The Woman's Personal Life Exposed

### **John 4:16-18**

#### **John 4:16**

At this point, the Lord brings home to her that of which he had been aware all along—the circumstances of her personal life.

*(16) Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." (ESV)*

The Son of God instructs the woman to invite her husband to join her at the well. Then, Jesus would discuss what was meant by giving her living water. (John 2:24-25)

#### **John 4:17**

Taken completely by surprise, the woman replies,

*(17b) ... "I have no husband"...*

The Lord Jesus knew very well that this woman had no husband. His purpose in telling her to go call her husband was to challenge her conscience. Jesus needed to make her fully aware of her present moral and spiritual condition, before she would appreciate the significance of the truths that the Lord was presenting to her mind and soul.

This principle remains true today: Before a sinner can come to see his or her need of redemption, he or she must be made fully aware of their present sinful condition and of their deep spiritual need which can be met only in Christ Jesus.

#### **John 4:18**

(Cf. Ezek. 16:32-34; Mark 10:11-12; Heb. 13:4)

In this verse, it is apparent that the woman has become acutely aware that Jesus knows everything about her. She realises that nothing in her life remains concealed from the Lord's knowledge. Now she understands that she cannot keep any secrets from the eyes of him with whom we have to do. The Lord knew very well that this woman had had five husbands. He knew also that the man with whom she was now co-habiting was not her husband. (Ps. 90:8; Heb. 4:13)

## Worshipping God in Spirit and Truth

### **John 4:19-26**

#### **John 4:19**

Although initially she must have been shocked at the Lord's knowledge of her personal life, the woman does not deny anything that the Lord has said. Instead, she acknowledges that he must be a prophet.

Possibly, in an attempt to move the conversation to another topic, the woman begins to discuss a matter of religious dispute between Jews and Samaritans. On the other hand, the woman may have desired sincerely to find out where she should go to find out more about God, and where she might confess her sins to God. (Cf. Luke 24:19)

### John 4:20

The Samaritan woman had acknowledged Jesus as a prophet. Perhaps, then, this prophet would be able to answer the long-standing question concerning the right place to worship God. The Samaritans and their ancestors had worshipped God on Mount Gerizim (the mount of blessing—Deut. 28.) According to their tradition, but entirely false, the Samaritans believed that it was on this mountain that Abraham took Isaac to offer up in sacrifice to God. Indeed, the Samaritans had built their own temple on Mount Gerizim; although, at the time Jesus spoke, this temple no longer stood. It had been destroyed by John Hyrcanus about 129 BC.

The Samaritans, therefore, believed that God ought to be worshipped on Mount Gerizim, whereas the Jews contended that a person could truly worship God only on Mount Zion; i.e., at the temple in Jerusalem. Thus, the woman asks the Lord Jesus if he can resolve this argument: Where must we go to worship God? (Deut. 12:5-11; 1 Kings 9:1-3; 2 Chron. 6:5-6; 7:16)

### John 4:21

In solemn terms, the Lord Jesus replied that the time was coming when people would worship the Father neither on Mount Gerizim nor in the temple at Jerusalem. The temple was not only the house of God and a house of prayer; it was also, and most significantly, the place to offer sacrifices. However, these ceremonial and ritual sacrifices would no longer be required by God. The Lamb of God had come to offer one final sacrifice for sin forever. Thus, as the God-ordained place of sacrifice, the then-existing temple at Jerusalem would no longer find a place in God's plan. God would be worshipped in another manner, and prayers and sacrifices of praise to God would be offered not according to laws, rituals and ceremonies, which were valid but temporary, but according to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God was about to revive true spiritual worship among his people. Then, people would no longer be required to confine their worship of the Father to one particular locality. (Acts 17:24; see also Matt. 18:20)

### John 4:22

The people of Samaria worshipped according to their own traditions, and according to their version of the scriptures—the *Samaritan Pentateuch*. However, their understanding of the true and living God was at best partial, and usually involved a gross corruption of true spiritual worship. Their claimed worship of the Father was not according to truth, but according to a grievous deviation from the truth. An open and honest scrutiny of their religious history would have revealed this to anyone seeking sincerely to worship the one true God. (Cf. 2 Kings 17:24-41; see also Ezra 4:1-24)

Again, the temple built by their forefathers on Mount Gerizim was not authorised by God but by man. This temple no longer stood on their holy mount; but still they performed their religious rites and ceremonies as though they were obeying the will of God. However, if these people had been obeying God's will, they would have been worshipping the Father in Jerusalem. Superseding and replacing the earlier temporary sanctuaries, the temple in Jerusalem was then the only place of worship in which God had caused his name to be remembered. However, as the Lord Jesus had just indicated, the time was coming when people would no longer confine their worship of the Father to even this most holy and revered house of God in Jerusalem.

(22a) *"You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know..."*  
(ESV)

As with so many religions today which profess to worship God, the Samaritans did not really know what, or whom, they worshipped. Their worship was purely according to the traditions of men, and to a distorted interpretation of part of the Old Testament scriptures as rendered by their Samaritan Pentateuch. However, sincere they may have been, the Samaritans did not, and could not, possess an accurate concept of the one true God, nor of his requirements for all mankind. These truths were contained in the Hebrew canon of Scripture alone, and were proclaimed to the people by the Old Testament prophets alone.

Thus, the Lord Jesus says to this woman:

(22a) *“You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know...”*

Since God had revealed his Word and ways to Israel, and had entrusted to them alone his Holy Scriptures, they knew what God required (although, often, they did not practise what God required). They knew the one whom they worshipped—for they knew how to worship the Lord God in accordance with the truths of his Word. In that Word, God had revealed where his name was to be remembered.

(22b) *“...we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”*

In that Word, too, God had revealed the one and only way of salvation for fallen mankind. If, therefore, a person wished to worship the Lord and to experience his salvation, he or she must approach God in his own appointed way. The knowledge and provision of this salvation comes to mankind through the Jews—for to the Jews were entrusted the very words of God. (Rom. 3:1-2; 9:5; cf. Luke 24:47)

#### John 4:23

Even so, as the Lord had declared already, a time is coming—and has now come—when the worshippers of God will worship him—

(23b) *“...in spirit and truth”... (ESV)*

The true worship of God is not a matter of observing ordinances, rites and ceremonies. These are outward acts. In and of themselves, they can do nothing for the soul. They must be united with true spiritual worship. True spiritual worship is a matter of the heart; and this is the only kind of worship that is acceptable to God. It is not so much a matter of what a person *does*, as what a person *is*. God looks upon the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7; John 5:25)

The Father seeks people who are humble, sincere and honest to be his worshippers. He desires the worship of a contrite soul; a soul without any trace of hypocrisy, deceit or pretence. He desires those who long to be whole—and who seek to be pure—to come to worship him.

(23c) *“...for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”*

These are they who worship the Father *“in spirit and truth.”* (Isa. 66:1-2; Luke 18:9-14)

#### John 4:24

Why does the Father seek such worshippers? Because God is Spirit. He possesses no material or bodily parts. He is pure Spirit. He communicates with our souls; and, by his grace and by the operations of the Holy Spirit, he elevates our souls to a higher spiritual level. Likewise, we communicate with our Father in heaven from our souls.

Frequently, we may feel that our prayers to God are very inadequate, or we find it extremely difficult at times to express in words our innermost thoughts and feelings. Our

heavenly Father knows our difficulties, and his Holy Spirit interprets our prayers to God. (Rom. 8:26-27; 2 Cor. 3:17-18)

This is why we must speak to God “...*in spirit and truth.*” This is why our worship and praise must be spiritual, and not earthly or unspiritual. This is why God requires us to come before him in humility, and contrition, and without any trace of dishonesty or pretence. God wants the worship of our sanctified hearts and minds, not the worship of our unsanctified fleshly natures. (Ps. 51:17; Isa. 57:15)

When, however, pride, envy, deceit, impurity and other sins mingle with our worship, we are no longer offering our worship in spirit and truth. Since God is a holy, righteous and pure Spirit, he cannot and will not accept the worship, prayers or praises of an impure heart or mind. (Ps. 66:18)

### John 4:25

At this point, the woman makes known her belief in the coming Messiah. How she might have become aware of the Messiah in such explicit terms is uncertain.

The Samaritans acknowledged only the first five books of Moses—the Pentateuch. In the Pentateuch, the Lord speaks of the *one who would bruise the serpent's head*—a reference to the coming Redeemer. He speaks also of the coming *Shiloh*—another reference to the Messiah. Again, in Deuteronomy, the Lord speaks of the *Prophet* like Moses, whom he would raise up from among the people. Once again, this probably refers to the coming Redeemer. (Gen. 3:15; 49:10; Deut. 18:14,18-19)

However, in none of these prophecies is the precise term *Messiah* or *Anointed One* used to refer to the coming Redeemer. It is, however, possible that the woman had heard of the Messiah from Jewish people, or even from other parts of the Old Testament Scriptures. Unlike the Pentateuch, other parts of the Old Testament do speak expressly of the Messiah.

At any rate, this Samaritan woman held to the belief of a coming Messiah. She believed, also, that this Messiah would be able to explain all these things to her.

### John 4:26

Then Jesus revealed to this woman his true identity:

(26b)...“*I who speak to you am he.*” (ESV)

‘I am the Messiah. I am the expected Redeemer. I am the promised Anointed One of God. I—the one to whom you have been speaking—am the Saviour of the world.’

Only to very few of his own people did the Lord Jesus reveal his identity so plainly as to this Samaritan woman. For the most part, his own people did not receive him; so it is certain that they would not have believed that he was God's Messiah. For the most part, their idea of a Messiah was of one who would deliver them in triumph from the yoke of the Roman oppressor. The Lord Jesus, however, did not match their earthly and carnal expectations. He spoke only of a spiritual and heavenly kingdom. (Rom. 10:20-21)

Yet, although the majority of his own people rejected his claims, other people did receive him. In this case, the one who received him was a despised Samaritan woman. Jesus revealed the fact of his Messiahship to this woman because he knew her heart. The Lord saw the true longings of her soul, as God had prepared it by his grace. He knew that this woman's response would be favourable, and that she would accept this profound statement with humility and faith. (Cf. John 9:35-38)

Let us remember, too, that—in the providence of God—the Lord had to pass through Samaria; i.e. he *must needs* pass through Samaria. The reason he had to pass through Samaria was that this woman might come into direct contact with the Saviour, and so find forgiveness of sins and eternal life. To this end, therefore, the Lord Jesus tells her that he is the expected Messiah—the Saviour of sinful men and women, and therefore her Saviour too.

Thus, it is written:

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10 ESV)*

How important it is for each of God’s people to experience those times in their lives when they must of necessity ‘pass through Samaria’: That is, when—on becoming fully aware of where God wants them to be at any given time—they leave their present place or location in obedience to God’s will, and are found subsequently in the right place at the right time for the right person.

## **One Sows—Another Reaps**

### **John 4:27-38**

#### **John 4:27**

At this point, the disciples returned from the nearby town with their newly purchased food. On arriving at the well, however, they were greatly surprised to find the Lord Jesus talking to a woman. (Cf. Luke 7:39) According to Jewish tradition, a rabbi should not engage in conversation with a woman out of doors—not even with his own wife. When, therefore, the disciples found Jesus talking openly with a *Samaritan* woman they were astonished. However, none of them dared to ask the woman what she wanted, or why she had presumed to speak with their Master. Again, the Lord’s disciples were afraid to ask Jesus himself why he had been talking to this Samaritan woman.

#### **John 4:28-29a**

The woman did not wait for the disciples to start asking inopportune questions about her. Instead, she headed back to town in great haste. Before departing, however, she had left her water vessel at the well to enable the Lord to refresh his thirst. The woman had already planned to return to the well later, at which time she would be able to collect her water jar.

*(29a) “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did...” (ESV)*

Whenever the woman reached Sychar, she began telling everyone she met about Jesus. She spoke to them of the conversation they had had together, and of the things he had said concerning her. Then she invited her townspeople to come out with her to the well to meet Jesus personally.

At this stage, the woman does not speak to the people about the living water. She speaks to them about what the Lord had said concerning her personal life. This would be no secret to the townspeople. However, the woman desired to emphasise to them that the stranger whom she had just met at the well also knew all about her sinful way of life. (John 4:17-18)

Then, she asks,

### John 4:29b

(29b) "...Can this be the Christ?"

Although Jesus has already told her that he was the Messiah, she does not presume to declare this to her fellow-citizens. Perhaps she does not think it appropriate that a sinner like herself should be the one to announce the coming of the Christ. Instead, she gently makes the suggestion in the form of a question.

(29b) "...Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:25-26)

### John 4:30

In view of what the woman had just said to them, the townspeople considered that they would need to determine for themselves whether the prophet of whom she had been speaking was indeed the Christ. Therefore, on reaching a consensus, the citizens of Sychar began making their way out of the town as a body, heading toward the well and to the Saviour of the world. (Matt. 8:11-12)

(In passing, we might observe that this woman's testimony to the Saviour proved more effective than any witness borne by the Twelve disciples, while buying food in the town. Surely, if anyone should have invited these needy people to come to meet the Saviour, it should have been his own disciples.)

### John 4:31

In the meantime, the Lord's disciples were exhorting their Master to take something to eat. They had just returned from the town, fully aware that—before they had parted company with Jesus some time earlier—their Master had been extremely tired with his journey and very hungry. Therefore, the disciples considered that he must be more than ready to eat the food they had just bought for him.

### John 4:32

Jesus, however, speaks to them of a 'food' that satisfies more than physical nourishment.

(32b)...*"I have food to eat that you do not know about."* (ESV)

This expression must have greatly puzzled these disciples. Here, the Lord was asserting that he already had a means of sustenance, of which the disciples were unaware and of which they could not appreciate at this time. This sustenance was even more valuable and enriching to the Lord than the food which the disciples had just brought to him: For it was food from above.

### John 4:33

Like the woman of Samaria, the disciples took the Lord's words literally. They thought that he was speaking of *physical* nourishment. Therefore, they assumed that someone must have brought him something to eat. However, since it was none of their own number, who could it have been? Apart from the Samaritan woman, no one else had come out to the well—and the woman had brought no food with her. Who, then, had provided food for Jesus?

### John 4:34

The Lord expands on what he has just said:



(34b) ... *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."* (ESV)

The food of which the Lord had been speaking, of course, was not physical food as the disciples had imagined. Jesus had been speaking of spiritual food and spiritual satisfaction. The 'food' of which the Son of God had been speaking was to obey the will of his Father in heaven, and to accomplish his work. This is what provided true satisfaction and true nourishment to the soul—obeying God's will and finishing his work.

It was God's will that his Son should come here to Jacob's well. It was God's will that he should meet with the Samaritan woman at this well. Again, it was God's will that Jesus should speak to this woman of the living water and of the gift of eternal life.

Doing these things was what provided the Lord with food—food for his soul. It was true nourishment for his mind and spirit. The satisfaction provided to the soul by doing the will of God and the work of God is greater by far than that provided by any physical nourishment; however essential this may be. (John 6:33,38)

### John 4:35

Even while Jesus was still speaking to his disciples about these things, the citizens of Sychar were advancing from the town to meet him. As he looked toward the town, the Lord Jesus saw this great throng of people—still at a distance—but drawing ever closer to the well.

At this point, the Lord changed the topic of his conversation with his disciples. Speaking now of the anticipated grain harvest, Jesus said,

(35a) *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?'"* (ESV)

On looking at the fields, a person may think to himself that another four months will pass before the harvest. At this stage, the crop is not yet ready or ripe for the reapers to gather in the grain.

However, continues Jesus,

(35b) *"...Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."* (ESV)

Here, the Lord is instructing his disciples to think above the material and physical realm. He commands them to open their eyes—to comprehend with their minds—that a harvest field stands ready at this moment. Thus, the Lord bids his followers to look upon this field; for now is the time for reaping—not tomorrow, or in several months time. This crop is ripe already for harvesting; and, if it is not harvested while still ripe, the entire crop will be lost. (Matt. 9:36-38)

### John 4:36

Even now—even at this moment in time—the reaper is about to draw his wages. Even now, he is harvesting the ripened crop. The crop he is harvesting, however, is a crop for eternal life. He is harvesting a crop over which a sower has laboured faithfully and diligently and in the sweat of his brow. (Rom. 1:13)

From the nature of these remarks, it should have become evident to his disciples that the Lord Jesus was not speaking of the *literal* grain harvest but of a *spiritual* harvest—a harvest of souls. It is true that the grain harvest would not be ready for reaping for another four months. The spiritual harvest of souls, however, was ready at this moment for reap-

ing. Therefore, both the sower and the reaper may rejoice together—bringing in the sheaves. (Ps. 126:6; Prov. 11:30; Dan. 12:3)

### John 4:37

Thus is fulfilled the saying,

(37b) “...‘One sows and another reaps’...” (ESV)

One person sows the seed of God’s Word. This person labours long and hard over the seed that he has sown. He prays earnestly for that seed to take root in good ground. Incessantly, he beseeches God that he will cause that seed to spring up and grow. He prays and pleads with God to cause that seed to ripen and to bring forth fruit to eternal life. He prays for an abundant harvest of precious souls. Yet, perhaps for all his long, hard and faithful labours, this sower does not himself reap the harvest. By the appointment of God,

(37b) “...‘One sows and another reaps’...”

One person sows the seed of God’s Word. Another reaps the harvest of souls to life eternal. Nevertheless, both have proved faithful in the service of the Lord. Therefore, both sower and reaper together will rejoice in the harvest, and the Lord will reward both according to their works.

### John 4:38

The Lord was sending his disciples to reap a harvest over which they personally had not laboured. All the hard work of preparing the ground, sowing the seed, watering and nourishing the soil, has been accomplished by others. These other servants of God have done the hardest, and perhaps least rewarding, part of the work. Now, the disciples of the Lord Jesus were about to enter into their labours. Then, they would reap the benefits of their predecessor’s extremely arduous toil. (1 Cor. 3:5-9)

(Incidentally, those who preceded the disciples in sowing the Word of God included the OT prophets and John the Baptist. They included also those Jewish teachers who proclaimed faithfully to the people the teaching of the OT Scriptures. Most importantly, it included the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself. Additionally, we might include the individual testimonies to the wonderful words and works of Jesus from all those who had believed on him since the beginning of his earthly ministry. All these contributed to sowing the Word of God in the hearts and minds of the people.)

To return to verse 38, the harvest of souls of which the Lord was speaking was the approaching crowd of Samaritan townspeople. As they came nearer, the long flowing garments of these people would give the appearance of standing grain in the fields. This may be why the Lord used this analogy to speak of a crop now ready for harvesting. The ‘crop’ was the people of Sychar in Samaria. The harvest was the winning of their souls to Christ and to eternal life through him.

## Many Samaritans Believe in Christ

### John 4:39-42

#### John 4:39

Many of the people of Sychar believed on the Lord Jesus because of the woman’s testimony concerning her personal life. They believed that anyone who knew of such details must be a prophet. Taking into account other matters spoken of by the woman, they believed that this was the Prophet mentioned in the Pentateuch: This was the Christ.

It is noteworthy to observe here how willing and eager these Samaritans were to accept and believe on Christ. This stands in marked contrast to the treatment received by the Lord from his own people, the Jews.

**John 4:40**

By this time, the Samaritans from Sychar had arrived at the well, and had spoken with the Lord. Through their discussions with him, and because of the woman's personal testimony, many believed on him. We see here how important a word of testimony can be, and how people can be led to seek the Lord through our personal witness to his wonderful love, power and grace.

This winning of these souls to faith in Christ represented the harvest ready for reaping of which the Lord had spoken earlier to his disciples.

*(40b) ...they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.*

Eager to learn much more about the Lord Jesus, the Samaritans invited him to return to the town with them and to stay for a while. The Lord consented to spend two days in their presence, teaching them about the things of God and about his mission in the world. (Rev. 3:20)

**John 4:41**

Before the Lord Jesus left for Galilee, however, many more Samaritans believed his words and accepted him as their Saviour. Thus, in Sychar, a great harvest of souls was reaped to eternal life. Undoubtedly, these believers in Sychar would carry the message of God's salvation to other people throughout Samaria.

**John 4:42**

The Samaritan woman's fellow citizens told her that they believed on the Son of God, not just because of her testimony, but also—and principally—on account of the Lord's own words. They had heard him for themselves and they had become convinced that this Man was indeed the Christ. Thus, they said to the woman,

*(42c) "...and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world."*

The phrase *'this is indeed'* is based on a word meaning *'truly'*, *'with absolute certainty'* or *'beyond all doubt'*. (John 17:8; Acts 4:12)

**Jesus Heals an Official's Son****John 4:43-54****John 4:43**

Jesus remained in Sychar for two days. After this, however, it became necessary for him to continue his journey toward Galilee. There—in the providence of God—the Lord Jesus had to meet another needy individual.

Here, once again, we note that every step taken by the Son of God was in accordance with his Father's perfect planning and timing. Jesus would arrive at his next destination just at the very moment when his help would be needed desperately. So it is with every event and circumstance in our lives. The Lord comes to us in our need just at the most appropriate moment.

Looking, now at verse 44:

### **John 4:44**

The Lord had already stated that no prophet receives honour from his own people or in his own country; i.e., his home town—the town in which he had been brought up. In travelling to Galilee on this occasion, therefore, the Lord intended to avoid his hometown of Nazareth. Other towns and villages in Galilee were more than willing to receive him, and he had much work to accomplish there. (Matt. 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24)

From this, we learn that we ought not to pursue the Lord's work in an area that has consistently rejected the Lord's message. Other areas are willing and eager to hear and heed God's Word. Therefore, where it is consistent with God's will, the Lord's servant ought to labour in those other areas. (Matt. 7:6; 10:23)

### **John 4:45**

When, therefore, the Lord arrived in those other parts of Galilee, the Galileans extended to him a warm welcome. These Galileans had heard of all that the Lord Jesus had done. Many of them had actually witnessed some of his works while they had been attending the Passover Feast in Jerusalem. Therefore, they knew already something about Jesus and about his mission. (John 2:23)

### **John 4:46**

Once in the province of Galilee, the Lord travelled to Cana—a village about 5 miles north of Nazareth. This was the village where the Lord had miraculously turned water into wine. Soon after Jesus' arrival in Cana, a royal official approached the Lord. This nobleman and his household lived in Capernaum. At that time, Capernaum was a flourishing town located on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

### **John 4:47**

The nobleman had a son who, at this moment, lay very close to death. The town of Capernaum, however, was almost 18 miles distant from Cana—a full day's journey. In great anxiety, the royal official begged Jesus to come down to Capernaum immediately to heal his stricken son. The man believed that Jesus had power to heal his son—but apparently not to heal him from a distance of nearly 18 miles! As yet, his faith in Jesus was incomplete. (Cf. Matt. 9:18-19)

### **John 4:48**

The Lord Jesus gently rebukes this man for his lack of faith. After all, this nobleman must have heard of the miraculous signs that Jesus had performed elsewhere, including Cana of Galilee where water had been turned to wine. He must have known that the Son of God, whose help he now besought for his dying son, needed only to speak the word of command and it would be effected forthwith. Yet, this man could not believe that the Lord could heal his son without travelling to Capernaum. Thus, Jesus was inferring that unless this man—and many others like him—witnessed his miraculous power at first hand, and saw the evidence with their own eyes, they would not believe wholeheartedly in the Son of God.

To this end, Jesus said to this nobleman,

*(48b)... "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." (ESV)*

On another occasion, the Lord was to say to Thomas:

...*“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (John 20:29 ESV)

#### John 4:49

By now, very deeply concerned for the welfare of his dying son, the official appeals again to the Lord Jesus,

(49b) ...*“Sir, come down before my child dies.”* (ESV)

Still believing that Jesus needed to travel 18 miles to Capernaum in order to heal his son, the nobleman calls out in distress for the Lord’s help. ‘It will take a full day or more for us to reach Capernaum. By that time, however, my son may be dead. Please come now. Please leave here with me immediately to come and heal my dying son.’

#### John 4:50

At this point, the Lord replied to the man:

(50b) ...*“Go; your son will live.”* ... (ESV)

These indeed were words of immense comfort and reassurance to this utterly distraught man. ‘Go! Make your journey home without me! Be assured, however, that your son will not die. On the contrary, *your son will live*, for I have healed him. By my word of command, I have just made your dying son whole.’ (Cf. Matt. 8:13)

The man could have doubted what the Lord had just said to him. Without faith in Jesus’ words, this nobleman could have despaired when he realised that the Lord was not going to accompany him home to heal his child. Instead, however, he took Jesus at his word, and immediately began his long journey home. If the Lord Jesus had said that his son would live, then it must be so. It must be possible for Jesus to heal people without actually being present. Certainly, if he is the Son of God, then he must have the power and the authority to heal by a word of command—and at a distance.

The royal official’s faith was slowly beginning to increase.

#### John 4:51

The following day, as the official neared his home in Capernaum, his servants caught sight of him approaching and ran eagerly to meet him. Immediately, they told the father that his son was living. Something very remarkable had happened: Suddenly—and with no obvious cause—the young man had been restored completely to full health and strength. There was no longer any cause for distress or anxiety.

#### John 4:52

The father asked his servants the time at which his son had become well. In reply, the servants told him that it was at (or during) the seventh hour (1.00 pm or 13:00 hours) on the previous day. Then the father realised that this was the precise hour when the Lord had said to him,

(53b) ...*“Your son will live”*... (See also v.50)

The Lord Jesus had healed this man’s dying son at the very instant that he had issued the words of hope and encouragement to his distraught father. (Ps. 107:20; see also Matt. 8:8,13)

### John 4:53

The healing of his son at this precise moment in time convinced the father of the person, power and authority of Jesus the Christ. Now, he believed on him with all his heart. Now, the father's faith had become much more complete.

On hearing and seeing what had happened, the nobleman's entire household also placed their faith in the Son of God.

### John 4:54

John tells us that this was the second miraculous sign that the Lord performed *in Galilee*. Evidently, the Lord had performed other miracles in Judea. In Galilee, however, his first miracle was turning water into wine, and this took place in Cana.

The second Galilean miracle was commanded from Cana and was effected in Capernaum. By these miraculous signs, the Lord demonstrated beyond all doubt that God had sent him, and that he was acting in God's name and by his express authority. (John 2:1-11)

Again, by these miraculous signs, the Lord Jesus demonstrated convincingly that he possessed the same almighty and sovereign power as his Father in heaven. Only he who possessed the attributes of God could exercise—by a word of command—his almighty power to create (as respecting water to wine at Cana) or to heal at a distance (as respecting the dying young man at Capernaum).

## John Chapter 5

### Healed After Thirty-Eight Years

#### **John 5:1-15**

##### **John 5:1**

Some time after this, the Lord travelled back up to Jerusalem to attend one of the Jewish feasts. If this was one of the Passover feasts, this would mean that four Passovers took place during the period of the Lord's public ministry. In this case, the Lord's ministry would have lasted approximately three-and-a-half years. However, if this feast is not one of the Passovers, then it is possible—but not certain—that the Lord's ministry lasted for a shorter period of perhaps two-and-a-half-years. (John 2:13; 6:4; 13:1)

##### **John 5:2**

In the city of Jerusalem, close to the Sheep Gate, was a pool called Bethesda (meaning *House of Mercy*). By this pool were five colonnades with porches. In these porches, people could find shelter from the heat of the sun or from unfavourable weather conditions. (Neh. 3:1; 12:39)

##### **John 5:3a**

Sheltering in the porches beneath these colonnades sat or lay a considerable number of sick or disabled people. Among them were the blind, the lame and the completely paralysed—together with many other sick or handicapped people.

*(3b) [Some manuscripts insert, wholly or in part], waiting for the moving of the water; (4) for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had. (ESV footnote to John 5:3) <sup>19</sup>*

Day after day and week after week, these people lay in these porches, eagerly waiting for the stirring of the waters.

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<sup>19</sup> Verses 3b and 4 are omitted from the most reliable manuscripts, as they are not found in any manuscripts before the fourth century. Possibly, they were incorporated in the text from a marginal comment. As an editor or copyist's comment, however, this passage ought not to be considered as part of God's inspired and infallible Word.

## Expository Notes

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On certain occasions, an angel of the Lord would stir up the waters. On these occasions, the first person to step down into the pool was then healed of whatever ailment he had. That person's act of faith in stepping into the waters was met by the healing hand of God upon his or her afflicted body or mind.

### John 5:5

At this time, a certain bedridden man was lying in these porches, patiently awaiting help and healing. This man had suffered from his condition for thirty-eight years—although it is not known how much of this time he had spent lying near the pool of Bethesda.

This disabled man lay so close to the source of healing. Yet, because his disability prevented him from reaching the waters in time, healing was constantly denied him. Perhaps, unlike others at the pool, this man had no one to assist him down to the waters. Nor, apparently, were any of those nearby—or their friends—willing to help this man in his need. Thirty-eight years had passed, but no one noticed or cared that he had been so cruelly neglected and abandoned by the many who passed him by.

Such a situation must have brought this stricken and forsaken man to the point of complete hopelessness and utter despair. Yet, there was One who knew of his desolate plight—and who cared:

### John 5:6

One day, as this man lay in these porches, the Lord Jesus walked up to him. Clearly, the Son of God was not about to pass him by. Rather the Lord came and sought him out, and he did so when the man was in no condition to seek help for himself.

Knowing that this man had been in this condition for a very long time, the Lord Jesus asked him directly,

*(6c)...“Do you want to be healed?” (ESV)*

Here, the Son of God searches the true motives and attitudes of this man's heart. Did he really want to be healed of his pitiable condition? What was the real desire of his heart? Did he desire with all his heart to be made whole—or did he wish to continue as he was?

Perhaps, if he were to continue as an invalid, he might hope to receive sympathy and alms from others. Although, it seemed, that no one much cared for him, someone must have been providing him with the essentials of life.

It is a possible also—although by no means certain—that this man's former lifestyle had caused, or largely contributed toward, his present helpless condition. Perhaps, too, he would still be pursuing this way of life, had not this disability prevented him from doing so.

Whatever the reason, the Lord Jesus asked him:

*(6c)...“Do you want to be healed?” (Cf. v.14)*

### John 5:7

The disabled man failed to understand the significance of Jesus' question. Instead of answering the Lord's question directly, the man begins to provide Jesus with an explanation: He had no one to aid him or carry him down to water when it was stirred. Without this assistance, others always reached the pool before he did. Thus, the man declares:

*(7b) “...while I am going another steps down before me..”*



'I am stranded here in these porches. I have no opportunity of getting down into the water before others. For many years, this has been my plight. With all my heart, I want to reach the healing waters—but I have no one to help me down.' (Ps. 72:12-13)

Perhaps this disabled man hoped that—since this stranger had stopped to talk with him—then he would also help him reach the pool. However, the man must have been amazed to hear Jesus' next words to him:

### **John 5:8**

At this point, the Son of God commanded the bedridden man:

*(8b) ... "Get up, take up your bed and walk." (ESV)*

Not knowing who Jesus was, this command must have astonished the disabled man. For thirty-eight years, he had been confined to his sleeping mat. How, then, could this stranger imagine that he could pick up his bed and walk, after so long a period of immobility?

Yet, something about this Stranger inspired reverence and awe. Something about his manner and deportment indicated that this was no ordinary man. He commanded with authority. He spoke—and you knew you must obey. (Cf. Mark 1:22-27)

*(8b) ... "Get up" [the Lord said.] "take up your bed and walk."*

The disabled man did not stop to wonder whether he would be able to walk or not. He obeyed the Lord's command. He got up, he picked up his mat, and he walked.

Once again, the Lord had healed by a word of command. Once again, healing had been effected instantly. (Cf. Matt. 9:6-8; Mark 2:10-12)

### **John 5:9**

Verse 9 confirms that no delay occurred between the time the Lord commanded the man to walk, and the time that healing took place. Healing occurred immediately. The very moment that the man obeyed the word of the Lord, he was made whole. Again, the man's healing was complete. No recovery or convalescent period was necessary. The man had been thoroughly healed.

Under normal circumstances—and after thirty-eight years of virtual inactivity—the man's leg muscles would have degenerated substantially or atrophied completely. However, as part of his healing, the Lord had restored full power to the man's muscles—and, of course, to every other part of his wasted body. Now, he was as fit and healthy as it was possible for a man of his age to be.

Gladly, therefore, this man obeyed the Lord's command to pick up his mat and walk. Here was the evidence to all the people that this man had been healed—truly and completely healed.

Then, in the latter part of verse 9, John records these significant words:

*(9b) ... Now that day was the Sabbath. (ESV)*

The evangelist notes that this healing miracle took place on a Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day of rest from all forms of labour, except works of love, mercy and compassion. (Matt. 12:1-13; Luke 13:10-17; see also Mark 2:27-28)

### John 5:10

A notable miracle had taken place in this man's life, and soon it became common knowledge among the people of Jerusalem. However, a number of these people were incensed when they heard and saw what this man was doing: He was carrying a bed-mat through the streets of Jerusalem on the Sabbath! Did this man not know that it was forbidden to labour on the Sabbath? Why, then, was he labouring under the weight of his mat!? This was a flagrant abuse of the tradition concerning the Sabbath. (Jer. 17:21-22)

Soon, these people took issue with the man whom Jesus had healed. Totally ignoring the fact that a chronically sick man had been made completely well, they said to him angrily:

*(10b)...“It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.”*  
(ESV)

‘You have no right to be carrying that bedroll. The law prohibits you from performing labour of any sort—and you are breaking this law.’ (Exodus 20:8-11)

### John 5:11

The man must have wondered what dreadful thing he had done to incur the wrath of the citizens. Had he not just been commanded to take up his mat and walk? And was not his healing proof in itself that the Man who thus commanded him—whoever he was—was authorised to heal? Thus, to the angry voices arrayed against him, the healed man replied,

*(11)...“The man who healed me, that man said to me, ‘Take up your bed, and walk’”* (ESV)

‘I am merely obeying the command of the person who made me well. It was he who said to me,

*(11c) “...‘Take up your bed, and walk’”*

By implication, of course, this man could only have been healed from such a condition by someone acting in the name of God, and by his authority. This, however, the man's questioners conveniently chose to ignore. Instead of giving credit to the One who had performed this healing miracle, they were trying to discredit his glorious name. By implying that he had broken the commandments of God, they were inferring that the person who had healed this man could have no association with God.

Although this angry crowd may have suspected that Jesus had healed this man, they were not yet sure. (Cf. John 9:16)

### John 5:12

Mercilessly, the Jews pursued this line of questioning with the healed man. They demanded to know who had healed the man. What person would dare command anyone on a Sabbath day to take up his mat and walk? Surely this healed man must realise that anyone who commanded him to break the Sabbath was acting against the law and against the authority of the Jewish religious Council? (Cf. Matt. 21:23; Rom. 10:2-4)

### John 5:13

Although interrogated closely concerning the identity of his healer, the man proved unable to say who had made him well. He did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus had not identified himself to the man, nor had the Lord remained long enough at the pool for the man to ask

him who he was. Whenever he had healed the man, the Lord had slipped away quietly through the throng.

#### John 5:14

Grateful to God for the healing that had so miraculously been carried out in his life, the man made his way to the house of prayer. There, in the temple precincts, he offered prayer and praise to God for making him whole.

Jesus, also, came into the temple at this time. Thus, John says:

*(14a) Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! ..." (ESV)*

Then, for the first time, the man realised that it was Jesus who had made him well.

The Lord continued:

*(14b) "...Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."*

In making the above remark, the Lord seems to be implying that this man's sinful lifestyle had led to his subsequent infirmity. Although by no means true of all such cases, sin may have been the cause of this particular man's disability. Because of his sin, therefore, the man had spent thirty-eight years of his life in an unnecessary and unhappy condition. (Ezra 9:13; Ps. 118:18)

This man might have accomplished so much in those years, had he not wasted his life by sinful practices. Yet, God had mercy on him. Although he may have brought this misery upon himself, the Lord Jesus deliberately sought him out. He fully intended to heal him of his disability, and also to ensure that he received the forgiveness of his sins. (Cf. John 8:11)

To show to the man the connection between his sin and his illness, the Lord met him again in the temple and uttered these words:

*(14b)..."See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."*

By his grace and mercy, the Lord had fully healed and forgiven this man. However, in case he should imagine that he was now free to return to his old way of life, the Lord warns him of the consequences of returning to his former folly.

*(14b) "...Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." (See also 1 Pet. 4:1-5)*

'Stop practising sin. Forsake or renounce your former sin and sinful companions. Follow the way of righteousness and holiness. In doing this, you will be abundantly blessed. However, if you return to your former sins, then next time you may be afflicted with something worse than a long-term illness.' (Cf. Acts 5:1-10)

#### John 5:15

After his encounter with the Lord Jesus in the temple, the man went away into the city to inform the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him.

In telling the Jews, it may not have occurred to the man that he was doing anything that might disadvantage the Lord Jesus. The man may have been attempting to provide the answer to the question put to him earlier. Perhaps, he had been expressly instructed to report back to these authorities if ever he discovered who had healed him. Perhaps, too, in his naiveté, he believed that this good news ought to be declared to everyone. Rejoic-

ing, then, in the healing of his body and soul, he tells the Jewish religious authorities that it was Jesus who had forgiven him and made him well again.

Some commentators believe that this man must have known that the Jewish religious authorities were intent on destroying Jesus. If so, then the man would have been guilty of informing on the Lord Jesus Christ. However, this view does not seem consistent with the fact that—following his healing—the man was found later in the temple, presumably offering praise and thanks to God. Nor, during their questioning of him, did the Jewish religious authorities necessarily reveal to this man what they planned to do with the Lord Jesus.

### Jesus Accused of Blasphemy

#### **John 5:16-18**

##### **John 5:16**

No one—including the Jewish religious authorities—could deny that a notable miracle had taken place. By careful investigation, they would have discovered that the man whom Jesus had healed had indeed been suffering from a paralysing disability for the past thirty-eight years. This was beyond dispute. Also beyond dispute was the fact that this same man was now walking the streets of Jerusalem fit and well.

Again, the Jewish leaders had now established that it was Jesus who had made such a remarkable change in this man's life. This, however, infuriated the religious leaders even more. What right did Jesus have to heal people without their consent or authorisation? In addition, what right did this man have to heal people on the Sabbath? (Cf. Matt. 12:8-14)

The Jewish religious authorities refused to accept that Jesus' ability to heal all manner of bodily, mental and spiritual conditions was a testimony to the fact that he had come from the Father. Instead of accepting this, they did all in their power to discredit the Son of God. Thus, they endeavoured to discredit his name by implying that he had broken the law by healing on the Sabbath.

Jesus, of course, had not broken God's law concerning the Sabbath. Rather, he had overturned man's traditional misinterpretation of that law. God's law strictly prohibited all forms of everyday or commercial work on the Sabbath. However, it did not prohibit works of love, necessity, mercy or compassion. Again, God's law did not prohibit the performance of other good or necessary works on the Sabbath, such as healing or providing for those in need or distress; or for the rescuing of animals in distress. (Mark 3:4; cf. Isa. 58:1-14)

Indeed, not to have ministered in these ways would have been a wilful violation of an even greater and higher law of God. This law is summarised in Mark's Gospel where the Lord Jesus says:

*(30) And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' {Cf. Deut. 6:4-5}*

*(31) The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' {Cf. Lev. 19:18} There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31 ESV)*

##### **John 5:17**

The Jewish religious leaders asserted that the Lord Jesus had contravened the Sabbath, and therefore had violated God's law concerning the Sabbath. In truth, however, the Lord had been upholding and magnifying the law of God. According to the Jewish interpretation of God's law, a person should not perform any work at all on the Sabbath. They reminded

the people that, in six days, God made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day, he rested from all his labours. However, they conveniently forgot that the Creator of heaven and earth is also the Sustainer of heaven and earth. On the seventh day, God rested from his work of *forming* the creation. However, even on the seventh day, God continues his work of *sustaining* the creation. From the beginning of creation to the present time, this work continues apace. (Gen. 2:1-3; Matt. 10:29; Acts 14:17; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:3)

Therefore, in the latter part of verse 17, the Son of God says,

*(17b) ...“My Father is working until now, and I am working.” (ESV)*

God works for the good of his creation—even on the *Sabbath day*. The Son of God, too, works for the good of his Father’s creation—and especially for the good of his people, and for mankind more generally—even on the *Sabbath day*. (John 9:4; 14:10)

### **John 5:18**

On hearing these words, the Jews were utterly enraged. Now, they resolved steadfastly among themselves to put the Lord Jesus to death. As a rule, Roman law prohibited the Jewish courts from executing the death penalty. However, the Jewish authorities would attempt to dispose of Jesus under the semblance of Roman law. (Roman law permitted the death penalty in certain cases.) Failing this—or if the opportunity arose earlier—they would arrange for Jesus to be disposed of in some other way.

Thus, in verse 18, John records:

*(18) This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (ESV)*

The Jewish authorities resolved to put Jesus to death because—by calling God his own Father—they considered him guilty of the worst possible form of blasphemy.

Again, by calling God his Father, Jesus was making himself equal with God. In this verse, the word *equal (with)* is a word meaning *equal in quantity or quality*. When Jesus declared therefore that God was his Father, the Jews knew exactly what he meant. Jesus meant that he had been with God from eternity. He meant that—although a distinct Person—he was one with the Father. The Son of God meant that he possessed all the same glorious and holy characteristics or attributes as did his Father in heaven. (John 8:58; 10:30-33; 14:9; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3)

To the Jews, such claims from a mere man were blasphemous in the extreme. From a mere man, they would indeed have been blasphemous. However, from the Son of God, they were an assertion of his deity and rightful relationship with his heavenly Father. This, however, the Jews could not and would not accept. It was bad enough that Jesus had (supposedly) broken the Sabbath. Now—and much more seriously—he was saying that God was his own Father. Only one solution remained. It would be expedient to all concerned that Jesus be destroyed.

## **Jesus Gives Life to Whom He Will**

### **John 5:19-23**

### John 5:19

Because of their intrinsic unity of will and purpose and inseparable communion with one another, it is impossible for the Son of God to do anything apart from his Father. Everything that the Son does is an expression of, and is in fulfillment of, the will of the Father in heaven. The Son does only those things that he has seen and learned of his heavenly Father. He alone has had access to the most secret councils of God in heaven. He alone knows the full plan and purposes of God for his creation in general and for mankind in particular. (John 5:30; 8:28)

Thus, in verse 19, the Lord declares:

*(19b) ...“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father<sup>20</sup> does, that the Son does likewise.” (ESV)*

Again, as the writer to the Hebrews tells us, the Son is the exact imprint of his Father—the express image or representation of his being. The characteristics of the Father are the exact characteristics of the Son. Similarly, everything that the Father does is reflected in everything that the Son does. Concerning their persons, Father and Son are distinct individuals, co-equal with one another and with the Holy Spirit. Although co-equal and distinct Persons within the Godhead, they are fully united with one another as to will and purpose. For this reason, therefore, the works of the Father are inseparable from the works of the Son. Without exception, the works of the Son express only and always the will of the Father who sent him. (John 12:49-50; 14:10; Heb. 1:3)

### John 5:20

The Father loves his only Son with a love that springs from his holy, righteous and perfect nature. It is divine love. It is a love that is unimaginably pure and true. It is a love that is so wide in its scope and deep in its intensity that it cannot be comprehended by any human mind. A parent may love his or her child deeply and to the extent that they would sacrifice their life for their beloved child. However, God loves his Son to a height and degree that surpasses all human conception or imagination.

Because of his intense love for his Son, the Father reveals to his Son all that he does and that he has planned to do. Unlike human parents, the Father in heaven holds nothing back from his Son. Rather, from before the beginning of time, the Father has shared with his Son the fullness of his will and purposes for the eternal ages. (Luke 10:22-24; John 3:35; see also Prov. 8:22-31)

The people had witnessed already some of the works of the Father expressed through his Son. This included the miraculous signs of healing. The Father had enabled his Son to perform these miracles, and many others, in his name and by his authority. (John 1:18; 10:32)

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<sup>20</sup> **5:19** Greek *he*. [ESV footnote]

The Lord Jesus declared to the religious representatives that he would yet perform among them greater works than those which they had just seen or about which they had heard. Because of those greater works, the people would stand amazed and confounded.

Such greater works would include, but not be confined to, raising the dead (v.21,25, 28,29), and exercising divine judgment (v.22,27,30). Those greater works would be works that the Father would yet perform through his Son, and they would demonstrate to the people that it was God in heaven who had authorised his Son to perform such miraculous and most remarkable signs. In performing those mighty works, the Son would bring glory, honour and praise to the name of his Father in heaven; and by witnessing such indisputable signs of God's power and glory, the people ought to be constrained to seek God's mercy. (John 5:21,25-26)

### John 5:21

By a word of command, the Father brought the entire creation into existence. By a word of command, God created every living thing. Similarly, by a word of command, the Father in heaven raises the dead to life. The Father has power and authority over the realm of the dead. He has power and authority to raise the *physically* dead, and he has power and authority to raise the *spiritually* dead. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins the Father is able to make alive. This is an example of God's glory, and of the greater works of God. These are the works—or demonstrations of God's almighty power and glory—at which the people would stand amazed. (Deut. 32:39; 1 Kings 17:21-22; Eph. 2:1,4-6)

However, as the Son of God asserts in verse 21, the power, glory and authority of the Father is also the power, glory and authority of the Son.

**(21) "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, *so also the Son gives life to whom he will.*" (ESV; bold emphasis added)**

The fact that the Lord Jesus could impart, create, or restore life is further evidence that he came from God and that he is one with God. This is indisputable proof that he is whom he claims to be; i.e., his Father's Son, since no one but God can impart life or restore life to the dead.

The Son possesses all the fullness of God—including his divine attributes (although the fullness of his glory remained veiled while on earth). God's one and only Son has the authority to grant life to whomsoever he will. The Son gives this life to everyone whom his heavenly Father has committed to him from eternity. From before the creation of the world, their names have been written in the Lamb's book of life. (John 17:1-2; Rev. 21:27)

### John 5:22

The Father did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through him the world might find free salvation and deliverance from God's just condemnation on sinners. However, the Day of Judgment would be coming. On that day, the Father will judge all mankind through his Son. He who now is the Saviour of mankind, will—on that day—be mankind's Righteous Judge. (John 12:47; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Heb. 9:27)

However, there is another sense in which we are to understand judgment. A judgment is a time of separation or sundering. Even now, the Son of God had come to separate one group of people from another. He had come to separate his own people from the world of mankind, and to call them to himself. In calling his own to follow him, however, he would be separating them from the rest of mankind. These 'separated ones' or 'sanctified ones' would constitute his church. These would be his holy ones or his 'saints'. They would be the Lord's treasured possession—his redeemed and special people. (John 15:16,19; 1 Pet. 2:9)

**John 5:23**

It is the will of the Father in heaven that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. Exactly the same degree of love, worship, praise, reverence and awe as is given to the Father in heaven is to be given to the Son.

If a person does not love, worship and reverence the Son, then he does not love, worship and reverence the Father who sent him. Again, anyone who refuses to acknowledge the authority, power and glory of the Son refuses thereby to acknowledge the authority, power and glory of the Father.

To refuse homage and worship to the Son is to refuse homage and worship to the Father. (Ps. 2:11-12; Matt. 28:18-19; Heb. 1:5-6; see also Luke 12:8-9)

**From Death to Life**

**John 5:24-27**

**John 5:24**

In verse 24, the Lord Jesus declares:

*(24a) "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life..." (ESV)*

Anyone who acknowledges and obeys the Lord's teaching—recognising that this teaching comes from God—will inherit these blessings. Any person who accepts Jesus' teachings wholeheartedly, and who believes that the Father has sent Jesus, has eternal life. (John 3:16-18; 8:51; 11:26)

*(24b) "...He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."*

In addition, that person will never be condemned. He has passed over permanently from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. The miseries of sin—including spiritual death and alienation from God—will afflict him no more. By the grace of God, he has entered upon a state of spiritual life and blessing through faith in the Son of God and in his Father in heaven. Now, this believer is a child of God, and an heir of God's eternal kingdom. Furthermore, everyone who thus believes is delivered also from eternal death. (Rom. 8:1,16-17, 33-34; 1 John 3:14)

**John 5:25**

Again, the Lord Jesus solemnly declared to the people this fact: A time is coming when the dead would respond to the Son's voice of command. Those who are dead in trespasses and sins would hear the Word of the Lord speaking expressly to them. They would hear his teachings being proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, and—through the work of the Holy Spirit—they would know that the truths of these teachings applied to them. (Cf. John 16:7-11; Acts 4:31; Eph. 2:1,4-5)

By the Holy Spirit, these spiritually dead souls would be made alive. As the Lord Jesus' voice penetrates their souls through his Word and by his Spirit, their souls would be created anew. They would be born again to new and eternal life. They would be drawn by the Holy Spirit to call upon the name of the Lord for salvation. By the grace and mercy of God, the Holy Spirit in regeneration would make them able and willing to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit who brought them to Christ would remain with



them forever, indwelling, sealing and sanctifying them to God for all eternity. (Luke 15:24,32; Col. 2:13)

**John 5:26**

The Father in heaven is uncreated and eternal. No one ever imparted life to the Father in order to bring him into existence. The Father has had no beginning. He is the Self-Existent One and the Self-Sustaining One—without beginning of days or end of life. He gives life to every living thing. (Exodus 3:14; Ps. 90:2; Acts 17:25)

*(26) "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself." (ESV)*

Just as the Father is eternally self-existent, so likewise is the Son. The Son, too, is uncreated and eternal. In respect of his divine nature, no one ever imparted life to the Son in order to bring him into existence. He has had no beginning. Like the Father, his life is eternally self-existent and self-sustaining. He is the eternal Logos. Through the Son, the Father imparts life to every living creature. (John 1:1-4)

Since the Son has this divine life within himself, then it follows that he has the power and authority to impart life to others. He—and he alone—has the ability to impart abundant and eternal life to the spiritually dead, and to deliver them from their state of spiritual death. (1 Cor. 15:45)

This life—this eternal life—is the life that the Son grants to everyone whom the Spirit convicts, convicts and converts to Christ. Everyone who, in repentance and faith, calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. They will receive this gift of life eternal. Repentance and faith are gifts of God's unmerited, sovereign grace. (John 7:37-39)

**John 5:27**

The Father has given his Son full authority to judge mankind because he is himself the Son of Man. He is truly God and he is truly Man. As man, he has experienced everything that a human being can experience—sin apart. This qualifies the Son in a most peculiar sense to understand man's weaknesses and to act as man's Judge. (John 5:22-23; Heb. 4:15)

The Son, therefore, is the Saviour to all those who believe on him and who have received the new birth. However, to all those who have refused to acknowledge him or believe on him and who remain in their sinful state, he is—and will remain—their Judge. On the Day of Judgment, the Son of God will assign the finally impenitent to the place prepared for the devil and his evil angels or demons. (Matt. 25:31-32,41; John 3:18)

**Righteous and Unrighteous Shall Rise****John 5:28-30****John 5:28**

When will the Son of God judge the finally impenitent? He will arraign and finally condemn them before his majestic and glorious throne on the Day of Judgment. The Scripture says that it has been appointed unto men once to die; and after this, the Judgment. (Heb. 9:27; see also Acts 17:30-31)

Therefore, says the Lord Jesus:

## Expository Notes

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*(28) "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (29a) and come out"—*

By his Father's authority, the Son grants spiritual life to whom he will. By that same authority, he will one day command the physically dead to rise from their graves—and they will arise. Just as Lazarus in his grave was to hear the voice of the Son of God resounding through the realms of death, so all mankind will hear his voice commanding their bodily resurrection. Whether their bodies have been committed to the grave or to the sea, or their ashes to the dust of the earth, they will arise at the command of the Lord. (John 11:43-44; cf. Matt. 13:40-43,47-50)

### John 5:29

On that day, all mankind will stand before the Lord Jesus' judgment throne. Those who have done good will be acquitted at this throne of all charges against them. These are his redeemed people, and they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb of God has himself borne their iniquities and atoned for their sin. These are the ones to whom the Lord Jesus has granted eternal life. Their subsequent good works testify to the reality of their conversion and faith. These shall go away into everlasting life. (John 6:39-40; Rom. 14:9-12; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)

Those, however, who have done evil, will be condemned on all charges for which they stand accused. The Lord Jesus never knew them; i.e., he will refuse to acknowledge them. These individuals refused to hear or to heed the voice of God's Spirit speaking to them through the Word. They refused to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ or to seek his salvation. Therefore, they remained in their sins: and, for their unforgiven sins and iniquities, they will be condemned. Their evil attitudes and practices are testimony against them that their hearts and lives were not right with God. These shall go away into that place prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 20:11-15)

### John 5:30

The Son of God cannot do anything independently of the will and purposes of his Father in heaven. Everything that the Lord does is done in his Father's name and by his authority. Everything that the Son does is done in fulfillment of his Father's plans and purposes from eternity. (John 5:19; 8:28-29)

In bringing the words of eternal life to lost men and women, the Son of God was, in effect, judging mankind. Salvation is given to everyone who, by God's sovereign grace, receives the Lord Jesus and who believes on his name. Those who receive and obey his word are separated or 'called out' from the rest of mankind. These repentant and believing individuals are numbered among the redeemed of the Lord. In calling men and women to repentance and faith, and by making them a new creation by his Holy Spirit, the Son of God was constantly glorifying his Father in heaven. (Matt. 10:32-39; John 15:18-19; 17:14-16; 1 Pet. 2:9-12)

The remainder of fallen mankind remain in their sin—sin which they have preferred, loved or cherished before the knowledge of God. They have refused to hear and to heed the message of salvation. They are yet under the righteous judgment and wrath of God. This judgment is holy and just—for these impenitent individuals refused wilfully to hear and to heed the voice of the Lord. (Gen. 18:25-26; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18-20; 2:1-13)

In separating repentant and believing sinners from the unrepentant and unbelieving, the Son of God was applying his Father's judgment on the world. Yet, until the last day, the irreversible sentence of judgment will not be pronounced and executed. Therefore, until

the Day of Final Judgment, unbelieving and unrepentant men and women may yet be saved—if God so decrees.

## **Testimony of John the Baptist**

### ***John 5:31-35***

#### **John 5:31**

The testimony of the Lord Jesus is true, valid and infallible, since he is the Son of God and God cannot lie or fail to speak the entire truth. Nevertheless, to satisfy God's law pertaining to human testimony, the Lord Jesus consented to place himself under the restrictions of the Mosaic Law. According to this Law, no single individual's testimony could be accepted as true and valid unless at least one other independent witness was willing to corroborate that testimony. (Deut. 19:15)

Under these restrictions, the Lord Jesus is saying in verse 31 that he could not bear witness to himself, because—if he did—his testimony would not be valid according to the Mosaic Law. To become valid, the testimony of one person had to be confirmed by that of another person. This other person, however, had to be acceptable as a competent, trustworthy and reliable witness. (John 8:13-18)

#### **John 5:32**

To fully satisfy these legal requirements, the Lord Jesus *did* have the witness of another person. That other person had been testifying openly and repeatedly about the Lord Jesus. With unmistakable voice, he had been declaring to all who listened to him that Jesus was the One whom God had sent as their Messiah. Here indeed was a competent, trustworthy and reliable witness to the truth.

#### **John 5:33**

Some time earlier, the religious authorities had sent a delegation to John the Baptist to question him closely about his preaching. That delegation had reported back to the highest Jewish religious council in the land—the Sanhedrin. Thus, the entire religious court must have been aware of John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus as the One whom God had sent.

In addition to this, John had continued to witness to the truth concerning the Son of God. Multitudes of people had heard John proclaim the coming of the Messiah, and then point him out when he appeared. If only the people would admit it, they must have known that Jesus was God's promised Messiah—the Christ of God.

In purely human terms, therefore, John the Baptist was the Lord Jesus' independent witness. He had been testifying of the truth concerning Jesus, and he had declared him to be both the Anointed One of God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:6-8,15-27,29-34)

#### **John 5:34**

The holy sinless Son of God, of course, did not require the testimony of John the Baptist or any other man. The reason he mentioned John as an independent witness was so that the people might be convicted of their need and turn to their Messiah for salvation.

The people knew that John the Baptist had announced the coming of the Messiah. They ought to have known that John was God's spokesman or prophet, and that the words that he uttered were words given him from God. Since this was so, and the Lord Jesus was indeed the promised Saviour, the people would be foolish beyond measure to refuse the salvation that had now come to them. That is why the Lord mentioned these things—that they might be saved. (Luke 1:13-17; 1 Tim. 2:1-6)

Yet the Lord knew also that because of their spiritual blindness and hardness of heart, these same people would not seek the Lord's salvation unless the Spirit of God intervened to reveal the truth to their sin darkened hearts and minds. Yet, they remained wholly responsible to God for their sin and unbelief; for, by their own steadfast refusal to acknowledge God's truth in the past and at the present time, they had brought this spiritual insensitivity or hardening upon themselves.

### John 5:35

John the Baptist's testimony concerning the Lord Jesus was akin to a lamp shining through the people's moral and spiritual darkness. Throughout his ministry, the Baptist had proclaimed with fiery zeal the coming of the Lord. John preached a baptism of repentance; and, being convicted of their sins, many people repented and sought John's baptism. Thus, John's testimony about the Son of God shone bright and true to everyone who heard him. (Luke 1:76-79; Matt. 3:5-6; John 1:7-8)

For a time, the people chose to enjoy John's message. Indeed, because of that message of hope and salvation, many rejoiced and were exceedingly glad. Earnestly, they had been waiting for the coming Redeemer to make his appearance. Yet, when the Redeemer came to his own, his own did not receive him. Even so, to all who did receive him, he granted the right to become God's children. (John 1:11-13)

## Testimony of The Lord's Work

### John 5:36

John the Baptist had borne clear and repeated testimony to the One whom God had sent: Jesus, the Son of God and the Lamb of God's providing. However, the Lord Jesus had even greater testimony to hand than that of John the Baptist—the work that his Father had commissioned him to do.

The Father himself had sent his Son into this world to accomplish a specific work: the work of redemption. It was the Father's will that his Son should complete that work. At this moment, the Lord Jesus was engaged in that work, and would continue it until everything has been accomplished. (Matt. 17:5; 1 John 5:9-12)

To this end, the Lord declares in verse 36:

*(36b) "...For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me."*  
(ESV)

- The example of his holy, sinless, perfect and absolutely righteous life was testimony in itself that the Father in heaven was acting in, with and through his Son.
- The work of redemption that the Lamb of God would accomplish was testimony in itself that the Father in heaven had commissioned and sent his Son into the world.
- The miraculous works or signs that the Son of God was performing in the name of the Father, testified that he was acting with his Father's authority.

- The Gospel of full salvation that the Lord Jesus was proclaiming testified by its very nature that it originated from the Father in heaven—for only God could provide eternal salvation to the people. (John 10:25-26; 14:10-11; 15:22-25)

The Son of God had yet much more to accomplish in fulfilling his Father's purposes for the salvation of lost men and women. Those works, too, would testify to the fact that his Father had sent him. Yet, the Lord knew the hearts of these people. He knew that—in spite of the clearest evidence—they would not believe.

## Testimony of The Father

### **John 5:37-40**

#### **John 5:37-38**

In addition to the circumstantial evidence provided by the Lord's work, Jesus also had the direct testimony of his Father in heaven. A large number of the people had heard that testimony, for they had been present when John had baptised the Lord Jesus.

At that time, God's voice had resounded from heaven:

*...“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matt. 3:17 ESV; see also John 8:18)*

This was the direct testimony of the true and living God concerning his Son. This very attestation from the Father in heaven laid great responsibility on all those who heard this voice to pay heed to the words and works of the Lord Jesus. However, it seems that the majority failed to understand the significance of this divine testimony, or refused to acknowledge it as the voice of Almighty God.

In the latter part of verse 37, the Lord Jesus makes it plain to his hearers that they did not truly know God. They had never set eyes on the Father—for, as Spirit, God is invisible. Again, no one could look on the glory of God and live. (Deut. 4:12; John 1:18 (cf. John 14:9); 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12)

Although, however, they could not have beheld the awesome glory of God, they could have seen and should have known him through his revealed word, the Holy Scriptures. Yet, even in these, they could not see the Father in heaven.

The people had never seen God's form; nor had they ever heard his voice. If they had, they would have trembled at that awesome sound. Nevertheless, their ignorance of God was inexcusable: For they ought to have heard the voice of God speaking to them through his prophets and through his written Word. Yet, they had not heeded this voice. Rather, they had despised the Word of God and treated his prophets with disdain and contempt. God's Word had found no dwelling place in their sinful hearts and lives. (Matt. 21:33-45; Luke 11:47-48; John 5:46-47)

Although the Son came to these people as the living Word of God—the eternal Logos—yet they still refused to hear the voice of God. They utterly refused to accept his words or his claims, and therefore to believe on him. They would not hear Jesus' words—the Word of the Father—that would have brought them to eternal life. Therefore, if they would not be saved by the Word of God, then most assuredly they would be *judged* by the Word of God. (John 12:47-48)

### John 5:39

With all the 'pious' diligence that they possessed, the religious leaders studied the sacred Scriptures. They examined these Scriptures most thoroughly, believing that, by *scrutinizing and analysing* (as distinct from *believing and obeying*) the OT Scriptures, they would possess eternal life. However, as we have just seen, their idea of gaining eternal life was by ritual study and duty alone, and by observing every last letter of the law.

Yet, this was not what the Scriptures taught concerning eternal life, as these religious leaders ought to have known. The Old Testament Scriptures spoke of salvation by grace through faith. (Abraham's justification by faith is a prime example (Gen. 15:1-6).) The Scriptures spoke of the necessity of receiving a new heart, and of receiving God's Holy Spirit. (Ezek. 18:31; 36:26-27; Matt. 22:29; Rom. 3:19-24)

Contrary, therefore, to the expectations and hopes of the religious leaders, and of the people in general, the observance of the law, and of religious rites and duties, did not lead to life. The law is God's standard of holiness, justice and righteousness. However, God's law cannot provide—and it was never intended to provide—salvation for fallen mankind. Salvation comes as a gift of God's sovereign grace. It is based on the promises of God and is received by God's grace through faith in these promises: principally, faith in the promised Redeemer. (Rom. 4:1-5; 7:12)

These Scriptures, therefore, testify about the Redeemer. They speak of the Son of God, for he is God's promised Redeemer; he is the Christ of God. In fulfilment of these OT Scriptures, Jesus is the Seed of the Woman who bruises the serpent's head. The Son is the Suffering Servant of Jehovah spoken of by Isaiah. Jesus is the Branch—the Root and Offspring of David—spoken of by the prophets. (Gen. 3:15 with Gal. 3:19; Isa. 11:1-5; 53:1-12)

Yet, in spite of this unmistakable testimony from God's Word, the people would not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah or Anointed One of God.

### John 5:40

(40) "...yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (ESV)

Yet, although these Old Testament Scriptures spoke repeatedly and unmistakably about the One to come, the people would not come to this One to receive eternal life. For all their knowledge and learning of the sacred Scriptures, they could not see—i.e., they could not comprehend spiritually—the truths that they contained. They could see only the bare words. They could comprehend only their religious teachers' traditional interpretations of these words. However—like Nicodemus before them—they failed completely to comprehend the spiritual and prophetic dimension of God's Holy Word. (John 12:37-43)

The reason why they could not comprehend the spiritual dimension of God's Word was that they did not possess the Spirit of God. And since they did not possess the Spirit of God, they could not belong to God. Therefore, unless and until the Holy Spirit illuminated their minds to these sacred and solemn truths, the religious leaders and the people would remain in darkness—incapable of seeing or understanding the truth leading to eternal life. (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:14)

## **Jewish Leaders Reject God's Testimony**

### **John 5:41-47**

#### **John 5:41**

The Lord Jesus was not influenced by anyone's opinion of him. If men thought well of his Father in heaven, then they would think well of his Son also. However, if they rejected and thought ill of his Father, then they would do the same to the Father's one and only Son.

Nevertheless, men's view or judgment of him was of no importance to the holy sinless Son of God. Those who thought good of him would render to him the praise, honour and glory due to his holy and peerless name. Even so, the Son of God did not accept the praise of men when that praise was associated with worldly fame or acclaim. The Lord Jesus would accept the praise of men only when it was associated with true spiritual worship and thanksgiving to God, and when it proceeded from a humble, sincere and contrite heart.

#### **John 5:42**

The Lord Jesus knew the state of the people's hearts and minds. As the omniscient or all-knowing Son of God, Jesus knew precisely what people thought of him and of his Father in heaven. The people's minds were, to the Lord of glory, like the pages of an open book. In that book, Jesus could read nothing of commendation for his Father or for himself. On the contrary, the Lord could see only evil thoughts and malicious plans concerning him and concerning his heavenly Father. (John 2:25; 5:18; 8:22; 15:23)

The Jewish religious leaders claimed to know God. They claimed to be the only true guardians and expositors of God's Word. Yet, as the Lord Jesus declares in this verse, he knew that these leaders and teachers of God's law did not have God's love in their hearts. Their hearts were being false to the truth. They were living a lie. They were deceiving both themselves and the people who were looking to them for instruction and guidance. Yet, how can blind guides lead the blind? Their understanding of God and his Word was based purely on intellectual and worldly knowledge. They possessed head knowledge of God, but no heart knowledge or spiritual understanding. (Matt. 15:14)

#### **John 5:43**

The incarnate and Holy Son of God had come into the world bearing all the authority of his Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus had revealed something of his Father's majestic power and glory to these people. He had brought to them the words of life. He had spoken to them about the purposes of his Father concerning the redemption of lost men and women. The Son of God had testified truthfully of those things which he had seen and heard from his heavenly Father. (John 6:38-40)

Yet, although Jesus had borne witness to the truth, the people to whom he had come would not accept his testimony. They utterly refused to believe that he had come from the true and living God, or that he was acting on God's authority. This, however, was wanton and wilful unbelief, for they were rejecting not only the testimony of the Son, but also the testimony of the Father as given in the Old Testament Scriptures and by God's holy prophets.

These religious leaders rejected God's Son out of hand. Yet, if another person came to them without any divine authority, they would accept that person willingly. Based on that individual's name and (supposed) reputation, they would accept him and listen to his pro-

nouncements. Seemingly, human testimony and authority carried greater weight with the religious leaders than the testimony and authority of the Sovereign and Almighty God!

### John 5:44

The Jewish religious authorities were more concerned about what other people thought and said, than about what God thought and said. They sought the praise of men, not the praise of God. How, then, could they believe in God's Son?

In their hearts, they knew that their thoughts and attitudes were contrary to God's standards of righteousness. They knew that their lives were not right with God. Therefore, these religious leaders sought to ignore God and his Word; and, for this reason, they rejected God's testimony concerning his Son. In the same way, their forefathers and predecessors had rejected the holy prophets—and for the same reasons. (Matt. 23:5-7; John 12:43; Rom. 2:29)

However, by accepting the praises of one another, these people had cut themselves off from receiving God's praise. God's praise comes only to those who—in true humility—seek to know his ways and do his will. Clearly, the religious leaders did not know God's ways—or they refused wilfully to acknowledge God's ways; nor did they have the slightest inclination to obey God's will. (1 Sam. 2:30)

Even so, the Lord Jesus would not be the one who accused them for their culpability:

### John 5:45

These leaders of the Jews need not imagine that the Lord Jesus would be their accuser before God. They need not suppose that it would be necessary for the Son of God to stand in his Father's presence to denounce them for their spiritual apathy and ignorance.

At that very moment, these religious leaders stood accused before God the Father. The one who accused them, however, was not the Lord Jesus but Moses. Yet, Moses was the very person on whom these people had anchored their hopes for acceptance by God. They believed earnestly, that by following Moses' injunctions to the letter, they would be pleasing the Father in heaven and thereby earning their eternal reward.

Moses, the servant of God, had imparted to the people God's holy law. Yet, neither the people of that day, nor the descendants of those people, had kept that law. At every turn, they had despised and rejected the law that God had given to Moses, and they continued to reject that law right up to the present time. By thus despising and repudiating the sacred law of God, they were despising and repudiating the very words and express commands of God. How, then, could these people expect God to accept them? They did not observe or obey the holy laws of God from a pure and humble heart. Rather, they observed proudly, and obeyed dutifully, the mere letter of the law and the traditions of men. Therefore, these leaders stood accused in God's presence by Moses—the one whose words they had failed manifestly to obey. (John 7:19)

Had they obeyed Moses' words, they would have received the Lord's blessings. Not that salvation comes through obedience to the Law of Moses. However, God would have revealed to them his way of salvation through faith. (Incidentally, they ought already to have been aware of God's way of salvation through faith, since it had been revealed to them in the OT Scriptures.) Furthermore, if they had sought the Lord with a pure, humble and contrite heart, he would have shown them the true and intended purpose of the Mosaic Law. (Gal. 3:10-14,24)

They had fixed their hopes and faith on Moses, but their hopes were falsely founded. This, however, was no fault of Moses or of God's law, but of the people's sinful and unbelieving



hearts. They disobeyed and rejected the Word of God now, just as their forefathers had done in the past.

### John 5:46

If these people had accepted the teachings of Moses, they would have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ. In these teachings, Moses wrote about him. He told the people about the coming Redeemer. The people in general, however, and the leaders in particular, refused to heed Moses' word—the word of God's spokesman. How, then, could the religious leaders of Jesus' time say that they believed in Moses, if they did not believe what Moses wrote?

Where, however, did Moses write about the One whom God would send?

Moses recorded all that God had said concerning the promise made to Abraham (or Abram). Even before he had a son, God promised to make of Abraham a great and mighty nation. Through Abraham, God promised to extend his blessings to all nations on earth. Abraham believed God's promise to make of him a great nation, and God counted it to him as righteousness. Thus, Abraham was justified by faith. (Gen. 12:1-3; 18:18; 22:18; 28:14)

Indeed, Moses put on record everything written in the Pentateuch, including the book of Genesis. This included everything that took place before the birth of Moses, but which was passed on to him. Thus, in chapter 3 of Genesis, the LORD says concerning the promised Messiah:

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.."*  
(Gen. 3:15 ESV)

Again, in Genesis chapter 49:

*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.* (Gen. 49:10 ESV)

Or, as the NKJV renders this verse:

*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*  
(Gen. 49:10 NKJV)

In addition, in Deuteronomy chapter 18, Moses wrote:

*(15) "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—(16) just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'*

*(17) And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken.*

*(18) I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. (19) And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.* (Deut. 18:15-19 ESV)

However, this was not all. The entire system of sacrifices and offerings spoke volumes about the Christ whom God would send. The precise details of Old Testament worship and approach to God spoke unmistakably about the necessity of atonement, and about

## Expository Notes

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the blood-sprinkled mercy seat. In all those ways and more, the leaders and the people were shown that no one could approach God apart from a perfect, vicarious and blood-shedding sacrifice.

Moses, on whom these leaders relied, wrote unmistakably about all these things. And, according to the word of the Lord, whom did these perfect, vicarious and blood-shedding sacrifices typify and foreshadow? Was it not the Lord Jesus—the holy, perfect, spotless Lamb of God?

### John 5:47

Since, however, these members of the Sanhedrin or supreme religious council did not believe what Moses had told them, then it was certain that they would not believe what the incarnate Son of God told them.

Moses was a *servant in* God's house. The Lord Jesus, however, is the *Son over* God's house. It is a serious matter indeed to reject the words of God's *servant*. However, it is an infinitely more serious matter to reject the words of God's *Son*.

Even now, these leaders of the people stood condemned *by God's servant, Moses*. One day, however, their sentence of condemnation and judgment would be imposed *by God's Son, the Lord Jesus*. (Luke 16:29-31; Heb. 3:5-6)

## John Chapter 6

### Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

(Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17)

#### **John 6:1-15**

##### **John 6:1**

Some time after his discussion with the Jewish religious leaders, the Lord left that area. Crossing over the Sea of Galilee,<sup>21</sup> Jesus and his disciples came to the opposite shore.

##### **John 6:2**

Immediately they discovered that the Lord had left the area, a large crowd of people set out on foot to meet him on the other side of Lake Tiberias. These people had witnessed the miraculous signs that Jesus had performed, and they had seen him heal many sick people by these miracles. They sought, therefore, to follow the one who was able to perform such marvellous works. Perhaps they would see Jesus perform yet more miracles. Perhaps, too, they would be able to listen to more of his awe-inspiring words. Probably, the majority of this thronging crowd would be no more than curiosity seekers. Their interest centred in the man Jesus, and in the outstanding signs that he could perform. However, they may have possessed little if any true faith, or any real desire to obey the Lord's teachings.

##### **John 6:3**

Once they reached the other side of the lake, Jesus and his disciples made their way to the slopes of one of the nearest mountains. Possibly, the Lord was weary after working constantly on the opposite shore, and now wanted to rest in a remote and quiet place.

Climbing up the gentle slopes of a nearby hillside, Jesus and his disciples found a spot to sit down and rest. Below them lay the villages bordering on the Sea of Galilee, and the deceptively placid waters of this frequently turbulent lake.

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<sup>21</sup> *Sea of Galilee*: known also as the *Sea of Tiberias*, or *Lake Gennesaret*; and known formerly as the *Sea of Chinnereth*.

### John 6:4

The evangelist John notes that this event happened near the time of the Jewish Passover. At this time, large numbers of men—and to a lesser extent, women and children—would be making their way to Jerusalem for the annual festival. Probably, this would account for the very large crowd of people who had travelled around the lake on foot to meet the Lord. If so, this crowd would include people from the surrounding towns and villages. However, the crowd would also include many pilgrims passing through Galilee on their way to the Passover at Jerusalem.

### John 6:5-6

As he sat there on the grassy slopes, the Lord Jesus caught sight of this large crowd of people coming after him. They had just discovered that the Lord had sought solace in the nearby hills. Therefore, with great haste, they began climbing up the slopes to find him.

When they had caught up with the Lord and his disciples, the multitude began thronging around him—waiting for him to speak to them again. Jesus, however, knew that these people had come a long way, and that they were now very hungry. Yes, he intended to feed their famished souls. Firstly, however, he arranged to nourish their bodies so that they would be fit and able to listen to his teaching.

*(5b) Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (6) He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. (ESV)*

Of course, Jesus knew already how he was going to feed this vast multitude. However, he put this question to Philip to test this disciple's faith. (Cf. Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17)

### John 6:7

At once, Philip began to reason things out by human standards. For the vast crowd of people now present, it would cost about two hundred denarii (about 6 months' wages) to buy sufficient bread. Even supposing this much bread could be obtained, it still seemed unlikely that there would be enough bread for everyone present to receive one bite!

Philip, it seems, had completely overlooked the signal demonstrations of Jesus' power that he had witnessed on the other side of the lake and elsewhere. Although he had seen Jesus perform many mighty miracles, Philip did not seem to realise that the Lord could perform another such miraculous sign to feed these people. All this disciple could think about was the apparent impossibility of obtaining and providing enough bread for so great a multitude.

Jesus had put Philip's faith to the test—and had found it wanting. So it is with many of us. We believe wholeheartedly on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and on the finished work that he accomplished for us at Calvary. However, when it comes to believing in him to meet our ordinary everyday needs, we do not always believe that the Lord will provide. When it comes to believing that he is able and willing to help us in a time of difficulty or crisis, we often fail to trust him or to seek his aid. In our anxiety or perplexity, we endeavour to find help through inadequate human resources. (Matt. 6:25-34)

### John 6:8-9

While Philip was struggling vainly to answer the Lord's question, Jesus told the other disciples to determine how much bread was available among the assembled crowd. (Mark 6:38) After much searching among the thronging multitude, the disciples could find only

one young boy with a few loaves and fish. Andrew brought this boy to Jesus, saying to the Master,

*(9) "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" (ESV)*

'We have searched diligently for food among all the people. All we have been able to find, however, is this young boy's five loaves and two fish. How, though, can five loaves and two fish even begin to feed so vast a multitude?'

#### **John 6:10**

While all this was going on, the huge crowd had been milling around on the hillside waiting for something to happen. Probably, they hoped or expected to see Jesus perform more mighty miracles. As they waited for Jesus to act, the people would be drifting about on the hillside, talking to one another.

When the Lord Jesus was ready, he instructed his disciples to make the people settle down.

*(10) Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. (ESV)*

Expecting to hear Jesus speak, they stopped wandering around and sat down on the grass. John tells us that there were about five thousand men present on this occasion. However, according to Matthew's account, this number was augmented by women and children. Therefore, it is more likely that the total number of people present on this occasion was closer to 10,000. This seems to lend support to the strong probability that pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast had joined the local Galilean population on this occasion.

#### **John 6:11**

Taking the five barley loaves and two small fish, the Lord Jesus gave thanks to his Father in heaven for his gracious and bountiful provision. From this, we learn that we ought always to thank God even for the little that we have, knowing that—from this little—the Lord is able to make abundant provision for all our needs. (Cf. Luke 24:30; Acts 27:35; Rom. 14:6; 1 Tim. 4:4-5)

*(11b) ...he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. (ESV)*

After giving thanks, the Lord distributed the loaves and fish to his disciples. The disciples then handed them out to the multitude. The five to ten thousand were at liberty to take as many of the loaves and fish as they desired. No limit was placed on the quantity they received nor on the number of times they could ask for more.

Once again, the Son of God manifests something of his divine power and glory. Only God can create in this manner. And, here, the Son of God was demonstrating in the presence of all these people that he possessed, and could exercise, the very attributes of the Almighty Sovereign God.

#### **John 6:12**

Every one of the five thousand or more people received their share—and more—of the five loaves and two fish. Every one of this vast and hungry throng was able to continue eating until he or she was fully satisfied.

Clearly, this miracle amounted to an explicit demonstration of Jesus' almighty power. These were not just people in need of a light snack or picnic lunch. Many of them had already walked a very long distance and had been outdoors for many hours before eventually climbing up the hillside to find the Lord Jesus. By the time they found Jesus, therefore, these people would be very hungry indeed, and in need of proper nourishment. The fact that their share of the loaves and fishes left them fully satisfied is testimony to the creative power of God's Son. This miracle was a miracle of creation. Out of so little, the Lord created abundance—without resorting to any natural means.

When everyone had eaten to the full, Jesus instructed his disciples to gather up the remaining fragments so that nothing of God's provision was wasted. From this, we learn that we ought to make the best possible use of everything that God provides. Nothing ought to be wasted; for it has come to us from the Lord's hand, and is ours by his providence and grace.

### John 6:13

Obedying the Lord's instructions, the disciples gathered up the remaining fragments of bread and fish. Borrowing twelve large wicker baskets, they filled these baskets to the brim with the remaining pieces of loaves and fish.

The Lord had provided an abundance of provisions for the people's immediate need. However, he had also provided more than was immediately necessary. Perhaps the people could carry some of this food home with them to their families. Perhaps it would be taken to those who were unable to climb the mountain to be in the presence of Jesus—the elderly, the infirm or the sick. Perhaps these people too would receive some of this bountiful supply from the Lord's hand. (Phil. 4:19)

### John 6:14

That a notable miracle had just taken place, no one could deny. In excess of five thousand people had just witnessed it. Perhaps around ten thousand people had just been fed from the same five loaves and two fish. Had there been any other explanation, this vast multitude would never have agreed that a miracle had occurred.

Sometimes, it is alleged that the teeming crowd merely shared their picnic lunches amongst themselves. However, these people had neither the time nor the occasion to prepare picnic lunches before setting out after Jesus. They had come unprepared. The fact that one boy was carrying five loaves and two fish proves nothing. This may have been intended as an individual meal before the boy—possibly, with other members of his family—had been caught up in the bustling crowd going after Jesus. Let us remember that when Andrew and the other disciples searched for food, all they could find was this boy's loaves and fishes. The disciples could find no other food anywhere among this vast throng of people.

Again, had other people been in possession of food that they then had shared with the crowd, they would soon have discredited those who were claiming that Jesus had performed a miracle. No such adverse testimony was given. All concurred in the fact that Jesus had indeed performed a miraculous sign. This miracle convinced these people that Jesus was no ordinary man. Although there would still be many doubters, many others among them began to consider seriously the possibility that Jesus might be the promised Messiah.

*(14) When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (ESV)*

According to Moses, this was the Prophet whom God would raise up and send into the world; this was the Prophet to whom all the people were to listen and obey. (Deut. 18:15-18 (cf. Acts 3:22-23); John 4:25-26,42)

**John 6:15**

Jesus knew the kind of thoughts that were now entering the minds of these well-fed people. They had seen his immense power demonstrated in this miracle. They had experienced something of his majestic authority over nature. They knew that—somehow or other—Jesus had created this ongoing supply of loaves and fishes out of virtually nothing. They knew that—apart from the loaves and fishes—the Lord had not made use of any human means to accomplish this miracle. All the Lord had done was to give thanks to God and then begin the distribution of the five loaves and two fish. With their own eyes, however, the multitude had seen that these five loaves and two fishes had not diminished during their distribution.

Because of this demonstration of Jesus' power and authority, some of the people determined to seize the Lord forcibly and set him up as their king. Probably they reckoned that a man with such power was the right person to be set up against the despised Roman government. Perhaps, too, this man Jesus might even overthrow completely the yoke of Roman tyranny and oppression. (Cf. John 18:33-37)

Realising the crowd's intentions, therefore, the Lord departed from the scene, seeking the solitude of another more isolated mountain. (Matt. 14:22-23)

**Jesus Walks on the Water**

(Matt. 14:22-33; Mark 6:47-51)

**John 6:16-21****John 6:16-17**

As evening approached, the disciples left Jesus and made their way down the mountainside to the shores of Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee). On arriving at the water's edge, they took the small boat lying there on the shore. Presumably because there was no wind to permit the use of the sail, they began to row the boat across the lake toward Bethsaida by Capernaum. By this time, darkness had fallen. Jesus, however, had not yet joined them. (Matt. 6:45)

**John 6:18**

Lake Tiberias lay some 600 feet (183 metres) below sea level; and, because of the steep hills rising above the shoreline on this side (SW of the Golan Heights), the Sea was particularly susceptible to powerful squalls and tumultuous conditions.

As the disciples rowed slowly across the lake, one of these very strong winds arose and swept down from the hills without warning, whipping up the waters furiously and threatening to overturn their frail craft. Soon, the disciples found themselves battling with all their might against a very rough and stormy sea. No matter how hard they tried, they could barely maintain their course in the teeth of the raging gale now sweeping down upon them. As the swell grew even greater and the wind continued to scream around them, they began to ship water. Surely, if assistance was not immediately forthcoming, they would perish forever beneath the now heaving waves. (Matt. 14:24)

### John 6:19

Struggling desperately to maintain their course, the disciples had somehow managed to reach a position about three or three-and-a-half miles (about 5 to 5.5 km) across the lake. However, some distance remained before they would reach the opposite shore—and the raging wind and waves was intensifying with almost every minute that passed.

As the disciples battled to keep their small vessel afloat, suddenly they caught sight of a figure approaching them through the darkness. Peering through the gloom and spray, they could just detect the shadowy outline of the Lord Jesus. Jesus, however, appeared to be coming to them on top of the water! He seemed to be walking with ease over the raging sea!

This was too much for the weary and now astonished disciples. Thinking they must be seeing a ghost, utter terror seized their hearts. (Matt. 14:24-26; Mark 6:47-49)

### John 6:20

Knowing that they were now panic-stricken, the Lord called out to them,

*(20) ...“It is I; do not be afraid.” (ESV)*

The Son of God assured his terrified disciples that they were not seeing a ghost. Rather, they were looking upon Jesus himself—their Sovereign Lord and Master. Therefore, he says *“It is I; do not be afraid”*. The Son of God had seen their distress and danger, and—in the midst of their dire distress—he had come to deliver them. (Matt. 14:27; Mark 6:50)

From this, we learn that the Lord may allow his people to enter into the most severe trials or difficulties, or to endure the most distressing and worrying of circumstances. Yet, our beloved Master and Lord never neglects or abandons his people in the midst of their crises. Whenever the Lord knows that they need his immediate help, and whenever his time is right, he intervenes to deliver them. As his people, however, we must not be taken aback when—by his providence—the Lord Jesus comes to meet our needs or to deliver us from our distresses. Rather, we ought always to thank him for his protecting and sustaining hand upon our lives. (Isa. 41:10; 43:1-5)

### John 6:21

Convinced, then, that this was indeed the Lord Jesus himself, the disciples welcomed him eagerly into their battered craft. Upon receiving the Lord on board, and perhaps now able to hoist the sail, the boat sped to the other side of the now peaceful lake. Once again, the Son of God had demonstrated his sovereign and almighty power over the forces of nature: For this raging storm abated only at the very moment when the Lord entered the boat and commanded the winds and waves to cease. (Matt. 14:32,34; Mark 6:51-53)

(John does not record the point where Peter attempted to walk on the water to meet Jesus. However, this incident is recorded by Matthew. (Matt. 14:28-31))

Considering this passage, we see that—when we receive the Lord’s help—we experience the Lord’s deliverance. When we stop trying to win the battle by ourselves, and instead call upon the Lord, the Lord grants to us a sense of peace and serenity. By God’s grace, we experience this peace and tranquility even in the midst of the most arduous, threatening or dangerous situations. By his almighty hand, he creates calm in our lives, bringing us safely through every trial and difficulty. So long as we do all that the Lord requires of us, we will experience the Lord’s presence and power in all those events and circumstances with which we ourselves are unable to cope. (Cf. 2 Chron. 20:15)



## The Crowd Searches for Jesus

### **John 6:22-24**

#### **John 6:22**

On the following day, the vast crowd of people whom Jesus had fed became greatly perplexed. They knew that only one small boat had been lying on the shore. They also knew that the disciples had taken this boat, but that Jesus himself was not present with them when they had left. However, despite many intensive inquiries and much searching throughout the area, the people could not find the Lord Jesus. Apparently, the Lord had left the area—but in which direction? His disciples had already taken the only boat available. Had the Lord, then, travelled elsewhere on foot?

#### **John 6:23-24**

Determined to find the Lord Jesus again, the crowd headed toward some Tiberian boats that had just pulled ashore. Probably, these were larger fishing vessels, which would be able to ferry greater numbers of these people across to the other side of the lake (safety considerations or regulations did not apply in these days!). Therefore, a large number of people crammed themselves into these boats and made their way across the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum. Those still remaining on the other shore presumably started making their way back around Lake Tiberias on foot. Once in Capernaum, the people immediately started searching throughout the town for Jesus.

## Jesus, the Bread of Life

### **John 6:25-59**

#### **John 6:25**

When the crowd finally found the Lord Jesus, they asked him,

*(25b)...“Rabbi, when did you come here?” (ESV)*

They could not fathom how the Lord had arrived at Capernaum ahead of them. Jesus had not left with the disciples when they had crossed over the lake. Furthermore, the recent violent storm would have prevented this man Jesus from crossing the lake, even if another boat could have been found. In addition, following the storm, many of the crowd themselves had just crossed over the lake on Tiberian fishing boats—boats that had only then become available. By what means, then—and at what time—had the Lord arrived in Capernaum?

#### **John 6:26**

Jesus does not answer their question directly. Rather, the Lord addresses their motives for asking such a question. Solemnly, the Lord asserted to the people that they were not looking for him on account of the mighty miracle that they had seen him perform on the other side of the lake. If they had, they would have known that such signal demonstrations of his almighty power and glory attested to the Lord Jesus' divine mission and authority in this world. However, this was of no consequence to most of these people.

No, the real reason the people sought the Lord Jesus was because he had met their physical needs. The Son of God had fed them to the full with the loaves and fish, and now they were looking for more.

These people were not seeking *spiritual* abundance, but *physical* abundance. They were not concerned about spiritual fulfilment, but about material fulfilment. Their thoughts were not spiritual, but carnal. They saw in the Lord Jesus only a person who would be able to meet all their earthly desires. However, by thinking along these lines, the people were greatly mistaken, and could only be sorely disillusioned. The Son of God had indeed come into this world to provide abundance and fulfilment—but not the kind of abundance or fulfilment of which these people were thinking. (Phil. 3:19)

### John 6:27

Thus, the Lord admonishes the people not to spend their time and effort striving for the food that perishes. Yes, it was necessary that they worked to earn their living. This was God's will for them. However, they were not to imagine that this kind of work was the only kind of work required of them. They were not to think that they could work to provide for their bodily and material needs, and yet not need to 'work' to provide for their spiritual and eternal needs. They would neglect their soul's needs at their peril.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus instructs them to strive not merely to meet their temporal needs, but also to meet their spiritual needs. And, concerning the latter, they were to strive with all their might for the food that would never perish, but which would endure to eternal life. (Matt. 6:19-21,31-34)

If a person were to labour to meet the needs of his soul—that is, if with all of his being he were to seek to know the Lord and to feed on his every word—then the Son of Man would give to that person everything that he needed to nourish and sustain his soul. The Lord of glory would satisfy abundantly that individual's every spiritual desire: For he has promised to fill the hungry with good things—with every blessing that God, in his grace and providence, can bestow upon a humble, contrite sinner. (Isa. 55:2-3,7; Jer. 15:16; Luke 1:53; John 4:14)

Clearly, of course—without the aid of the Holy Spirit—no sinful human being has the desire or the ability to work for the food that endures to everlasting life. Jesus was challenging these people to recognise and acknowledge their complete lack of any real spiritual life. Very soon, as we shall see (v.29), the Lord Jesus would reveal to these people what he had meant by 'working' for the food that endures eternally. Meantime, in verse 27, the Lord Jesus makes it abundantly clear to the people that this spiritual sustenance comes to them as a gift from God's Son:

(27c) *"...which the Son of Man will give to you..." (ESV)*

The Lord Jesus referred to himself as the Son of Man. He was God's perfect Man. He was the only one authorised by his Father to grant eternal life to spiritually hungering and thirsting souls. The Father had set his seal of approval upon his only Son and upon his work, and he had attested to this publicly at Jesus' baptism. At that time, the Holy Spirit had descended and remained upon God's Son, and his Father's voice had resounded from the highest heavens. (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; John 1:33-34; 5:36-38)

### John 6:28

Greatly perplexed by these remarks, the crowd asked Jesus,

(28b) *"What must we do to be doing the works of God?" (ESV)*

'What is the nature of the works that we must perform?'

In all probability, these people would be thinking about striving to the utmost of their ability to keep God's law. Perhaps, if they did their best, God would accept them and they would win eternal salvation. These people would imagine that—by keeping the commandments,

the moral law or the ceremonial law with all its statutes and ordinances—they might attain to eternal life. However, to find out exactly what Jesus meant by ‘working’ for the food that endures to eternal life, they ask him what they must do. Exactly what kind of works must they perform?

In truth, of course, these people ought to have known what kind of works God required of them. God required a life of love, faith, mercy and humility. (Micah 6:8; Luke 10:25-37)

### John 6:29

Jesus’ answer must have astonished these people. It was not at all what they had expected to hear, nor what their rabbis had taught them.

(29)...*“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*  
(ESV; cf. John 3:16-18)

Here was the answer to their question; and the Lord had presented it in unmistakable terms. The work of God—the work that God required of any person—was to believe... Belief, however, did not involve work in the commonly understood or accepted sense of the term. Indeed, belief was not so much work as faith, trust and commitment. This kind of faith involved wholehearted acceptance of something or someone. It involved total trust in a promise—and especially in the promises of God. And it involved total commitment to the one who made these promises.

This, however, was not the kind of work these people had envisaged. They wanted to *earn*—or to prove themselves worthy of—their salvation. The idea of accepting salvation by faith was alien to them, and not at all favourably received by the majority. (Rom. 10:2-4)

Jesus had said:

(29)...*“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”*

God required simple faith as the only form of acceptable ‘work’. In addition, he required that a person place this faith in his only Son. This, also, proved to be a real obstacle to many of these people. Those who did not accept that Jesus was the Son of God would find it impossible to place their trust in him. To them, Jesus was to be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. To the believer, however, he was to be the Rock on which their faith was founded—their Rock of Ages. (Rom. 9:30-33; 1 Cor. 10:4)

### John 6:30

This question must rank as one of the most audacious questions ever asked. These same people had just seen one awe-inspiring miracle—the feeding of the five thousand. They themselves had formed part of that crowd. They had eaten of the five loaves and two fishes. With their own eyes, they had witnessed these five loaves and two fishes being multiplied and distributed among well over five thousand people. They had eaten and been fully satisfied with their share of these same loaves and fishes. Now, after all this, they dared to ask the Lord Jesus for another miraculous sign! They presumed to put the Lord to the test, asserting that—in order to believe in him—they must see him perform at least one more outstanding miracle. (Cf. Matt. 12:38-40)

How blind are those who refuse to see! This incident exemplifies the attitude and expression of rank and wilful unbelief. Clearly, then, most of these people had no interest in what Jesus could do for them spiritually, but only in what he could do for them materially and physically. (John 6:36; 12:37-40)

### John 6:31

The unbelieving crowd continued:

*(31) "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" {Ex. 16:4; Neh. 9:15; Ps. 78:24-25} (ESV)*

The crowd were citing an incident in Israel's early history, where the people remained in the desert for forty years because of their wilful refusal to believe the promises of God. Naturally, in citing this incident to Jesus, the crowd omitted to mention the reason for Israel's forty-year delay in reaching the promised land! During all this time, however, the LORD had fed the people of Israel with manna from heaven. (Exodus 16:4,35; Num. 11:6-9; Deut. 8:3)

Recalling this miraculous event, the Jews pointed out to Jesus that Moses had proved his authenticity as a leader by giving them this sign from heaven. For example, Moses had demonstrated to the people his authority as God's appointed leader by giving them manna from heaven. In the same way, therefore, Jesus ought to produce a like sign, and for the same reason—to prove his God-given authority to the people.

Such was the earthly—and grossly mistaken—manner in which these people were thinking about the Son of God. The very fact that they placed Jesus on a level with Moses shows how wrong they were.

### John 6:32

Jesus soon corrects their misapprehensions about Moses, and about himself. It was not Moses who had given them that manna from heaven. Rather, the Lord God had provided that bread. Moses had merely drawn the people's attention to the provision that God was making for them. Indeed, Moses himself had declared quite plainly that the manna was being provided by the LORD. (Exodus 16:15)

Therefore, the crowd now questioning Jesus was greatly mistaken in believing that Moses had provided the manna by himself, or that this sign demonstrated a power inherent in Moses to work miracles. The miracles performed through Moses were wrought by God. Moses was only the Lord's servant or agent. The miracles performed by Jesus, however, were wrought by Jesus himself; i.e., by his own inherent power, and in fulfilment of his heavenly Father's will and purposes.

Moses, therefore, had not provided the people with bread (or manna) from heaven—but God had. However, when Jesus provided more than sufficient food from five loaves and two fishes, *he himself* had performed this miraculous sign. This in itself placed Jesus on the same level with his Father—the one and only Creator—and infinitely above Moses or any other human servant of God.

### John 6:33

The true 'bread' from heaven (v.31) that God provides was not physical sustenance akin to the manna in the desert. Rather,

*(33) "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (ESV)*

Clearly, a person ought to understand this expression in a figurative and spiritual sense—yet, the Jews failed to see this. Jesus was talking about himself as the true 'bread' from God. He was the one who had come down from the Father's presence to give spiritual life and sustenance to the world.

In speaking to the woman of Samaria, the Lord Jesus had told her about the living water that he would provide. Clearly, *living water* was a figure of speech representing the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Now, in speaking to these people about the *true bread* from heaven, the Lord again is using a figure of speech.

Just as ordinary bread feeds and nourishes the body, so also the true bread from heaven feeds and nourishes the soul. Jesus, the bread of life (v.35), is the one who imparts true spiritual life and sustenance to men and women everywhere; i.e., to everyone who believes on him, who listens to his teaching, and who receives and applies his teaching to their hearts and lives. (John 4:10; 7:37-39)

### John 6:34

Like the woman of Samaria, the people on this occasion understand the Lord's words *literally*. They had just listened to Jesus telling them that they must do the work of God; i.e., they must believe on the one whom God had sent. They had just heard Jesus explain that he is the bread of God sent down from the Father in heaven to give life to the world. Now, they appeal to the Lord to provide them with this bread—still thinking of material sustenance of some kind.

(34) *"They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."*

'Let us have the bread of which you are speaking.'

Probably, these people imagined that—by eating this physical bread—they somehow would have lived for ever. In a similar but mistaken way, the woman of Samaria imagined that—by drinking the 'living' water—she would no longer need to come out to the well. Such is the danger of understanding a figurative expression literally. (John 4:15)

### "I Am the Bread of Life"

#### John 6:35

Now, the Lord Jesus explains what he meant about the bread of God that comes down from heaven.

(35a) *"I am the bread of life..." (ESV)*

This is one of seven occasions when the Lord Jesus uses the expression: *'I am...'*

When used in such a manner, the expression, *'I am'*, was an express and unmistakable reference to the exclusive name of the Sovereign and Most High God; i.e., YHWH—the LORD God Almighty. When Moses had asked God the name by which the people were to remember him, the LORD had said:

(14) *"...I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"*

(15) *God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:14-15 ESV)*

Every time, therefore, that the Son of God used this phrase in such a manner, he was asserting his deity and his absolute equality with God in heaven. The Jewish religious teachers were very well aware that this was a claim to deity and equality with God. This, too, was the reason why the Jews accused the Lord of blaspheming the most high and holy 'Name'; i.e., the name, *'I AM'*

To return to the passage under consideration, the Lord Jesus had said:

(35a) ...*"I am the bread of life..."*

Here, Jesus was asserting that he himself would be the sustenance for the people's souls. They were to feed their hungering souls on him; i.e. they were to believe on him, and they were to accept (or feed on) his teachings wholeheartedly. By thus 'doing the work' of God (v.29), they would find life—abundant and eternal life.

Then, also in verse 35, Lord adds,

(35b) *"...whoever comes to me shall not hunger..." (ESV)*

This was the Lord Jesus' most solemn and inviolable word to these people, and also to people today: Anyone who comes to him—i.e., anyone who receives him through faith—will never at any time go hungry spiritually. Whoever that person may be, he would never be refused life-giving nourishment for his soul, nor would the Lord ever refuse to sustain that soul. The Son of God had just avowed most solemnly never to deny that person the true spiritual fulfilment for which he sought, and which would bring to him the gift of eternal life. (Isa. 55:2)

In the next part of this verse, the Lord adds,

(35c) *"...and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." (ESV)*

Often, the writers of the sacred Scriptures portray the salvation blessings of the Holy Spirit *figuratively* as an ever-flowing stream of living water. The Spirit of God is the source of abundant and eternal life. In this part of the verse, the word 'never' is a compound word meaning 'not at all, by any means, at any time.' (Isa. 55:1; John 4:13-14; 7:38)

What, however, does it mean to come to Christ, or to receive him? It means to believe in him. It means to commit oneself unreservedly to him, believing upon him as Saviour and Lord. This is the explanation of the figurative expression, *the true bread from heaven or the bread of life*. Jesus is that bread of life. To 'take' or 'receive' the bread of life is to 'take' Christ to oneself or to 'receive' Christ as one's own. It is to appropriate by faith the work and the merits of God's Son, believing upon him alone for personal and eternal salvation.

Those who believe on Christ with all their heart have been enabled to do so by the grace of God operating through the Person of the Holy Spirit. Every repentant sinner, whom the Spirit of God thus leads to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is thereafter sealed and sanctified to God by that Spirit. The same Holy Spirit indwells them and remains with them forever.

### John 6:36

Nevertheless, although they had seen and heard the Lord's teachings on numerous occasions, many people still would not accept him as the Anointed One of God. Repeatedly, the Jews had witnessed Jesus' almighty power through the miracles of grace, mercy and providence. However, in spite of the overwhelming evidence, they refused steadfastly to believe on him.

These people could not believe because of their spiritually dead and sinful hearts. They had chosen their sins in preference to God's righteousness. They had preferred to hide in darkness, rather than submit their lives and conduct to the light of God's penetrating Word. Consequently, God had allowed their hearts and minds to become hardened or blinded to the truth. They *could not* see the truth, because—previously—they *would not* see the truth. (John 3:19-20; Rom. 1:28-32)

## All Whom the Father Gives Will Come

### John 6:37

Even so, not everyone would remain in a state of wilful unbelief. By the sovereign grace and mercy of God, and by the work of God's Holy Spirit, many would turn to seek the Lord. Many would call upon his name. The Father would accept every one of these, because every one of them would come through repentance and faith to his Son.

Jesus explains this by saying,

*(37a) "All that the Father gives me will come to me..." (ESV)*

Everyone, without exception, whom the Father has given to his Son, would come to the Son. It was utterly impossible that any one of these should fail to come to the Lord Jesus for salvation. The Father in heaven has given all these individuals to his Son, and now they were his. Therefore, the grace of God must bring them through faith unto eternal salvation. (John 10:29; 17:2,6,9,24)

In the second part of this verse, the Lord declares:

*(37b) "...and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (ESV)*

No one who came to Jesus need ever fear that the Lord would reject them or cast them out. Never under any circumstances, would Jesus reject anyone who came to him—i.e., in true repentance and genuine faith. The Father gave them to his Son, and the Son of God would not lose even so much as one. They would never at any time be driven away from the Son. They would never be cast out. They would be his—now, and for evermore. (Isa. 1:18; Matt. 11:27-30)

Who, though, are those whom the Father has given to the Son?

Clearly, they are those whom—from eternity—God has predestined unto life. The Father has given every one of these to his Son, and every one of them will come to believe on his Son. All this is by the sovereign grace of God in redemption, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that a person can be born anew spiritually; or led from darkness to light; or from death to life or from unbelief to belief. (John 6:65; 2 Thess. 2:13-14)

Outside of Christ Jesus, all mankind without exception is presently abiding under the wrath of God. All alike therefore deserve only to face God's just judgment. Nevertheless, out of his everlasting love, the Lord God has determined to save a vast multitude who would be known as his special and chosen people. To this end, he gave his only Son to effect their redemption and to reconcile them to God.

That anyone at all experiences this salvation is due entirely to the sovereign grace, mercy and compassion of Almighty God. It is not due to our own desire, will, effort or choosing. We choose Christ *only after his Spirit has drawn us*, and then we believe on Christ—*freely and willingly*. However, we believe on him *only because his Spirit has called us* and enabled us to exercise saving faith.

Again, we accept Christ as our Saviour and our Lord. However, we accept him as such *only because the Spirit of God has revealed these truths to us through the Word*. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts, convinces and converts us to God. It is the Spirit of God who constrains us to embrace the truths of the Gospel with all our hearts. (Rom. 9:16) Every aspect of our salvation, therefore, is due to the love, mercy and grace of God, and not to our own prior desires, efforts or choosing.

*“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10 ESV)*

### John 6:38

The Son's express purpose in coming into this world was not to accomplish his own will, but the will of his Father in heaven. The Lord Jesus came with the sole purpose and intent of fulfilling his Father's will. In this way, the Son would bring glory, praise and honour to the name of his heavenly Father. (Ps. 40:7-8; Isa. 53:10; John 4:34; Phil. 2:6-11)

What, however, is the will of the Father?

This is explained in the following verses as being the salvation of lost men and women.

### John 6:39

*(39a) “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me ...” (ESV)*

In verse 39, the Lord declares that it is his Father's will that he, the Son, should not lose even one of all that the Father had given him. Every single man, woman and child that the Father had given to the Son would be brought to faith in the Son. Every single one thus brought to faith in Christ would belong to Christ for all eternity. (Matt. 18:12-14)

According to this verse, it is the Father's will that the Son should not lose any of those given to him. Therefore, once the Holy Spirit has brought them to true saving faith in Christ, God keeps every single one of those believers eternally secure. (John 10:27-30; 17:12)

*(39b) “...but raise it up on the last day.” (ESV)*

Concerning all those whom the Father has given to the Son, the Lord says it is also the Father's will that the Son should effect their resurrection at the last day. This, of course, means that their bodies will be raised and glorified, and reunited with their souls for all eternity. However, since it is the will of the Father that everyone given to the Son must thus be raised, then it is absolutely certain that these believers cannot fail to inherit their home in heaven. The will of the Father is the guarantee of their eternal security. Not one of them can ever, or shall ever, be lost. (Rom. 8:11,28-30; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)

### John 6:40

*(40a) “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life ...” (ESV)*

In verse 40, Jesus expands further on his Father's will concerning the redemption of lost men and women. It is the will of the Father that every single person who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. Everyone who believes on the person of Christ, and on his atoning work on his or her behalf, will be saved—saved from the righteous wrath and judgment of God. (John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11-13)

It is the eternal decree of God in heaven that everyone who looks to his Son in faith will be saved. The verb *to look* (look upon) means *to look most attentively*; i.e., to look with a view to seeing all there is to see, and learning all there is to learn.

The expression, *looks to the Son*, probably derives from the incident of the brazen serpent. In speaking to Nicodemus, the Lord said that just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Those who looked in faith to the uplifted



serpent, lived. Those who disbelieved and refused to look, died. (Num. 21:7-9; John 3:14-15)

Everyone who looks in faith to the uplifted Son of Man inherits eternal life. Everyone who believes with all his heart that Jesus has been uplifted on the cross for his sins will be saved. Everyone who believes that there is no other means of salvation except through faith in the crucified, resurrected and glorified Son of God, inherits eternal life. (Acts 4:12; 1Tim. 2:5-6)

Those whom the Spirit and the Word convict of their sin and convince of their need of salvation, look to Christ in faith. The Holy Spirit has converted them and enabled them to express true repentance toward God and genuine saving faith in his Son. Thus, by looking in faith to Christ, every one of these believers discover that God has granted him or her abundant and eternal life. Regardless of their race, colour, class or former beliefs, these are the ones whom the Father has given to the Son.

*(40) "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (ESV)*

By the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, every one of these men, women and young people comes to the Son—*freely and willingly*. Every one of them receives the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit and eternal life. Every one of them will be kept forever secure by the Son—for this is the will of the Father concerning them.

The last phrase of verse 40 confirms this. There, the Lord Jesus repeats his promise that he personally will raise up every believer at the last day. (John 7:37-38)

## **Jews Reject Jesus' Words**

### **John 6:41**

The Jews, however, failed completely to understand the spiritual nature of the Lord's teaching. They could think only of the expression he had used—*bread from heaven*. To them, Jesus surely must be talking about physical bread, like manna; but which—unlike manna—somehow provided eternal life by eating. To these people, this was an absurdity. Their minds could not comprehend that Jesus was not speaking of physical food but of spiritual food. Thus, they began muttering discontentedly between one another, and complaining about Jesus' works and words. (John 6:52; cf. Jude 1:16)

### **John 6:42**

As they murmured, the Jews asked one another,

*(42a) ..."Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" ... (ESV)*

Apparently, these Jews were acquainted with Jesus' father and mother. Therefore, they complained bitterly among themselves when Jesus claimed that he had come down from heaven (v.38). They were baffled by Jesus' assertion that he had come to earth from heaven above. Again, they were completely mystified by the Lord's claim to be doing the will of his Father in heaven. These Jews knew that Jesus' earthly parents were Joseph the carpenter and Mary his wife. How, then, could Jesus claim to be connected with the Father in heaven? (Matt. 13:55-57; John 7:27)

Joseph, of course, was not Jesus' natural father. Jesus was conceived supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. However, for legal purposes, Joseph would be considered as Jesus' father or guardian. (Matt. 1:18-25; Rom. 1:3-4)

### John 6:43

Jesus was fully aware of everything that these Jewish religious leaders were thinking and whispering among themselves. He knew the thoughts and intents of their hearts, and he knew that they were directing their complaints against him and his teaching.

These religious leaders had failed utterly to understand the spiritual nature of Jesus' teaching. Instead, they had tried to attach a literal interpretation to everything that the Lord had said. They had blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts by their own wilful obstinacy and unbelief. (Heb. 4:12; John 12:37-43)

### John 6:44

(44a) *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him..."*  
(ESV)

Why did these Jews—and many other people—not receive Jesus' teaching? Because, said Jesus, no one *can* come to him unless the Father draws him. No one *can*—i.e., no one is able to—accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord unless drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. No one *can*—no one is able to—comprehend spiritual truth and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, unless the Holy Spirit regenerates him or her and illumines their sin-darkened mind. (Matt. 11:25-27; John 6:65)

It is often claimed that—even in his fallen state—mankind possesses free will. We do not deny that, in general matters, fallen mankind possesses some measure of freedom of will to act independently. However, we must recognise that, in moral and spiritual matters, and because of the fall, man's free will is biased continually toward, and contaminated by evil. Even when he chooses to perform good deeds or actions, those good deeds or actions are thoroughly polluted by his sinful nature. In his sinful state, fallen man does not possess the inward desire to choose good continually, nor to do that which pleases God. These things are not within fallen mankind's power.

Before the fall of man, Adam and Eve possessed free will. This original pair, therefore, were able to exercise that free will without the restraints of sin or of sinful inclinations on their will. However, when this pair exercised their free will to disobey God's express command, and therefore to sin against God, their free will suffered accordingly. Since the fall, mankind's 'free will' has been influenced and governed by his sinful inclinations and tendencies. Therefore, although they may exercise freedom of the will in a general sense, when it comes to exercising their free will in a moral or spiritual sense, men and women today are much more likely to find their 'free' wills enslaved to sin and its consequences.

Again, since the fall, men and women no longer possess the *ability* to exercise their 'free will' in a manner pleasing to God. Similarly, fallen men and women *do not have the ability* to come to Christ unless effectually drawn to Christ by the Holy Spirit. (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 8:7-8)

All those, however, whom the Father draws by his Holy Spirit, will come unfailingly to Christ. None of those whom the Spirit draws will ever find himself or herself rejected. God makes these men and women his children by regeneration and adoption. The Holy Spirit convicts, convinces and converts (or regenerates) them.

In regenerating them by his almighty, sovereign, life-imparting power, the Holy Spirit then enables these men and women to exercise their now renewed minds and wills in the moral and spiritual realm. The first and immediate exercise of their renewed minds and wills is to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. They do this gladly, and they do it *freely and willingly*; for the Spirit of God—acting through the Word of God—has made them able and willing to respond in love and faith to the Son of God, and to accept him wholeheartedly for all that he has done for them.

Therefore, to every one of those whom God calls, Christ speaks this solemn word:

*(44) "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." (ESV)*

Here, the Lord Jesus assures every one whom the Father draws to his Son by his Spirit, that they will belong to him for eternity. Though their bodies die and lie buried in the grave, yet—at the last day—the Lord Jesus will raise them up. In their then glorified and immortal body, they will dwell in the presence of the Father and his Son throughout the eternal ages, serving him and singing his praises.

#### **John 6:45**

{Cf. Isa. 54:13}

All this was in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophets. There, it is written that they would all be taught by God. All those whom the Father would draw to Christ would receive this teaching from God's Word as its truths were applied to their hearts and minds by the Holy Spirit. They would listen to the things of God and they would learn; i.e., they would understand the truths concerning Christ, because revealed to them by the Spirit of God. (Isa. 2:3; 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34; John 16:13-15)

*(45) It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me—" (ESV)*

By the Spirit's teaching, they would be convicted and convinced of their sin and need and brought to repentance and faith in the Son of God. They would embrace Christ freely and willingly, but only because the Holy Spirit had first enabled them to do so. The Spirit had renewed their spiritually dead souls. He had shone into their darkened hearts and minds. He had revealed to them the truth about Christ. He had subdued their once stubborn hearts, and had drawn them to Christ. Then, with a willing heart and mind, they had received Christ as their Saviour and their Lord. (John 16:8; cf. 2 Cor. 3:14-18)

#### **John 6:46**

No one at any time has ever seen the Father. God is Spirit. He is invisible. He dwells in unapproachable light; i.e., he is characterised by absolute holiness, purity, righteousness, justice and truth. So pure and perfect is the character of God that no one could come into his presence or look upon the fullness of his majestic glory, and live. Therefore, no human being in his present state or form is capable of looking on the resplendent glory of the Father. (John 1:18; 5:37; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12)

*(46) "not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father." (ESV)*

However, although no sinful human being can see God or look upon his glory, one totally sinless and perfect Person possesses that right and privilege—the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son, who is co-eternal and co-equal with his Father, came from the immediate presence of God. He, and he alone, has seen God. He, and he alone, not only looks upon his Father's effulgent glory, but also possesses that same radiant glory himself. The Son is the exact imprint of his Father and the radiance of his glory. The Son, therefore, is the only person who can and does reveal the Father to sinful men and women. Similarly, the Son is the only person through whom sinful men and women can approach the Father. (John 14:9-10; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3)

### John 6:47

They will all be taught by God, yet no one has ever seen God. They will all be taught by God. They will listen to the Father and they will come to Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the Holy Spirit has made known the truths of God. No one has ever seen God, but Christ has made him known. No one has ever seen God, but those who look with faith on the Son, have seen the Father too.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus continues:

(47) *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.”*

Now, the eternal and glorious Son of God avers that anyone who believes on him has—i.e., *now possesses*—eternal life. Any person who receives him receives life for evermore. Anyone, who has learned of the Father and has come to the Son, receives from the Son the gift of eternal life. (John 5:24; 6:40; 1 John 5:12-13)

### John 6:48

This is what Jesus meant when he had spoken about the bread of life. The ‘bread of life’ is that spiritual nourishment or soul food which provides eternal life. To receive of this living bread, a person must be drawn by the Father to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Saviour and Lord. (John 6:33)

Until a person takes of this living bread, he remains in his sins. And until he is drawn and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, he remains spiritually dead, totally alienated from God and at enmity with God. Only by a work of sovereign grace in his heart and life, and by his subsequent acceptance of the bread of life, can a person be justified and reconciled to God. Justification and reconciliation, therefore, are to be found only through that grace of God which draws a person to repentance and faith in his Son, and which impels that person willingly to accept the Lord Jesus’ atoning and substitutionary work on the sinner’s behalf.

### John 6:49

Here, the Lord Jesus speaks once more of the manna provided by God for his people in the desert. The Jews’ forefathers had eaten that manna, yet they had died. God had provided them with bread from heaven, but this bread from heaven was physical and material: it did not provide the people with eternal life. This bread was neither spiritual bread nor living bread. The manna in the desert was intended only to meet the people’s daily temporal needs. (John 6:31; 1 Cor. 10:3-6; Heb. 3:17-19)

### John 6:50

In contrast to this temporary and temporal bread, the Lord Jesus provides the bread that is permanent and eternal. Indeed, he is that bread. He is this source of nourishment.

The Jews failed to understand that the Lord Jesus was not speaking of physical nourishment, but of spiritual nourishment. They could not conceive of him as the bread that had come down from heaven to provide eternal life. Nor could they comprehend what the Lord had meant when he said that the person who ate this bread would never die. (John 6:33)

Jesus, of course, had not been speaking merely of natural or physical death—the death of the body—but of spiritual death. This was a matter of the soul; not of the body. The Jews, however, remained completely baffled by the expressions being used by the Lord Jesus. They still understood his remarks as referring to literal, physical bread. They imagined that one had to eat this bread literally, to receive the life of which Jesus was speaking.

**John 6:51**

(51a) *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven..." (ESV)*

Where do we find this living bread?

(51a) *"I am the living bread..." [declared Jesus].*

(51a) *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven..."*

Here, the Lord Jesus was repeating unequivocally that he was the source of eternal nourishment and life; he alone could provide food for the soul. He had indeed come down from heaven; i.e., from the presence of his Father. The same Almighty God and Father who provided his people with manna in the desert, now provides his people with spiritual bread from heaven. This spiritual bread is imparted to his people by God the Son.

(51b) *"...If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever..." (ESV)*

Yes, a man must 'eat' of this bread in order to live forever.

(51c) *"...And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (ESV)*

No one was to imagine, however, that this living bread was to be taken into their mouths and ingested in their stomachs, as was the manna. No, this living bread was Jesus' flesh. He would give his flesh for the life of the world. Jesus, of course, was speaking about giving his *body* and shedding his *blood* on Calvary's tree to make atonement for sinners throughout the world. (Matt. 20:28; Titus 2:14; Heb. 10:5-12,20)

(Later, within the Church, the Lord Jesus would institute a sacred remembrance feast typifying the occasion of his sacrificial and atoning death. This was to become known as the 'breaking of bread', 'the Lord's Supper', or, in the later church, as 'Communion' or 'the Eucharist'. (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor. 11:22-29) However, Jesus is not discussing this subject directly here.)

The Jews failed completely to understand Jesus' words. They still insisted on interpreting the Lord's words literally, in the context of eating physical bread. Then, when Jesus said that the living bread was his flesh, the Jews again attempted to understand his words literally.

**John 6:52**

This was too much for the Jewish religious teachers or rabbis to bear. At once, they began debating hotly among themselves concerning the terminology used by Jesus.

This is absurd, they inferred:

(52b) *"...How can this man [emphasising their belief that Jesus was only a man] give us his flesh to eat?" (ESV)*

From their over-literal standpoint, the Jewish leaders considered that it was utterly obnoxious to their beliefs that the Lord should expect them to eat human flesh. The very thought filled them with revulsion. Had not the Lord God expressly forbidden such practices? What kind of man was this? What kind of teaching was he propounding to the people? Thus, the Jews continued to strive, quarrel and wrangle with each other over the apparent import of Jesus' words.

### John 6:53

To *eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood* was to believe wholeheartedly the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was to believe everything that Christ had been saying about his person and work. It was to believe that he came into this world to be the Saviour of lost men and women. It was to believe that the holy, perfect Son of God would sacrifice his life to make atonement for sin. Thus, to eat his flesh and drink his blood was to believe that he would yield up his body and shed his life-blood for the redemption of sinners. This whole teaching was what provided life and nourishment for the soul.

Therefore, the Lord says,

*(53b)... "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (ESV)*

'Unless you feed yourselves on this life-giving food and drink, you will remain in death.'

Figuratively, *to drink* is to receive into one's soul that which serves to refresh, strengthen and nourish it unto eternal life. However, as usual, the Jews did not realise that Jesus was speaking figuratively. In their spiritual blindness, they still thought that the Lord was speaking literally.

### John 6:54

The Lord continues to press his analogy. Anyone who eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life. Anyone who receives Jesus and his teaching as the bread of life—i.e., who believes on him and everything that he teaches—has eternal life. Anyone who—by faith—believes on the Lord Jesus as his or her Saviour and Lord has the gift of eternal life.

Those who believe on Christ as their Saviour and Lord believe in the need for an atoning sacrifice. They believe on the need for a perfect, spotless lamb to take away sin. They believe that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin. They believe that Jesus—the Lamb of God—came into this world to become this atoning sacrifice. They believe that he alone takes away the sin of the world. (Heb. 9:22) All this, however, amounts to believing on the Son of God and accepting the teaching of his Word.

*(54) "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (ESV)*

God grants eternal life to all those whom he has called by his Spirit. It is they—and they alone—who repent and believe on the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. It is they—and they alone—whom the glorified Lord Jesus will raise up at the last day.

### John 6:55

This is the only real food, or true and life-giving nourishment for the soul. This is the only source of real life—abundant and eternal life. Jesus, the Son of God, provides this spiritual food. He is the one who meets the deepest hunger of a person's soul, and who satisfies the soul's deepest thirst. The Lord Jesus is the one who imparts life—spiritual and eternal life. (John 6:32-33) Only by 'eating' or partaking of him—i.e., only by accepting his person and teaching wholeheartedly—can a person receive this life. The Lord Jesus' flesh, therefore, is real food and his blood is real drink.

If a person believes wholeheartedly in the person, work, and teaching of the Lord Jesus, and 'eats' or absorbs that teaching, then he or she is 'eating' of his flesh (figuratively and spiritually). If a person believes unreservedly on the necessity for and validity of the Lord

Jesus' sacrificial and atoning death (and resurrection), then that person is participating (figuratively and spiritually) in Jesus' flesh and blood.

**John 6:56**

Whoever, therefore, 'eats' or absorbs the teachings of the Lord Jesus—or whoever accepts him and his words wholeheartedly—remains in him. Through believing in the Lord Jesus, and in his teaching and work, that person has 'eaten' or appropriated by faith the Lord Jesus' flesh and drunk his blood. He or she has absorbed into their heart, mind and soul every word of truth taught by the Son of God. Therefore, that person has received eternal life.

This life springs up from within him. It is life originating from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and it is sustained by the Holy Spirit. All those in whom the Spirit dwells, belong to Christ. Those who belong to Christ remain (or abide) in him, and he remains in them. Because of their redemption, procured through the shedding of his blood, the Lord Jesus becomes inseparably bonded to his people, and they to him.

**John 6:57**

Between the Father and the Son exists a mystical union. The Son is bonded inseparably to his Father and the Father to his Son. Jesus lives because of the Father. Similarly, a mystical union exists between the believer and his Lord. They have become inseparably bonded. The believer cannot sustain his spiritual life apart from his union with Christ. Therefore, the believer must feed continually on Christ (or, 'eat his flesh and drink his blood') to be nourished and sustained spiritually. The teachings of Christ—and the Word of God in its entirety—constitute the believer's spiritual food.

Feeding on the Word, is feeding on Christ. Abiding in the Word—i.e., conforming our lives to the teachings of God's Word—is abiding in Christ. Those, therefore, who continue to nourish their souls on Christ and on God's Word, live because of Christ and because of the sanctifying power of the Word and the Spirit. (John 14:23-24; 15:1-10)

**John 6:58**

The Lord Jesus himself is the true bread from heaven. This bread from heaven constitutes real spiritual nourishment for a person's soul, for it comes from God above. This bread alone imparts life—abundant and eternal life. To eat this living bread is to receive the Son of God and to accept his teaching wholeheartedly. Anyone who thus believes on the Lord Jesus Christ has received eternal life.

Looking back to Israel in the wilderness, God had provided 'bread from heaven' (manna) to feed his people, but this bread from heaven was intended principally to meet the people's *physical* needs. (Nevertheless, the daily provision of manna for almost forty years, demonstrated the power and glory of Almighty God. The daily prayerful dependence of the people on God, highlighted the necessity of a right spiritual relationship with God.)

By contrast, the Bread from heaven that God has now provided is intended principally to meet a person's *spiritual* needs. (All other true needs, however, are comprehended under, and fully met, in God's salvation.) By taking the Bread that came down from heaven, a person lives forever. By believing on, and accepting, Christ and his teachings, a person receives eternal life. By feeding continually on Christ's words, a person receives instruction in the ways of love, truth, and righteousness and holiness.

### John 6:59

The Son of God taught these things to the people in one of the Jewish synagogues. It was the Lord's practice to teach the people in their local places of worship. However, in such situations, the Lord Jesus frequently encountered a great deal of opposition and hostility. As in this case, this opposition derived from the people's total inability to comprehend the things of God. Their minds had become set on earthly forms of worship and on the traditions of men.

Sadly, the Jewish religious leaders of the day were completely ignorant of true spiritual worship. To them, pleasing God did not mean believing on Christ. Rather, it meant obeying all the rites, rituals, duties and ceremonies of the Mosaic Law. Theirs was a salvation by works or good deeds. In reality, however, salvation is by grace—the free unmerited gift of God's sovereign grace.

## Many Disciples Turn Back

### John 6:60-71

#### John 6:60

During this period, a larger group of people associated themselves with the Lord Jesus. His followers were not confined to the Twelve. This larger group had been listening to all that the Lord had said concerning the bread that came down from heaven. Many of these followers, however, found the Lord's teaching exceedingly difficult to accept. To them, Jesus' teaching was harsh and completely incomprehensible. In many respects, it was as offensive to their unspiritual minds as it was to the Jewish leaders.

These 'followers' refused to accept certain things that the Lord had said. Therefore, they complained,

*(60b) ...“This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” (ESV)*

Who among us is able to tolerate this kind of teaching? This is not the kind of teaching we expected to hear from Jesus.

So these followers continued to murmur and complain against the Lord's teaching. (John 6:66; 8:31)

#### John 6:61

The Son of God was fully aware of every thought that passed through the minds of these 'disciples'. He knew their hearts, and he realised that they had taken offence at his teaching. Therefore, John writes:

*(61) But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offence at this?" (ESV)*

The Lord Jesus challenged those who claimed to be his followers (and by implication, believers on the Lord Jesus). 'Do you take offence at this?' 'Does this kind of teaching cause you to stumble? Have you tripped or fallen over these teachings?' (John 2:24-25)

#### John 6:62

However, if such teachings caused offence to these 'followers' (and so-called believers), what would they think concerning the Lord's resurrection and ascension back to his Father's presence? They claimed to be the Lord's followers. But they did not really believe



that Jesus had come from the Father in heaven. They followed Jesus as a man who could perform strange and miraculous signs, and who perhaps could achieve great things on earth. (John 3:13; 16:28; cf. Eph. 4:8-11)

These followers did not believe in Jesus' heavenly origin. If they had, they would have accepted his words without reserve. The fact was, of course, that the Son of God had come from God in heaven with his Father's commission to teach his word and to accomplish his Father's work. The words that Jesus had spoken to these followers were the words of his Father, not the words of any man. Therefore, if these followers took offence at what Jesus was teaching them, then, in reality, they were taking offence at what God was saying to them. These words were his words. This teaching was his teaching. These truths were God's eternal truths—and so they would remain forever.

If people reject the truths that God reveals to them, then these people reject God. If, however, they refuse to accept the Father's Word, these same people cannot remain the Son's followers.

One day, the Son of God would return to his Father's glorious presence. Then, his followers would see the resurrected Lord Jesus ascending to the Father. As on previous occasions, this would confirm to these disciples that Jesus had come from God and that God had sent him into this world. It would confirm to the Lord's true followers that every word that he had spoken had been the words of the living God.

Clearly, however—at the time Jesus was speaking—not all of his followers were true disciples. Many had been offended deeply by his recent teaching. They had found his words difficult, if not impossible, to accept. Those followers who were truly the Lord's, would accept every teaching that he gave them. Those, however, who were not his true disciples, would reject both the Lord and his teachings.

### **John 6:63**

Many of these followers had professed to be the Lord's disciples. However, it is impossible for anyone to become the Lord Jesus' true follower unless that person demonstrates a willingness to learn from the Lord and obey his teaching. A disciple is a learner, and those who follow Jesus must be ready and willing to listen to his words and to accept these words as from the Father in heaven.

Every word that the Lord Jesus spoke was the word of the living God. The Holy Spirit gives life to a person's soul through the application of the Lord's teaching to their minds, and through their wholehearted belief in him and in his teaching. No other teaching can provide a person's soul with spiritual life. Only the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit can impart spiritual life. Human words or fleshly wisdom can never impart such life. However, the words that the Son of God speaks in the power of the Spirit can and does impart this spiritual life. (2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 5:25; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:23)

How does a person become a true follower or disciple of Jesus?

They do so by receiving unconditionally the teachings of the Lord Jesus and by believing on him as the one whom God has sent. Those who are truly the Lord's disciples will continue to receive his teachings, or doctrine, throughout their lives. They will heed his voice speaking through his Word, and they will follow the Lord wherever he leads.

### **John 6:64**

Knowing the hearts of all men, Jesus was fully aware of the thoughts and intents of each of his followers. The Lord knew every secret thought and plan. He knew that—even among the Twelve—there was one who did not believe, and who would betray him. This

man was Judas Iscariot. Even although Jesus had called Judas to follow him, this disciple's heart was not right with God. Even although—and in common with the other apostles—the Lord had empowered Judas to perform mighty works in his name, yet Judas did not belong to Christ. (John 13:10-11,18-21)

From this, we learn that it is possible to hold office in the church without being spiritually regenerated. It is possible to exercise gifts in the church without being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It is possible to occupy an exalted or privileged position in the church and yet be lost and destined for judgment and eternal hell. Of course, such individuals do not belong to the true 'invisible' church (comprising all the elect of God), but only to the visible or nominal church.

Judas had been invited to associate with Christ and his followers. Everyone, except Jesus himself, believed this man to be a true disciple. Everyone thought that Judas was a man of God, except the Son of God. Judas had succeeded in deceiving the Lord's true followers. He had given the impression that he was a believer, when he was not. He was an unbeliever. He was a man still in bondage to the control of the devil. Later, Satan would enter Judas and he would betray Jesus. Satan, however, can only enter, or take control of, those lives in whom the Holy Spirit has no permanent dwelling place. (John 13:27)

### John 6:65

Not everyone who follows Jesus believes on Jesus. Although many may say that they are his disciples, the Lord knows their hearts. He knows that they do not believe. Among these people are many who refuse to accept Jesus' teachings unconditionally. They find some of his words difficult to accept. Some of the Lord's teachings or doctrines cause them offence, creating in their hearts a very real stumbling block. (John 10:26-27; 12:37-40)

These 'followers' cannot accept the Lord's teachings because his teachings hold no appeal to unregenerate and worldly-minded people. Jesus' teaching requires humility of heart and spiritual discernment. As such, they appeal only to those who are spiritually minded.

Therefore, says the Lord,

*(65) ...“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (ESV)*

It is the Holy Spirit—and he alone—who enables a person to understand and accept the Lord Jesus' teachings. The Spirit reveals the things of God to the mind. He alone can restore the spiritually dead to life and turn spiritual darkness to light. This is the reason why no one can come to the Lord Jesus unless the Father has enabled him or her. As long as a person remains in spiritual death and darkness, that person possesses no desires after spiritual things. The Holy Spirit must first create that desire or thirst within him or her.

By regenerating a person spiritually, and causing them to thirst after righteousness, the Spirit of God draws that person to Christ—the Righteous One. Through this internal or effectual call, the Holy Spirit leads a person to repentance and faith in Christ. Granted, a repentant sinner accepts Christ freely and willingly—but only because the Father has enabled him to do so. Apart from this work of the Holy Spirit, it is utterly impossible for a person to come to Christ in repentance and faith. Without the Spirit, that person possesses no real desire to seek the Lord or to call upon his name. (John 6:37,44-45; Eph. 2:8-9; Jas. 1:16-18)

**John 6:66**

These words proved more than many of the Lord's followers could endure. When they had set out to follow Jesus, they had not expected to receive such teaching. They had not realised that a true disciple of the Lord must seek to learn the ways of the Lord. He had to receive and believe every word spoken by the Lord—for it was the word of the Almighty Sovereign God himself. (John 8:31-32)

Some of these truths, however, proved unpalatable to these professing—but uncommitted—followers. Consequently, at this stage, many of the Lord's disciples turned back. Clearly, however, these people had not experienced the regenerating and justifying power of God, because God never permits true believers to apostatise (renounce their faith) or fall away. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God keeps his own people eternally secure. The fact that the people mentioned above abandoned their profession is proof that they never belonged to Christ. In forsaking Christ, they returned to the world and to their old sinful way of life. In this way, false professors often separate and differentiate themselves from the real followers of the Lord Jesus. (John 6:60)

**Jesus Challenges the Twelve****John 6:67**

At this point, the Lord turned to the twelve disciples he had specifically chosen.

*(67) "So Jesus said to the Twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?". (ESV)*

The Twelve, too, had heard the Lord's teaching. Now, Jesus turns and challenges these followers also. Perhaps better than any, the Twelve knew what the Lord expected of his followers. They knew that they must believe and receive every word that the Lord Jesus spoke. It was not open to them to accept some of the Lord's words or teaching and reject others simply because they might find certain doctrines offensive to their ears or minds. These truths revealed something of the Father in heaven, and they taught what the Father wanted people to know concerning his Son. Therefore, anyone who wished to be a follower of Jesus had to accept every word he spoke as the words of the living Sovereign God.

How, then, would the Twelve respond to this? Would these also forsake the Lord and turn back to the world?

**John 6:68**

Challenged by this question, Simon Peter replies:

*(68b) ..."Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."  
(ESV)*

Among the Twelve, Peter may not always have been the most confident or consistent of Jesus' disciples. Yet, of one truth, this disciple was absolutely sure. Jesus had come from God (v.69). He must have come from God, since he had the words of eternal life; and no one but God could impart such words or grant such life. To whom else, then, could Peter possibly turn? No one else could teach him the truth about God and about his relationship with God. No one else could bring to him the message of salvation and eternal life.

**John 6:69**

Peter continues with his answer to the Lord Jesus. Not only he, but other true disciples also, had come to believe that Jesus was indeed the Holy One or Anointed of God. With

## Expository Notes

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all their hearts, Peter and the Twelve (excepting Judas Iscariot) had come to accept that Jesus was the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. If, like the unfaithful and uncommitted followers, they were to turn back, what hope would remain for them in God? (Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11-12)

### John 6:70

Because they had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, Peter and the other true disciples believed on the Son of God and were fully prepared to accept his teaching. These disciples belonged to the Lord Jesus. They were his sheep.

Jesus knew, however, that this was not true of every one of the Twelve. One among them had never experienced spiritual rebirth. He was a deceiver and a thief. Even although the Lord Jesus had personally selected each of the Twelve, the Lord knew that one of them did not possess saving faith in him. Instead of being a child of God, this man was and remained a child of the devil.

### John 6:71

The Lord had chosen Judas Iscariot for apostolic office, and this man had performed some outstanding works in the name of the Lord. This, however, would never excuse or mitigate his sin and guilt for the kind of man that he was. For three years, Judas had been in the immediate presence of Jesus—and yet he had rejected Jesus' teaching. For this reason, the man of Kerioth increased his guilt beyond measure. (Matt. 10:1-4; John 6:64-65; 13:18; 17:12; 18:2-9)

The Lord referred to Judas as *a devil*; i.e., he was a slanderer or false accuser. He was a child of *Diabolos* or *Satan*—the adversary, slanderer, false accuser and author of lies. (John 8:44; cf. Acts 13:10)

How dreadful it is indeed to be aware of the Lord's Person, work and teaching, to have experienced the fellowship of his people, to have tasted of the powers of the world to come, and yet to renounce all interest in God's Son and in the only way of salvation. (Cf. Heb. 6:4-8; 10:29,38)

## John Chapter 7

### Jesus Awaits His Appointed Time

#### **John 7:1-13**

##### **John 7:1**

The Lord Jesus knew that the Jewish religious leaders were seeking to kill him. For this reason, Jesus left Judea temporarily. For the time being, he would concentrate his work on the towns and villages of Galilee. (John 5:18) The Son of God did not intend to allow the evil schemes of the Jewish religious authorities to thwart his Father's plans and purposes for him. Soon, Jesus would return to Judea, but he would not do so openly.

##### **John 7:2-3**

One of the three major Jewish festivals—the Feast of Tabernacles—was approaching. (Lev. 23:33-43; Deut. 16:13-16)

Concerning this feast, Dr. M.G. Easton wrote:

The third of the great annual festivals of the Jews (Lev. 23:33-43). It is also called the "feast of ingathering" (Ex. 23:16; Deut. 16:13). It was celebrated immediately after the harvest, in the month Tisri, and the celebration lasted for eight days (Lev. 23:33-43). During that period the people left their homes and lived in booths formed of the branches of trees. The sacrifices offered at this time are mentioned in Num. 29:13-38. It was at the time of this feast that Solomon's temple was dedicated (1 Kings 8:2). Mention is made of it after the return from the Captivity. This feast was designed:

- 1) to be a memorial of the wilderness wanderings, when the people dwelt in booths (Lev. 23:43), and
- 2) to be a harvest thanksgiving (Neh. 8:9-18). The Jews, at a later time, introduced two appendages to the original festival, viz., (1.) that of drawing water from the Pool of Siloam, and pouring it upon the altar (John 7:2,37), as a memorial of the water from the rock in Horeb; and (2.) of lighting the lamps at night, a memorial of the pillar of fire by night during their wanderings.

"The feast of Tabernacles, the harvest festival of the Jewish Church, was the most popular and important festival after the Captivity. At Jerusalem it was a gala day. It was to the autumn pilgrims, who arrived on the 14th (of the month Tisri, the feast beginning on the 15th) day, like entrance into a silvan city. Roofs and courtyards, streets and squares, roads and gardens, were green with boughs of citron and myrtle, palm and willow. The booths recalled the pilgrimage through the wilderness. The ingathering of fruits prophesied of the spiritual harvest." (Valling's Jesus Christ, p. 133.)

Jesus' brothers planned to journey up to Jerusalem to attend this important festival. However, they did not wish to travel to the holy city without Jesus. At this point, Jesus' brothers completely misunderstood the nature and purpose of the Lord's work. They believed mis-

takenly that Jesus was trying to make a name for himself, and that his miracles were the means he was using to create a following.

Therefore, in a bid to encourage Jesus, his brothers exhorted him to leave the relative seclusion of Galilee. Instead, (they said) he should visit Jerusalem; especially on the occasion of this feast. There, in that bustling capital, large numbers of people would be able to witness his miraculous powers. In this way (Jesus' brothers reasoned), the people would be more readily persuaded to follow Jesus.

The Lord's brothers continued:

### John 7:4

*(4a) "For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly..." (ESV)*

Jesus' brothers continued to urge the Lord to go to the feast. Mistakenly believing that Jesus was seeking worldly fame and accolade, they told him that he could not achieve such fame so long as he worked in secret.

*(4b) "...If you do these things, show yourself to the world..." (ESV)*

Only by performing his works openly to the world, would Jesus make a name for himself. Only in this way would he become a real public figure that the people could admire. Only in this way would he gain a substantial popular following among the people.

Thus reasons the mind of unspiritual man. It may even have been that his brothers were mocking the Lord Jesus. Yet, God's grace can transform even such worldly-minded attitudes, making them serve his own purposes.

### John 7:5

This way of thinking, however, demonstrated very clearly that the Lord's brothers did not believe that Jesus was whom he claimed to be. They failed to see Jesus as the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. (Cf. Mark 3:21) Thus, they did not believe that the Father had given Jesus a specific work to accomplish. To his brothers, Jesus was just another man—a man with very remarkable powers. Only later would his brothers become convinced of the truth—the solemn truth that Jesus was, and is, the Holy One of God.

(Following their conversion, Jesus' (half-) brother James would become a pillar in the early church, and Jesus' (half-) brother Jude would become an ambassador of the Lord, writing the letter that bears his name. (Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Jude 1:1))

### John 7:6

*(6a) Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come..." (ESV)*

The Lord Jesus reminded his brothers of the true nature of his work on earth. The Son of God stated plainly that the precise time appointed for him by his Father had not yet arrived.

The Lord Jesus did everything at the time specified for him by his Father in heaven, and according to God's will and purposes. However, Jesus' brothers had no such plan to fulfil. Therefore, any time was right for them—so long as it did not conflict with God's general purposes for them. (John 7:30; 13:1; 17:1)

The Lord continued:

### **John 7:7**

It was perfectly safe for the Lord's brothers to mingle with the crowd of worshippers now thronging Jerusalem. They would not encounter the hostility of the Jews. However, if Jesus himself were to appear at the wrong moment, the Jewish authorities would persecute him and attempt to kill him (v.1). They did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. To them, Jesus' claims to have come from the Father constituted blasphemy.

As a whole, unregenerate mankind wilfully rejected the Lord Jesus, either by quietly ignoring him and his word or by despising him and repudiating his teaching publicly. The Lord's teaching exposed their sin and reminded them that, one day, God would hold them responsible for their every thought, word and deed. These were matters, however, about which they had no desire to hear. Therefore, many of these people expressed deep and open hostility against the Lord Jesus.

Again, and with very few exceptions, the Jewish religious authorities—including the priests, Pharisees and Sadducees—united in their stand against the Lord Jesus. (Although Pharisees and Sadducees remained vehemently opposed to one another over doctrine; the latter denying the resurrection).

Almost to a man, these religious leaders determined to put Jesus to death. Ostensibly, their reason was for blasphemy against God, breaking the Sabbath, and for failing to seek the official approval of the religious council or Sanhedrin before engaging in public preaching. In reality, however, they were bitterly opposed to the Lord Jesus because he was exposing their ignorance of God's will and ways, and was taking them to task for their ungodly and hypocritical attitudes and behaviour.

Out of their wicked rebellion and resentment against God, these people endeavoured by any means possible to vilify the name of God's Son. At every turn, they sought to distort and discredit Jesus' words and works. (John 3:19-20)

We must remember, of course, that many of the Jewish religious leaders were unregenerate and worldly-minded men. Although steeped in the knowledge of the Mosaic Law, and of theological matters, they were entirely without the Spirit of God. They may have been clad in sacred vestments, and occupied high religious posts, but the majority of these apparently 'very religious' individuals were without God and without hope in the world.

The same is true today of those who occupy sometimes high religious offices or posts, who are clad in sacred vestments, *but who are without the Spirit of God*. They are yet in their sins. They are wolves in sheep's clothing, and a great danger to God's flock because they are alienated from God by their wicked works and sinful nature. Notwithstanding their religious claims, appearances of piety, or (false) professions of faith, they are not the servants of Christ. Rather, they are the servants of Satan. (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Jude 1:4)

In verse 8-9, Jesus said to his brothers:

### **John 7:8-9**

Recognising the importance of the divinely appointed Feast of Tabernacles, the Lord Jesus encouraged his brothers to go up to Jerusalem to attend the festival. However, the Lord advised his brothers that he himself would not be travelling to Jerusalem with them.

Clearly, the Lord wanted to avoid being recognised by the multitude that was thronging the holy city. Later, Jesus would make his way to Jerusalem—but not in public. The Lord was

following exactly his Father's plan and purpose for his life. However, this was not the right moment to proceed to Jerusalem. Therefore, while Jesus' brothers and many other worshippers made their way to the temple, Jesus himself remained in Galilee.

Therefore, John writes:

### **John 7:10**

Once his brothers had left for Jerusalem, the Lord too began his journey to the holy city. Jesus had fully intended to go to this feast, but not in the company of either his family or of the thronging crowd of worshippers. Those who sought Jesus merely for earthly advantage could not succeed in hindering or thwarting God's plan and purposes for his Son. Nor could the Lord permit those Jewish religious leaders who sought his life to hinder him in his work. For these and other reasons, the Lord went up to Jerusalem privately.

### **John 7:11**

The Jewish religious authorities fully expected Jesus to attend this important feast. Therefore, they had made arrangements for some of their number to keep watch for Jesus, and to report his presence immediately he appeared.

As the crowds began arriving at Jerusalem for the festival, these informers sought diligently among the people for any sign of the Lord Jesus. They would question the worshippers who were flocking into the holy city, asking them if they had seen or heard of Jesus. Hence, we see one reason why Jesus did not go up to Jerusalem with the crowd.

The religious leaders were determined to find the Lord and destroy him. Therefore, they kept on watching, searching and waiting—asking the question,

*(11b) ...“Where is he?” (ESV)*

To them, Jesus was only a man—a man to whom they referred demeaningly as *'he'*, completely ignoring the Lord Jesus' glorious names and titles. (John 11:56-57)

The Scripture continues:

### **John 7:12**

Even among the crowds of ordinary people, there was much disputing and arguing about Jesus. Much of this debate took place secretly and in whispers. This was because the people did not want the Jewish authorities to know that they had been talking about Jesus.

Some of the people declared that Jesus was a good man. Those people would point to all the good works that Jesus had performed, and to all the teaching he had brought to the people from God. However, others among the crowds alleged that Jesus was a deceiver. According to them, the Lord was deluding the people and leading them astray by his teaching. (John 10:19-21)

The Lord's teaching differed in many respects from that of the scribes and Pharisees. Therefore, (many people reasoned), Jesus must be teaching false doctrine. It was the scribes and Pharisees, of course, who had distorted the teaching of God's Word—not Jesus. Everything that Jesus said and taught was the truth of God, for it was the very word of God. Furthermore, Jesus himself was that living Word or Logos who had come to earth from the immediate presence of God.



**John 7:13**

However, because of their fear of the Jewish authorities, none of the people dared to say anything publicly about Jesus. All discussions took place in secret; or, at least, at times and places where the Jewish religious authorities were not likely to hear. Anyone who discussed Jesus openly—especially in a favourable way—risked being expelled from the synagogue, or even being arrested and imprisoned. (John 9:22,34; 12:42-43)

**Jesus Teaches at the Temple**

**John 7:14-24**

**John 7:14**

Jesus had gone up to the Feast privately. However, he did not appear at the temple until halfway through the festival. Only then did the Lord appear in the temple courts and begin teaching the people. By this time, the Jewish authorities had lowered their guard—apparently not expecting Jesus to appear at the Feast at this late stage. However, the Lord had managed to slip through the temple guard, and was now in the midst of the people.

Arrest at this point now became much more problematic for the Jewish authorities. With so great a crowd of worshippers present, the Jews could not risk provoking a riot by arresting Jesus in the temple precincts. Thus, the Lord was able to begin and to continue teaching the people undisturbed. (Luke 19:47-48)

**John 7:15**

Jesus' teaching utterly amazed the rabbis and other religious teachers. *They* had spent years of study in the theological or rabbinical schools—and still they could not teach like the Lord Jesus. Many of them had advanced far above their fellows—but still they did not possess the voice and words of authority that was so characteristic of the Son of God and of his teaching.

It was evident to the Jewish authorities that Jesus was endowed with immense knowledge and wisdom. (Jesus possessed infinite knowledge and wisdom—but this was not appreciated by the Jews.) The Jews could not understand how Jesus could know so much and teach so authoritatively without ever having studied at the rabbinical schools or schools of philosophy. Therefore, they asked,

(15b) ...*“How is it that this man has learning,<sup>22</sup> when he has never studied?”*  
(ESV; cf. Matt. 7:28-29; 13:54)

Once again, the religious leaders refer to the Son of God disparagingly as *‘this man...’* Clearly, they have no intention of acknowledging the Lord’s sovereign power, glory and authority.

### John 7:16

Aware of what the Jews were saying about him, Jesus replied,

(16) ...*“My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.”* (ESV)

The teaching that the Lord Jesus was imparting to the people did not originate with the Lord himself. Nor was this teaching of merely human origin. Rather, it was divinely inspired or ‘God-breathed’. It was the word or teaching of the Father in heaven. Every word that the Lord Jesus spoke was the word of the true and living God.

This teaching had come directly from the one who had sent the Lord Jesus into the world. Therefore, since this teaching was the word of the living Sovereign God, then everyone ought to heed every word that Jesus spoke to them. They ought to obey his teaching as the express word of God himself. (John 3:11; 8:28; 14:24)

The Lord continued:

### John 7:17

‘There is a way of knowing with certainty that my teaching comes from God above. However, the only people competent to judge are those who choose to do God’s will.’

(17) *“If anyone’s will is to do God’s<sup>23</sup> will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.”* (ESV)

Unless a person deliberately chooses to do the will of God, it remains impossible for him to reach a right judgment concerning the Lord Jesus’ teaching. The person, however, who chooses to obey God, does so because he or she is a person in whom the Spirit of God dwells.

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<sup>22</sup> 7:15 Or *this man knows his letters* [ESV footnote]

<sup>23</sup> 7:17 Greek *his* [ESV footnote]

Since the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—indwells that person, the Spirit will guide him or her to a right conclusion concerning truth and error. The Spirit will reveal the good and the right way, and will convince that person of every truth that comes from the Father. Therefore, he who does God's will is able to distinguish truth from error. (John 8:31-32,43,47)

He who does God's will knows within himself that the teaching of the Lord Jesus is the very word of God. This, however, is not merely a subjective experience or intuition. Rather, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the power, veracity and infallibility of God's Word, making the truth abundantly plain to those in whom the Spirit dwells. This is why a person knows—

*(17b) "...whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." (ESV)*

Jesus went on to say:

### **John 7:18**

The one who speaks of, for, and by himself does so to gain self-praise or self-honour. He is not concerned about bringing praise and glory to anyone else. His primary concern is to draw attention to himself and to his sayings or his personal opinions. Such a person is of this world, and does not seek the honour of the Father in heaven.

The one, however, who seeks to honour God by what he says and does, is genuine. There is no falsehood or deceit in that person. He does not aim to please himself, but to please the one who sent him. Such a person is a man of truth: a man who is not concerned about gaining self-glory or self-honour, but only the honour and glory of God in heaven. Thus, men and women should hear and obey a person who seeks to honour and glorify God. (John 8:49-50,54)

In verse 19, Jesus asks:

### **John 7:19**

In past generations, Moses had sought to bring praise and honour to God in heaven. It was not his intention to bring glory to himself, but only to the Lord. Through Moses, God gave the people his holy and righteous law—the law of Commandments. Yet, although those people had received God's law from the hands of Moses, they—and their descendants—had failed utterly to obey that law.

With all the vehemence that they could muster, the Jews of Jesus' day claimed to respect and honour the teachings of Moses. Yet, as the Lord Jesus made abundantly clear, almost every one of them was bringing the teaching of God's law into disrepute. Not even one of the present day Jewish leaders had kept the law that God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

To illustrate this point, the Son of God asks in the latter part of verse 19:

*(19c) "...Why do you seek to kill me?" (ESV)*

The very fact that the Jewish religious leaders were seeking to arrest Jesus in order to put him to death proved that these leaders did not respect God's law; for, in the law it is written: *You shall not murder.* (Exodus 20:13; John 5:45-46)

### **John 7:20**

*(20a) "The crowd answered, "You have a demon!... (ESV)*

The response of the crowd was immediate. They accused the Son of God of being demon-possessed, and therefore of speaking and behaving bizarrely and irrationally. They asserted indignantly that no one would think of killing him. Therefore, they were implying that Jesus must have been suffering from delusions of the mind. (John 8:48, 10:20)

Jesus, however, knew perfectly well what these people were thinking. He did not need anyone to tell him what was in people's minds. He told the Jews that they were trying to kill him—because he knew that they were harbouring murderous thoughts and intentions in their hearts and minds.

### John 7:21

Referring to the healing of the man paralysed for thirty-eight years, the Lord reminds the Jews of their reaction. They had been astonished to see this man being healed after so long a time. They knew of no one else who was capable of performing such outstanding miracles. With their own eyes, some of these people had witnessed God's power, yet they had refused to believe in God's Son. They had seen a man being healed, but they could only find fault with Jesus for healing him on the Sabbath day. (John 5:1-11)

The ability to perform such signs ought to have convinced the Jewish authorities that God had indeed sent Jesus. However, because of their own stubborn sinfulness, these people had blinded their minds to spiritual realities. They could not see or comprehend the witness that God was bearing to his Son. They refused to believe that these miracles authenticated Jesus' person and work. Their only concern was to accuse Jesus for breaking the law regarding the Sabbath. Jesus, however, had not broken the law of God in any respect. Rather, he had upheld and honoured the law.

Jesus continued:

### John 7:22

These people professed to observe the law of God, yet this did not stop *them* from 'working' on the Sabbath day.

The Jews asserted or implied that Moses had given them the rite of circumcision. However, this rite long predated Moses. God had given it to Abraham.

As a sign of his covenant with Abraham, God had commanded the patriarch to circumcise every male child when he was eight days old. To that day, among the Jews, this God-given rite was practised religiously. However, many of those infants reached their eighth day on a Sabbath. Yet—in obedience to God's law—the Jews circumcised those infants *on the Sabbath!* (Gen. 17:10-14)

God never institutes conflicting laws. Circumcising someone on that day did not break the law concerning the Sabbath. Similarly, healing someone on that day did not break the law concerning the Sabbath.

The Lord continued:

### John 7:23

Clearly, then, in order to obey God's law, occasions do arise when it becomes necessary to circumcise infants on the Sabbath day. The Jews themselves approved of this very practice, and were quick to condemn those who were slow to circumcise their children—even *on the Sabbath day*.

Thus, the Lord Jesus continues by asking in verse 23:

(23b) “...are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?” (ESV)

If the Jews could see no wrong in *circumcising* on the Sabbath, how could they possibly see any wrong for *healing* on the Sabbath?

With all their fastidiousness for legal niceties, how could the Jews approve of the one, and condemn the other? They showed no displeasure when surgical excision was performed on a child on the Sabbath. Yet, illogically, they expressed outrage against the Lord Jesus for making a person whole on the Sabbath! (Cf. Matt. 12:5)

Then, Jesus challenged the Jews:

#### **John 7:24**

Clearly, although annoyed at the act of healing on the Sabbath, the Jewish religious leaders had been annoyed even more by the person who had carried out the healing. Primarily, they had been annoyed with Jesus.

The Lord Jesus had been accomplishing his heavenly Father's will, but the Jews had not accepted either the Father or his Son. The Son had been working the works of God—even on the Sabbath day. The Jews, however, refused to believe that Jesus had come from God, or that God had sent him to accomplish his work.

Thus, the Son of God challenged them to cease judging by mere appearances. Rather, they should have been judging with mercy, justice and with righteousness. If they had, they would have accepted what the Lord Jesus had been saying to them: For he spoke the words (or expressed the will and purposes) of his Father in heaven. (John 8:15)

### **Jesus Continues Teaching**

#### **John 7:25-29**

##### **John 7:25**

Some of the leading citizens of Jerusalem, however, were more fully aware of the authorities' plans to put Jesus to death. Yet, when they saw Jesus teaching the people openly within the temple precincts, they began to question among themselves: 'Did not the authorities intend to arrest and imprison this man, and put him to death? Why, then, were they permitting him to teach openly? Why had they not arrested him while they had the opportunity? Had some new evidence come to light, convincing them that Jesus really was the Messiah?'

Therefore, they ask:

##### **John 7:26-27**

'We know the origins of this man,' reasoned these people. 'He comes from Nazareth in Galilee. His father is the carpenter, Joseph. Therefore, Jesus cannot be the Christ.'

(27b) “...when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.” (ESV)

*When the Christ appears, no one will know where he came from.* (Probably, this is an allusion to the prophecy in Malachi concerning the Lord's sudden appearance at the temple.)

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There, it is written:

*"Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (Mal. 3:1 ESV)*

Concerning the Lord Jesus, the people who claimed to know of his origins, were greatly mistaken. Jesus had been raised in Nazareth, but he had not been born there. Rather, the Lord Jesus had been born in Bethlehem—in fulfilment of the prophecies concerning him. He was not the son of Joseph (except in the legal and technical sense). Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. As such, Jesus was a descendant of David—in fulfilment of what the prophets had said concerning him. (Micah 5:2 with Matt. 2:5-6; Matt. 1:6-16; Matt. 13:54-56; John 6:42)

### John 7:28

At this point, the Lord Jesus cried out in the temple for everyone to hear: He challenged these people's preconceived ideas of his person and origin. The people thought that they knew him. They thought that they were aware of his origins. They were convinced that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, his presumed natural parents.

How wrong they were! Mary was indeed Jesus' natural mother. Joseph, however, was not Jesus' natural father. Jesus, the Son of God, had been sent into the world by his Father in heaven. To this end, Jesus had been conceived miraculously in the womb of the virgin Mary. This miracle of conception had occurred through the direct intervention and almighty power of the Holy Spirit.

The people professed to know Jesus. They professed to know where he had come from. Clearly, however, they remained completely unaware of Jesus' true origins. Their professed enlightenment was darkness indeed! (John 8:14,42)

In verse 29, the Lord continues:

### John 7:29

The vast majority of these people at the temple for the Feast knew neither the Father nor his Son. If they had, they would have believed that Jesus was the Christ—their promised Messiah, and they would have accepted him as such. As it was, they rejected both Jesus and his teaching. In reality, however, the people were rejecting God the Father. For all their professions of faith in the Jewish religion and in the God of Abraham, most of these people did not know the Father. However, asserted the Lord Jesus, *I know him, for I come from him... i.e., from the immediate presence of the Most High and Sovereign God. (John 8:55)*

*(29b) "...and he sent me."*

The Father had sent his Son into this world to accomplish his purposes for the salvation of lost men and women. However, these truths remained hidden from the minds of the people—and especially from the religious hierarchy. They professed to know God and to be aware of his will and purposes for their lives and for mankind in general. Yet, their attitudes and actions toward the Lord Jesus proved that they did not know God in any personal sense. How, then, could they be aware of God's will and purposes? (Matt. 11:27)

## Attempts Made to Arrest Jesus

### John 7:30-36

**John 7:30**

Jesus said three things (v.29) that greatly offended and enraged these Jews:

1. He said that he knew the Father.
2. He said that he had come from the Father.
3. He said that the Father had sent him.

To the Jews, this was blasphemy of the highest order. By saying that he knew the Father, Jesus was claiming personal and intimate acquaintance with the Father—a claim that no devout Jew would dare to make. Again, by claiming such an intimate relationship with the Almighty, Jesus indicated that he stood infinitely closer to the Father than even the most pious of religious Jews. This was most offensive to Jewish ears. Yet again, by saying that he originated from the Father, Jesus was claiming equality with God. He who originates *from* God must be essentially the *same* as God—just as a child is essentially the same as his or her parents.

Jesus, it seemed, was claiming to possess all the attributes of deity—which indeed he did possess! This, the Jews entirely understood. Therefore, when Jesus said that he had come from God, this must have utterly enraged these Jews. They thought of such an assertion on the part of a mere human being as blasphemous.

In addition to this, however, Jesus said that the Father had sent him. This further claim to direct association with Almighty God infuriated the Jews even more. Therefore, they sought to silence Jesus permanently. Believing that he was guilty of blasphemy, they would call for the appropriate penalty—death by stoning. (John 8:54-59; 10:30-31)

*(30) So they were seeking to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. (ESV)*

To this end, the Jews immediately attempted to arrest Jesus. However, events were not under their control, but under God's control. It was not the Father's time for his Son to be taken. Therefore, in the providence of God, Jesus escaped from their clutches. No one was able to lay hands on the Son of God before his appointed time. (Luke 19:47-48; 20:19; 22:53-54)

**John 7:31**

While these leading Jewish citizens, and civic and religious leaders, had been debating with Jesus, many ordinary Jewish people had been listening to their discussions. These people did not necessarily agree with the antagonistic stance adopted by their leaders. Even so, not all of the ordinary people accepted everything that the Lord said. Many of these people believed on Jesus as a prophet—perhaps as the prophet whom many Jews thought would appear before the coming of the Messiah. (Apparently, they had not accepted John the Baptist as fulfilling the role of that very prophet!) (Matt. 11:14; John 6:14-15)

Many of the ordinary people considered Jesus to be a great man and a remarkable miracle-worker. However, they did not necessarily see in Jesus the one whom God had sent to be their Saviour. Indeed, as this verse clearly indicates, these people believed that the Christ was still to come. (John 2:23-25)

**John 7:32a**

All too soon, news reached the ears of the Pharisees that Jesus was teaching in the temple precincts. This was too much for these exasperated men to endure. They determined

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to arrest Jesus without any further delay. If, (reasoned the Pharisees), they allowed him to continue teaching, his doctrine would adversely affect the common people. Then, even more people would begin to follow him!

Also of great concern to the Jewish religious leaders was the possibility that—if people continued to follow Jesus, the Roman authorities would intervene. Then, they might lose their freedom to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. In addition, they might forfeit their civil and religious liberties; or even forfeit their distinct racial or national identity. (John 11:47-48)

### John 7:32b

To avoid this possibility, the Pharisees conferred with the chief priests, and together they arranged to arrest Jesus. Summoning the temple police officers or guards, they ordered them to apprehend Jesus immediately, and to bring him before the chief priests and Pharisees.

### John 7:33

Jesus, of course, knew what was in the minds of the priests and Pharisees. He was fully aware of why they had sent the temple officers to arrest him. However, the Lord Jesus made it plain to them and to the people that his destiny did not lie in the hands of sinful man, but in the hands of God his Father. (Matt. 26:24; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

*(33) Jesus then said, "I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me." (ESV)*

The temple police had arrived to place Jesus under arrest and to escort him to the chief priests. They had come to deprive the Lord of his liberty; but—unknown to them—they would be utterly powerless to lay hands on the Lord Jesus before the Father's appointed time.

That time, however, was now very short (barely six months remained before Jesus would lay down his life). Soon, the Lord would leave this world to return to the one who had sent him. Before doing so, however, Jesus must finish the work that his Father had given him to do. The scheming plans of sinful men could not hinder or thwart in the least degree the eternal plans and purposes of the Almighty and Sovereign God. (John 12:32-36; 13:1,3,33; 16:5)

### John 7:34

When, that day came, the Jews would search diligently for the Lord Jesus—but they would not be able to find him. By that time, his work on earth would be accomplished. His Father's will would be done, and his name would be glorified. Men and women out of every nation under heaven would then be reconciled to God, through faith in the Son of God and in his finished work of atonement at Calvary.

On completion of this work and his subsequent resurrection, the Son of God would be received again into the glory of his Father, there to be exalted to his own right hand for evermore. The people would seek him in that day, but they would not find him—for to that place, sinful men and women could not come. (Luke 13:24-25; John 8:21; Mark 16:19) It was reserved only for those who called upon the name of the Lord for salvation; for those who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and for those who would become the children of God by regeneration and by adoption.



**John 7:35**

Again, the Jews began to murmur and debate among themselves: Where could Jesus be going? Where could he possibly hope to hide himself?

The Jews, of course, imagined that Jesus had been speaking of going to some remote place or distant land. Jesus had said that he would be returning to the one who had sent him. Even so, it had not entered the heads of the Jews that the Lord had been speaking about returning to heaven. To them, Jesus was only a man. Any man who spoke about 'returning' to God in heaven was not to be taken seriously—except insofar as he might be guilty of irreverence or blasphemy. (Cf. John 16:17-18)

Therefore, continued the Jews:

*(35b) "...Where does this man intend to go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?" (ESV)*

Since Jesus was only a man (they reasoned), he must have been speaking about going to other people with his teaching. However, to whom would he go? Would he go to teach those Jews who had been scattered among foreign nations, far beyond the borders of Israel? Would he even take his message to the Gentiles—to those who stood outside God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Jews?

Greatly perplexed, the Jews asked again:

**John 7:36**

The Lord Jesus, however, had no more to say to these Jews on this occasion.

**'Come to Me and Drink'****John 7:37-44****John 7:37**

*(37a) On the last day of the feast, the great day... (ESV)*

All too soon, the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles arrived. The last day fell on a Sabbath; and it was a particularly joyous occasion. As on each previous day of the feast, the priest solemnly brought forth the sacred golden vessels—amidst great rejoicing. These hallowed vessels had been filled with water drawn from the stream of Siloam. (The stream of Siloam was a small river that flowed beneath the mountain on which the temple stood.)

In the midst of great rejoicing, the priest raised the golden vessels and poured out the water upon the altar. As he did so, this song was sung:

*"With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation." (Isa. 12:3 ESV)*

[cf. Olshausen in Jamieson, Fausset & Brown]

At this point in the sacred ceremony, John writes concerning the Lord Jesus:

**John 7:37**

*(37) On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink." (ESV)*

'I am the one who fulfils this very prophecy. I am the source of eternal salvation, and the wellspring of eternal life. If, therefore, any man thirst after spiritual things—if he earnestly desires satisfaction for his soul—let him come to me and drink. I alone can satisfy the deepest desires of a man's heart. I alone can impart living water to the soul—that water which is drawn from the wells of salvation, and which will never run dry.' (John 4:10,14; Rev. 21:6)

Let us remember the words of the prophet of old:

*"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isa. 55:1 ESV)*

Therefore, declares Jesus,

*(37b) ... "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."*

For Jesus to claim to be the source and giver of eternal life meant only one thing: Jesus was claiming to be God. This, the Jews clearly understood. This again convinced these men that the Lord Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. However, because of the presence of the crowds, they themselves did not lay hands on him. Instead, they had sent the temple officers to accomplish this task on their behalf.

**John 7:38**

*(38a) "Whoever believes in me..."*

In verse 37, Jesus had issued the blessed invitation to receive the abundance of God's forgiving grace—including the gift of eternal life. In fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, salvation was being offered freely to the people. All that the people needed to do was to recognise their need, and come to Christ for the fulfilment of their needs. Everyone who believed these words of the Lord Jesus, and who accepted him as the source of life and salvation, would inherit the blessings of salvation. This included the forgiveness of sins. (John 6:35-37)

Thus, Jesus says:

*(38) "Whoever believes in me, as <sup>24</sup> the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (ESV)*

This is the same metaphor of eternal life that Jesus used with the woman at the well. Thus we see that these and other similar metaphors (such as eating Christ's flesh and

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<sup>24</sup> **7:38** Or let him come to me, and let him who believes in me drink. As... [ESV footnote]

drinking his blood) were not intended to be understood literally. Rather, they speak figuratively of profound spiritual truths. The 'living water' represents regeneration and eternal life imparted by the Spirit of God.

To help the people understand basic spiritual truths, Jesus used this figure to illustrate eternal and abundant life. The Lord was basing his teaching on the familiar temple ceremony where the waters from the stream were poured out from the sacred vessels. He was also deriving his teaching from the Old Testament Scriptures which spoke of living water or the wells of salvation. These concepts were very familiar to the Jews, and therefore should have been understood by them—were it not for their sin-darkened and unspiritual minds. (Cf. Jer. 2:13)

To return to the verse above: Everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ will be abundantly satisfied; for, in Christ, a person's every spiritual need will be fully met. That person will inherit all the fullness of abundant and eternal life. This life will well up within him like an ever-flowing stream of living water. He will become Christ's for ever; and through believing in the Saviour, that person will be forgiven and reconciled to the Father in heaven. Everyone, therefore, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ becomes a child of God and an heir of God's heavenly, glorious and eternal kingdom.

### John 7:39

*(39a) Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive... (ESV)*

The streams of living water, of which Jesus had been speaking, referred to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit within each believer. For generations past, and up to the present time, all of God's children had been *regenerated* by the Spirit. However, they had not received all the promised *blessings* of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work would not begin in full measure until the Lord had completed his work on earth.

*(39b) ...for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (ESV)*

God would pour out the fullness of his Spirit on his people at Pentecost. This would be in fulfilment of the Lord's own promise to send the Holy Spirit after his ascension and exaltation to glory. (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21)

When God poured out the Holy Spirit in all his fullness, the Spirit's ministry would be greatly extended. He would lead Christ's apostles—and then God's people more generally—into all truth; and he would do this in a fuller, deeper and richer way than ever had been experienced before. (John 16:13; 1 John 2:27) The Holy Spirit would guide God's people, and he would enable them to discern truth from error much more distinctly. (1 John 4:1-6) God would impart to each of his redeemed children the gifts and graces of the Spirit. This would include the nine fruits of the Spirit; the first of which is love. It would include also the various gifts of the Spirit, given to whom he willed for the mutual edification and upbuilding of the church in love. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Again, through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the demoralised and despondent disciples would find their faith restored and revitalised. The Holy Spirit would equip and empower them to proclaim the Word of God boldly and courageously.

In working in the hearts and lives of the believer, the Holy Spirit would never magnify or draw attention to himself. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit would direct the believer's attention to Christ, and would seek always to glorify the name of Christ. Therefore, in John chapter 16, the Lord Jesus says:

*(13) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (14) He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (15) All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*  
(John 16:13-15 ESV)

The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. However, just as—in respect of his offices—the Son speaks of the things of the Father and glorifies his name, so also—in respect of his offices—the Holy Spirit speaks of the things of Christ and glorifies Christ's name. In this respect, the Spirit never draws attention to himself or to his works. Rather, the Holy Spirit always points to, and magnifies, the Lord Jesus and his works—which, in effect, are the works of the Father.

### John 7:40

On hearing these words of Jesus, many people declared him to be *the Prophet*. Perhaps they were thinking of the Prophet whom God had promised to raise up from among their own people. In Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Moses had written about such a Prophet. Speaking through Moses, God had commanded the people to hear and to heed the words of this Prophet—for he would be God's representative and spokesman. However, although the Jews did not necessarily equate this prophecy with the Messiah, it is virtually certain that the Prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18 does indeed refer to the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

### John 7:41

Others among the people thought that Jesus was indeed whom he claimed to be—the promised Messiah. These people began whispering this opinion among themselves—much to the annoyance of the religious authorities.

*(41b) ... But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?" (ESV)*

Yet other people, however, contested the opinion that Jesus was the Christ. They pointed out that the Messiah could not arise from Galilee. Like many others, these people were unaware that Jesus had not come from Galilee, but from Bethlehem in Judea—as prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. (Cf. Micah 5:2 with Matt. 2:5-6)

Therefore, this same group continued:

### John 7:42

*(42) "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (ESV)*

As we have seen, however, Jesus was indeed a descendant of David—thus fulfilling the Old Testament Scriptures regarding him. (Ps. 132:11)

### John 7:43

Because of these differences of opinion, the people were divided in their view of Jesus. Some held to his words and teachings, while others rejected Jesus and his teachings. This must have led to some heated discussions and debate between individuals and groups, and even between family members who held to differing opinions. (Luke 12:51-53; John 7:12; 9:16; 10:19-21)

**John 7:44**

Some of the civic leaders would have laid hold of Jesus in order to hand him over to the religious authorities. They considered him guilty of causing strife and dissension among the people. They feared lest this should lead to a riot or rebellion, which would soon come to the notice of the Roman government. There was, however, no danger of this, as all circumstances in the life of the Lord Jesus remained firmly in the hands of his heavenly Father, and under his control.

Again, it was not yet the Father's time for his Son to be apprehended—so no one was able to seize him; i.e., no one was permitted to take hold of God's Anointed until the express time set for this event by the Father. Although intent on killing the holy Son of God, these evil men were being restrained by God's almighty hand. (John 7:30; 8:20)

**John 7:45**

Meanwhile, the temple officers or guards, who had been sent to arrest Jesus, had returned to the chief priests and Pharisees without him. Immediately, the religious leaders demanded to know why they had not brought Jesus with them. Why had they disobeyed their express orders? (John 7:32)

Their reply was simple but profound:

**John 7:46**

*(46) The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" (ESV)*

The temple officers, of course, could not arrest the Son of God because the Father had so ordained circumstances that they felt unable to lay hands on Jesus.

Perhaps, these officers may have replied to those who sent them something like this: 'We *did not* bring him because we *could not* bring him. It would not have served the interests of justice or of righteousness to arrest such a man without good cause. We are temple police officers. Our duties include protecting the temple and its precincts from those who would defile it. They include preventing the desecration of the holy place. They include ensuring that nothing is done which would dishonour the name of the living God—the God whose name is worshipped in this holy sanctuary. This man Jesus, however, has committed none of these offences. On the contrary, we heard him honouring the name of God, and we did not see him do anything that was contrary to the law of this holy place. (Matt. 7:28-29) No ordinary man could speak as does this man. We considered it unwise, therefore—and potentially dangerous—to risk carrying out your orders to arrest Jesus.'

**John 7:47**

The officers' reply incensed the Pharisees. How had these temple policemen dared to disobey the orders of their superiors? What right had they to assess the situation and to consider Jesus not guilty of any offence? These men were merely temple guards—servants of the religious establishment. They knew little or nothing about Jewish theology or Jewish canon law. They had no right, therefore, (surmised the Jewish leaders) to presume Jesus innocent or to be influenced by his authoritative words.

Thus declared the astonished and enraged Pharisees,

*(47b) ... "Have you also been deceived?" (ESV)*

'Have you—like the common rabble—been taken in by this man's teaching?' (Matt. 27:62-63; John 7:12)

## Expository Notes

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Again, the Pharisees had been frustrated in their evil attempts to silence the Son of God. Because of the crowds then present in Jerusalem—and, more importantly, because God had prevented them—they had been unable to seize Jesus themselves. Now, the very men whom they had sent in their official capacity as temple police officers had returned to them without arresting Jesus! Once again, the Sovereign Lord God had prevented them. So, we see that God—not man—is in total control of all events.

### John 7:48

If it was possible for the temple guards to be taken in by Jesus' words, perhaps other religious officials had been similarly deceived. Turning to their own numbers—the other ruling members of the Jewish council or Sanhedrin—they demanded to know if any of the Pharisees had believed in Jesus. Was it possible that Jesus' teaching had influenced anyone among their own number?

### John 7:49

It was one thing for false teachers to deceive and mislead the common uneducated rabble. However, there could be no excuse for a religious leader being thus misled! The common people did not know the details of God's law. Because of their ignorance, they were presumed to fall under God's curse. (John 9:34)

(Such an attitude on the part of the Pharisees exhibited pride, arrogance and contempt. However, it was not only the common people who had become blinded by ignorance of God's truth—but also these religious leaders themselves! (Matt. 11:25; John 9:39-41; 1 Cor. 2:8))

### John 7:50

Now, one of their own number spoke up. This man was Nicodemus—the same man who had come to Jesus by night, some time earlier. (John 3:1-2) On hearing these things being said by the other members of the council, Nicodemus could not remain silent any longer:

### John 7:51

*(51) "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" (ESV)*

'We have an appropriate and orderly system of justice for trying and judging accused individuals. However, in accordance with that system, it is not right to presume or pronounce a person guilty before we have tried and convicted him. To do so would amount to a grave injustice, and a gross abuse of a divinely appointed legal institution.' (Deut. 1:17)

### John 7:52

The Pharisees had been taken aback. They had been completely unprepared for this interjection in support of Jesus—especially from one of their own number, and a respected member of the ruling council.

In furious rage, they turned on Nicodemus:

*(52) ... "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." (ESV)*

*“Are you from Galilee too?”*—an expression of reproach and contempt regarding those who came from the region of Galilee, and especially from towns such as the despised Nazareth.

‘Go and search the Scriptures! If you do, you will discover that no prophet ever arises out of Galilee! You are greatly mistaken, and in gross ignorance of Scriptural truths!’

In fact, the other Pharisees were greatly mistaken. At least two Old Testament prophets had come from Galilee. Jonah had come from Gathhepher, and Elijah had come from Thisbe—both in Galilee.

However, once again, the Pharisees were repeating the same mistake concerning Jesus’ place of origin. Because his family had come from Nazareth, and because Jesus himself had lived and worked there for most of his life, the Pharisees assumed that he had been born there. If they had checked the records, however, or the official Roman census, they would have discovered that Jesus’ birthplace was in Bethlehem of Judea. This was exactly as the prophets had foretold.

### **John 7:53**

[THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE JOHN 7:53–8:11]<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> **7:53** Some manuscripts do not include 7:53–8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text. [ESV footnote]





## John Chapter 8

### A Woman Accused of Adultery

#### *John 8:1-11*

##### **John 8:1**

As he did so often, the Lord Jesus retired to the Mount of Olives about two miles outside Jerusalem. There, in the quietness and solitude of this place, the Lord could commune undisturbed with his Father in heaven. Everyone else had gone to their own homes (John 7:53). Jesus, however, needed to spend much time away from the place in which he was staying to be alone with his Father. On this occasion, we are not told how long the Lord spent on the Mount of Olives. However, on other occasions, we know that Jesus sometimes spent all night in prayer to his heavenly Father. (Luke 21:37)

From this, we learn that—no matter how busy we have been during the day—we ought to spend time alone with God. No matter how hectic an everyday life we have, a specific time should be set aside each day to pray and to feed on God's Word.

##### **John 8:2**

Here, we are told that the Lord Jesus was again to be found back at the temple courts. Since he had arrived at the temple by dawn, Jesus must have left the Mount of Olives—or wherever he was staying (possibly Bethany)—even earlier in order to walk to Jerusalem. This meant that he must have left while it was still dark. We should note, too, that when the Lord Jesus arrived at the temple, the people were already there waiting to hear him. Thus, we are encouraged to spend the first part of the day with the Lord—even if this means an earlier-than-usual start to our day. (Luke 21:38)

When he arrived, all the people gathered around the Lord Jesus to hear what he had to say. As was customary among Jewish teachers or rabbis, Jesus sat down before beginning to teach the people. (Luke 4:20)

##### **John 8:3**

Soon, word reached the Pharisees that Jesus was again teaching in the temple courts. Together with those scribes who were teachers of the law, the Pharisees plotted to entrap and incriminate Jesus. They brought to him a woman whom they had caught in the very act of adultery. Then, they made her stand in the midst of the group.

Clearly, these men were intent not only in securing a conviction against this woman, but also in disgracing and humiliating her in public. Instead of examining her case in the relative privacy of a religious or civil hearing, they paraded her before crowds of gaping onlookers and accused her openly of her sin. This action constituted a gross and wilful contempt of the law, and of the principles of justice. Although this woman may have been caught in the act of adultery, she had not yet been tried and convicted formally of that offence. Therefore, the religious authorities had no right to disgrace her, or to expose her to public scorn and contempt ahead of the judicial process.

These religious authorities had been quick to apprehend and accuse the woman. However, they had failed utterly to apprehend and accuse the man who must have been

equally blameworthy. From this, we learn that it is wholly unjust to lay all the blame on one person when we know that other people must equally be to blame.

### John 8:4

As the woman stood trembling in the midst, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees continued to vilify and accuse her before the people. Addressing Jesus, they declared:

(4)...*“Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.” (ESV)*

‘This woman was caught red-handed, involved in gross immorality and unfaithfulness. She was found committing an immoral act and of abusing and misusing God’s gift of natural sexual relations. She committed this act while she was married to another man; therefore, she is guilty of adultery and unfaithfulness. She has been unfaithful to God, for she has broken the solemn marriage covenant that she made in his holy presence. She has been unfaithful to her lawful husband, for she has violated the solemn and sacred promise that she made to him.’

### John 8:5

The religious leaders inferred; ‘You profess to be from God. If so, you will accept the teaching of God as given through Moses.’

(5) *“Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” (ESV)*

‘Are you prepared to uphold God’s holy law?’ (Cf. Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:20-24)

In verse 6, John gives us the reason for the Pharisees’ captious question:

### John 8:6

The Pharisees, of course, intended to ensnare the Lord Jesus. If Jesus upheld the Mosaic Law—as the Jews believed he must do—he would be considered guilty of speaking against the Roman government.

(Under the terms of the Roman occupation, Jewish courts were not permitted to exercise the death penalty—either by stoning or by any other method. Prisoners accused of capital offences had to be handed over to the Roman authorities for trial. If they were found guilty, they would be executed according to Roman law; i.e., by crucifixion.)

Again, if Jesus had told the teachers of the law and the Pharisees to hand the woman over to the Romans, he would have incurred the wrath of the people. The people saw the Romans as unwelcome oppressors, and they despised being ruled by a foreign government. Although they conceded that the woman was guilty, they considered it a gross injustice to place her in the hands of the oppressive Roman authorities.

Yet again, if the Lord failed to condemn the woman without just cause, he would have been guilty of condoning her sin and approving of immoral practices. Therefore, the religious leaders were convinced that they had successfully led Jesus into a trap. No matter which of the three answers the Lord gave them, he would ensnare and incriminate himself. Then the Jews would have grounds for arresting him; or, at least, for utterly discrediting his teaching and work.

Apparently unconcerned with his apparent predicament, however, Jesus simply bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

**John 8:7**

The scribes (or teachers of the law) and the Pharisees pressed Jesus for an answer. They had plotted to lead Jesus into a trap, and now they had become convinced of their imminent success. No matter how Jesus replied he would incriminate himself and allow the Jews to prosecute him with apparently good cause. They only needed an answer to their question concerning the woman. Then, they would get the better of Jesus.

Jesus, however, steadfastly refused to give them any answer.

After the lawyers and Pharisees had persisted for some time with their questions, the Lord stopped writing on the ground.

‘You have brought this woman to me for judgment—although I have not come into the world for that purpose. You have brought her to a public place, and accused her of her sin and guilt before all the people. If, then, she is guilty as charged, it is for you to execute punishment—in accordance with the law. Go ahead and carry out the law’s demands.’

*(7b)...“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (ESV)*

‘If any of you—scribes and Pharisees—has never been guilty of sin, in thought, word or deed, then let that person cast the first stone.’

**John 8:8**

Once more the Lord Jesus stooped down and wrote with his fingers on the ground.

**John 8:9**

Thoroughly convicted by the words of the Lord Jesus, the loudly-accusing Jews fell completely silent. No longer did their vehement accusations reach the ears of the Lord Jesus, or those of the onlookers in the crowd. No longer could they press Jesus for an answer. They had received their answer; and, by it, they stood condemned. These ‘upright’ and most respected of religious leaders had every reason to hang their heads in shame. In their hearts, they knew that they were guilty of sin—perhaps even the same sin of which they had accused this woman. (Matt. 23:25; Heb. 4:12-13)

From this, we see the extent of man’s hypocrisy. Those who accuse and condemn others, all too often conceal within their hearts a kindred sin. And, by that sin, they stand condemned. (Rom. 2:1)

Convicted, therefore, by the words of the Lord Jesus, the religious leaders began to slink away from his presence—beginning with the eldest. Soon, only Jesus remained, with the woman still standing before him.

**John 8:10**

At this point, the Lord Jesus straightened himself up and addressed the woman:

*(10b)...“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” (ESV)*

‘Where are these, your accusers? What has become of those who—only a few moments ago—were accusing you and vilifying your name? Where are these righteous people who desired to uphold the strictest of moral standards by putting to death one who was guilty of breaking those standards? Has not their own hearts condemned them for their hypocrisy?’

From this we see that—although a person may indeed be guilty of sin—yet we must not presume to condemn. It is for the law to condemn, through the judicial system—not for us as private individuals. Those who hypocritically condemn others for their sins, automatically condemn themselves. God, and God alone, is fit to judge the hearts of men and women. The courts—church or civil—are the only places where public charges ought to be brought.

Therefore, Jesus asks the woman,

(10b) *“...where are they? Has no one condemned you?”*

### **John 8:11**

The woman replies, *“No one, Lord...”*

‘No-one remains to condemn me. They have all gone.’

The Lord did not approve of or condone what this woman had done—but neither did he condemn her. Indeed, he was much more fully aware of the woman’s sin and guilt than were the scribes and the Pharisees. The Lord knew that this was not the first occasion on which she had been guilty of adultery and immorality. Rather, he knew that she had been guilty of this sin for some time before she was actually caught in the act. Jesus was fully aware of these facts. Nevertheless, although he knew the full extent of the woman’s sin and guilt, he did not condemn her.

‘Utterly forsake what you have been doing. You have experienced the mercy and compassion of the Lord. You have been granted forgiveness and cleansing from your former way of life.’

(11b) *“Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” (ESV)*

From this, we learn that those who have experienced mercy and forgiveness from God cannot continue to practise a sinful lifestyle. To do so, would be to deny the reality of their forgiveness and conversion. Leaving a life of sin implies living a life of righteousness and holiness.

## **Jesus, The Light of the World**

### ***(Jesus’ Testimony Challenged)***

#### **John 8:12-20**

##### **John 8:12**

Still in the temple courts, Jesus turned his attention once more to the crowds of people who had assembled to hear him. As he sat there, the Lord Jesus called out:

(12a) *“I am the light of the world...” (See also John 9:5; 12:35)*

Previously, Jesus had spoken of *water* and *bread* as the source and provider of abundant life and eternal salvation. Now he speaks of a brilliant illuminating light that reaches to the ends of the earth.

*In ‘the treasury’ where it was spoken (see on v.20) stood two colossal golden lamp-stands, on which hung a multitude of lamps, lighted after the evening sacrifice (probably every evening during the feast of tabernacles), diffusing their brilliancy, it is said, over all the city. Around these the people danced with great rejoicing.*

*Now, as amidst the festivities of the water from Siloam Jesus cried, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink,' so now amidst the blaze and joyousness of this illumination, he proclaims, 'I am the light of the world...'*

*[Jamieson, Fausset & Brown (Scripture quotations from ESV)]*

Here, Jesus speaks of himself as the one who is the embodiment of truth, righteousness, justice and holiness. These characteristics of God are represented by the concept of unapproachable light. God the Son possesses the same characteristics as his Father. However, while he was living among mankind, the Lord Jesus did not reveal the full glory of these divine characteristics or attributes. (John 1:4-9)

As the light of the world, Jesus reveals to all humanity something of the glorious and illuminating nature of God. Similarly, as the light of the world, Jesus reveals to the darkened hearts and minds of men and women the eternal truths of the Gospel. (Isa. 9:1-2; John 3:19-21)

As this glorious light shines into people's hearts and minds, the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin, shows them the way of salvation, and brings them in repentance and faith to the Son of God.

Therefore, Jesus promises,

*(12a,b)...“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness...” (ESV)*

Never again will anyone who follows Jesus find himself abiding in spiritual darkness, and alienated from God by unconfessed and unforgiven sin. Never again will he remain in ignorance of God's only way of salvation, or of the only means of atonement for his sins through true repentance and faith in the Lamb of God. On the contrary, he will know the truth about God, for he will know the one who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Through Christ, he will possess the truth concerning eternal life—and therefore the gift of eternal life itself.

### **John 8:13**

The Pharisees could not bear to hear Jesus talk like this. To them, this was yet another blasphemous assertion. Only God possessed the attributes represented by *light*—and that light was unapproachable and infinite. It was a light so magnificent, and so unbelievably pure and brilliant, that no human being could stand in its presence—let alone bear that light in himself.

The *light* of God represented the *glory* of God. It represented his absolute holiness, justice, righteousness and truth. It represented the sum total of all God's perfections. Yet, here was a man claiming to be in possession of these very attributes!

In claiming to be the Light of the world, Jesus was claiming the attributes that belonged to God alone; at least, in the context in which the Lord Jesus was applying it. For, in claiming to be the Light of the world, Jesus was saying that he possessed the power to take away mankind's spiritual ignorance and sin. This, however, could only be accomplished by God.

Again, Jesus said that any person following him would have the light of life. However, only God could impart the truths of eternal life to men and women. Jesus, therefore, must either be God—which idea the Pharisees utterly rejected—or, as a man, Jesus was guilty of blasphemy against Almighty God.

## Expository Notes

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Therefore, believing him to be a man acting without authority from God, the Pharisees retorted,

*(13b)...“ You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true.” (ESV)*

‘You claim to be the light of the world—but your claim is unsubstantiated and uncorroborated. No one else supports your claim. Therefore, your claim must be false, for two or more witnesses must support all testimony.’

### John 8:14

Being the Son of God, Jesus had no need to support his claims by the testimony of independent witnesses. What he said was undeniably and indisputably true—for it was the truth of God himself.

Therefore, Jesus replies,

*(14a,b)...“Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going...” (ESV)*

Jesus’ testimony is valid simply because of his person and origin. He is the eternal Son of God. He came from the Father and therefore speaks the words of the Father—the very words of God. Through his teaching, Jesus reveals to men and women everything that the Father has told him to make known to mankind. Therefore, in making these claims, and by teaching the people, the Lord Jesus is obeying his Father’s will. Once Jesus had fully accomplished his heavenly Father’s will, he would return to his glorious presence.

Therefore, the Lord says,

*(14b) “...I know where I came from and where I am going...” (See also John 8:42; 13:3; 14:10-11; 16:28)*

The Pharisees, however, had no knowledge or comprehension of what Jesus was talking about, or about his true origin.

### John 8:15

The Pharisees reached their assessment of Jesus purely by the application of human standards of judgment. They saw him as a man; and they passed judgment on him as a man. They judged him as they would judge other men, and therefore they arrived at the wrong conclusions concerning Jesus. (John 7:24)

Since they applied only human standards to their assessment of Jesus, their judgment lacked the essential spiritual element. This was inevitable, since the Pharisees themselves remained in spiritual darkness and therefore could not appreciate spiritual truths.

Such knowledge of God that the Pharisees possessed was not a true spiritual knowledge, but a worldly knowledge. It was a knowledge that came from study and learning, but which lacked totally the illuminating and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Pharisees’ knowledge of God was intellectual knowledge only, not knowledge (i.e., spiritual insight, discernment or understanding) that came from God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 2:14-15)

From this, we learn that it is possible to know a great deal about God without knowing God personally and savingly. *If detached from spiritual illumination and regeneration, study and learning cannot make a person a child of God.*

**John 8:16**

The Lord says,

*(15) "You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. (16) Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father<sup>26</sup> who sent me." (ESV)*

'You judge by human standards—finite and fallible human standards—and therefore you arrive at the wrong conclusions,' asserts Jesus.

Of course, Jesus could have passed judgment—righteous and accurate judgment—on the Pharisees. However, he had not come to judge the world, but to save the world. Final judgment would come on sinful and impenitent mankind—but not now. (John 12:47-48; Acts 17:31)

However, Jesus makes it plain that even if he did pass judgment, he would make right decisions concerning people. He sees a person's heart and knows everything that that person is thinking, and is proposing to do—for good or evil. (Cf. 1 Sam. 16:7)

The Pharisees had complained that Jesus' testimony was invalid because other witnesses had not corroborated it. Jesus pointed out, however, that this was not the case. His testimony had been—and was being—corroborated. It had been corroborated by the voice of his Father in heaven when he had declared:

*"...This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matt. 17:5b ESV)*

Again, it was being corroborated by all the mighty miracles performed by the Lord Jesus. These works of grace and power testified unmistakably that Jesus was who he said he was—the eternal Son of God. (John 5:36; 10:37-38; 14:11; Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4)

**John 8:17**

Jesus points out to the Pharisees that—according to their own Law—the testimony of two people is valid. Such testimony is perfectly acceptable, because the statement of one competent, reliable and trustworthy witness is corroborated by the statement of a second competent, reliable and trustworthy witness. The Lord Jesus reminds the Pharisees that they themselves accept this principle, for it was embodied in the Law of Moses—the Word of God. (Cf. Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1)

**John 8:18**

The Lord Jesus bears witness on his own behalf. He is a competent, reliable and trustworthy witness. Therefore, his testimony is valid. (John 8:25) However, to corroborate the tes-

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<sup>26</sup> **8:16** Some manuscripts *he* [ESV footnote]

timony of the Lord Jesus, another person bears witness on his behalf; namely, the Father. Thus, testimony is borne by two different witnesses, in accordance with the requirements of the Mosaic Law, which the Pharisees accepted. (Heb. 2:4)

What the Pharisees did not accept, however, was Jesus' claim that the Father had borne witness to him as his only Son. Nevertheless, Jesus insists,

*(18) "I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me." (ESV)*

Therefore, the legal requirements for the testimony of two reliable witnesses are fully met and satisfied. (1 John 5:9)

### **John 8:19**

This, however, failed to satisfy the Pharisees.

*(19a) "They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" (ESV)*

The Pharisees, of course, did not accept that Jesus was referring to God as his Father. They utterly rejected the idea that God was Jesus' Father. When they asked him, "*Where is your Father?*" they were seeking clarification from Jesus that they might have cause to accuse him of blasphemy.

Perhaps, however, these Jews were referring to Jesus' earthly 'father'.

'You said your father sent you. Where, then is your father? Bring him here so that we may question him about you. Perhaps he will be able to explain to us why his son is behaving as he does.'

Jesus makes it plain to the Pharisees just how great is their ignorance of spiritual matters. They did not know Jesus; i.e., they did not accept him as the Messiah whom God had sent. Neither did they know God. Although they claimed to be acquainted with God and accepted by God, yet they rejected the one whom God had sent. In dishonouring God's Son, however, they were dishonouring God himself. In rejecting the Son, they were rejecting the Father who sent him. (John 5:22-23)

### **John 8:20**

Jesus stated all these things while teaching near the temple treasury. Therefore, many different people would hear his teaching as they came to place their offerings in the treasury. Yet, none of the authorities succeeded in hindering Jesus or were able to lay a hand on him, for his time had not yet come. Jesus' work was not yet finished. Nothing could happen to him before God's appointed time.

## **'You Will Die in Your Sins'**

### **John 8:21-30**

#### **John 8:21**

Jesus, of course, knew that his Father remained in control of everything that happened to him. He was aware that God had planned every detail of his life. The Lord knew too where his Father's plan would lead him, and what it would cost him. However, as the one who could see the end from the beginning, Jesus knew that very soon he would finish his work on earth. Then, he would return to the glory of his Father in heaven.



Jesus was speaking of returning to the one who had sent him, but the Jews failed to understand. Instead, they became exceedingly perplexed when the Lord said they would look for him but would not be able to find him. Where could Jesus possibly go? No matter where he travelled, news about his whereabouts would eventually filter back to them. Therefore (so they thought), it would be possible to send a delegation from any part of the country to interrogate him or even arrest him. (Cf. John 7:33-37)

Jesus said,

(21a) *“I am going away, and you will seek me...” (ESV)*

Then, however, he had added another puzzling remark:

(21a) *“...and you will die in your sin...”*

The Jews could not understand the significance of this expression. Certainly, such language should have been familiar to them from their knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures. However, these Jews lacked true inward spiritual life. They were at present spiritually dead—dead in their sins. If they remained impenitent, then, ultimately, they would be lost for all eternity—still in their sins.

‘I am going to my Father in heaven—and to that place you cannot come.’

The word *cannot* here means, *you are completely unable* [to come]. It is completely beyond your power or ability to come.

### John 8:22

When Jesus spoke of going away, the Jews thought initially that he was speaking of going to another part of the country. However, the Lord had said,

(21b / 22b) *“...Where I am going, you cannot come.” (ESV)*

Now, upon reflection, some of these Jews were beginning to think that Jesus meant more than going to another region. Perhaps, when he spoke of going away, he meant he was going to kill himself. This might explain why they would not be able to find him. To the Jews, this seemed the only logical explanation for Jesus’ remark,

(21b / 22b) *“...Where I am going, you cannot come.”*

### John 8:23

The Lord, of course, knew what was going through the minds of these Jews. Therefore, he continues by depicting the difference between himself and fallen mankind—including these Jews.

(23a) *“You are from below...” (ESV)*

‘You think in worldly terms, because you belong to this world. Everything that you think, say and do is coloured by your worldly view of things. You cannot see—i.e., you cannot comprehend—what lies beyond the scope of this world’s values.’ (John 3:31; see also Jas. 3:14-17)

(23b) *“...I am from above...”*

‘Unlike you, I come from the realms far above this temporal and perishing world. I come from the eternal heavens—the very throne and dwelling place of Almighty God. The difference between earth and heaven is like night and day. There is no meaningful comparison.’

The Jews came from a world that was created, finite and cursed by the effects of the fall and of sin. The Lord came from the realms of glory—uncreated, infinite and totally free from sin. (John 1:14; 3:13)

‘Your mode of thinking belongs to this world. The heavens from which I come represent a world that is foreign to your way of thinking, and whose values you cannot comprehend or even begin to appreciate.’ (Phil. 3:18-19)

### John 8:24

Once again, the Lord Jesus warns the Jews of their very great spiritual danger. Once again, he tells them that they would die in their sins.

However, on this occasion, the Lord indicates that a way of escape remains—if they should seek it during the day of God’s grace. The Jews would escape eternal punishment if they believed that Jesus was the one he claimed to be. If they accepted him as the Messiah of God and as their own personal Saviour, then God would grant them abundant mercy and forgiveness. If, however, they rejected this offer of grace, they would indeed perish in their sins for all eternity. (John 3:18,36; Acts 4:12; Heb. 10:26-27; 12:25)

### John 8:25

Vastly annoyed by these remarks, the Jews again demanded to know who Jesus was. Who did he think himself to be? Where did he come from? On whose behalf was he speaking and acting?

These Jews, of course, steadfastly refused to believe that Jesus came from the Father and was speaking and acting on his heavenly Father’s behalf.

Repeatedly, Jesus had claimed to be the one whom God had sent; i.e., the promised Messiah. He had claimed to be God’s only Son, sent into the world to accomplish his Father’s purposes for the redemption of lost men and women. The Jews, however, had utterly rejected Jesus’ claims, refusing to accept his words as the words of God. Even the miraculous signs performed by the Lord Jesus failed to convince these hard-hearted Jews of the reality—and underlying authority—of Jesus’ claims. (John 10:24-26)

### John 8:26

One day, God would judge these Jews for their outright and wilful rejection of his one and only Son. On that day, the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself would testify against them. However, that day yet lay in the future. Yet, while he remained on earth, the Lord Jesus himself would have occasion to censure and judge the Jews for their continuing obstinacy and wilful unbelief. (John 9:39-41; 12:47-48)

Jesus testified faithfully to everything that the Father had revealed to him in heaven. Every word and revelation of God is true—infallibly true. Therefore, the Son must declare to mankind all that is relevant to their salvation. This is the truth of the Gospel.

However, if the Jews would not accept the Good News of eternal salvation through repentance and faith in God’s Son, then this same message would be presented to the whole world. This, of course, was in accordance with God’s eternal plan and purposes. No longer would the Jews occupy a privileged and exclusive position in relation to God.

Of course, it was never God’s intention that the Jews should keep the message of eternal life to themselves. Even under the terms of the Old Covenant, God chose to set his love

upon the Jews in order that through them the Gentile nations might experience God's love, mercy and grace.

### John 8:27

The Father had entrusted to his only Son the message of eternal salvation through repentance and faith in him. Now, Jesus was presenting this message of God's grace to men and women everywhere. God accepted into his kingdom everyone whom the Holy Spirit brought to true repentance and faith in Christ. However, God rejected from his kingdom everyone who rejected Christ or who refused to heed his words.

In presenting the Gospel to lost mankind, Jesus was making known his Father's will concerning their salvation; for God was not willing that any should perish. However, although the Lord Jesus spoke only those things that he had learned from his Father in heaven, the Jews completely failed to understand that he was speaking to them about God. At least, they utterly repudiated the idea that God was Jesus' Father. To them, such a proposition was not only preposterous but also blasphemous.

### John 8:28

The Jews just could not grasp what Jesus was saying to them. Certainly, the Lord's words were plain enough, and the Jews should have understood them clearly. Nevertheless, they were unwilling to accept the truth. To do so, would have been an admission that Jesus was right and they were wrong. The Jewish religious leaders, however, could not contemplate such an embarrassing and humiliating concession. They did not understand that Jesus was speaking to them about the Father because they did not *want* to understand.

Jesus therefore says,

*(28a) ...“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he...” (ESV)*

The word translated 'lifted up' may also be translated (*have*) 'exalted'.

One day, the Father would exalt his Son to his position in glory, far above every name that can be named. Before this, however, the Jews would call for Jesus to be exalted on a cross: a cross of shame and dishonour. Yet, concerning this occasion, the Lord says,

*(28a) ...“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am...”*

They would know that Jesus was indeed the Son of God—the eternal *I AM*. In their hearts, they would know the truth—but even then, they would not acknowledge the truth. Even as he hung upon the cross, the Jews would know that Jesus was God's sacrificial Lamb. Still, in their wilful rebellion against God, they would not acknowledge their guilt nor seek refuge in his atoning blood.

Jesus is the living expression of the thoughts and words of his Father in heaven. He is the eternal Logos, or Word (of God). Everything that he says, is what God says. Jesus does and says nothing independently of the Father. This is why the Lord can say, I am in the Father, and the Father in me. (John 5:17-23; 12:49-50; 14:10-11)

Thus far, the Jews denied this relationship between Father and Son. On a coming day, however, they would be forced to acknowledge not only the regal majesty of Christ but also his eternal relationship with the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)

### John 8:29

The Father had sent his only Son into the world to accomplish his will and to die on the cross. However, although it often appeared that Jesus was working alone (apart from his disciples) this was never the case. The Father who sent his Son into the world remained ever with his Son. At no time during his life on earth did the Father abandon his own Son. (John 16:32)

Yet, on the cross, Jesus cried out in dreadful agony,

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1 ESV)*

The Father appeared to shun his one and only Son while he was paying the penalty for our sin. The Most High and Holy God hid his face from his Son while he was bearing the punishment for our sins on the cross. However, God did not *finally* forsake his Son. When Jesus cried out in triumph, *It is finished!* he passed into the immediate and glorious presence of his Father in paradise.

On the third day, his body was raised from death by the power of the Father. Subsequently, he was received into glory, there to be exalted to his Father's own right hand. Therefore, it has always been true that the Father never left Jesus alone. Moreover, the reason God did not forsake his Son was that Jesus always did what pleased his Father.

From this, we learn that God never forsakes his children. Though often they feel themselves alone and forgotten by God, yet their loving heavenly Father never takes his eye off them, nor does he remove his presence from them. His Holy Spirit remains with them for ever. (Deut. 31:6 with Heb. 13:5; Isa. 41:9-10; Matt. 6:25-34)

Even when they sin, God does not finally abandon his own children. He hides his face from them for a moment. However, whenever they confess and renounce their sin, the Father forgives and restores his erring children to himself. So great is his love toward those that fear him, and walk in his ways. For the believer, walking in God's ways is that which brings pleasure to their Father in heaven. (Ps. 103:8-14; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-2)

### John 8:30

The Jews were no more convinced by these words of Jesus than by any others. They refused stubbornly to accept his claims or to heed his words—the only words that could impart life to their spiritually dead souls. In doing so, however, they cut themselves off from all hope of salvation and acceptance by God—at least for as long as they continued to reject God's Son. (John 5:23)

However, apparently not everyone remained so wilfully obstinate. Among those who listened to Jesus were many ordinary Jewish people. Unlike most of the Jewish religious leaders, many of these ordinary Jewish people professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—although, not all of these professions turned out to be genuine. (John 2:23-25; see also John 7:31)

From this, we see that the same word of truth may produce opposite effects. Those who hear and reject God's Word remain under that condemnation which, ultimately, will lead them to eternal perdition. Those, however, who hear and accept the Word of God, experience immediate salvation from God, together with the gift of eternal life. (2 Cor. 2:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:7,8) The fact that they are truly the children of God is demonstrated by the fact that—by God's grace—they persevere in their faith unto the end.

## Professing Believers Challenged

### John 8:31-41

#### John 8:31

Jesus now turned his attention to those Jews who had professed to believe in him:

*(31b) "...If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." (ESV; cf. v.31 with v.37)*

These Jews had professed faith in Christ. Their faith, however, had not yet been tested. On previous occasions, many people had professed faith in the Lord Jesus. Even so, in times of trial, temptation—or even because of difficult teaching—many of these professors had turned away. They no longer followed Jesus, therefore they were never truly his disciples. Their profession of faith had been false. (John 6:60-66)

If, however, a person holds resolutely to his faith—even in the teeth of adversity and great difficulties—then clearly that person belongs to Christ. If, in spite of sometimes hard teaching, his confidence in Christ remains unshaken, then certainly he or she is a child of God. (Matt. 24:12)

God does not require us to believe that which is incredible or unreasonable. However, he requires us to believe everything that his Word teaches, including everything that the Lord Jesus has spoken. This Word is the Word of the living God, and therefore cannot fail of fulfilment, or prove mistaken in its teaching. Those things which, at times, we find hard to understand, we humbly accept as true because it is the word of our loving heavenly Father. We may not fully understand everything that God does, or be able to explain all his ways. However, we know that all God's ways are right and just. We know also that our heavenly Father never acts unwisely, unfairly, or in any way contrary to his holy character. On the contrary, he always acts in wisdom and righteousness, and with abounding love and mercy.

Therefore, to encourage these Jews, the Lord says to them,

*(31b) "...If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."*

#### John 8:32

God's Word is truth. (John 17:17) The more familiar a person becomes with this living Word, the more of its sacred and life-changing truths he will discover. The light of God's eternal truth will shine brightly upon his heart and mind, revealing the requirements of God to that person's inner being. Then, the person will come to realise what changes God requires of him. He will realise also how, through his sanctifying power, the Holy Spirit effects these changes in his life. (Ps. 119:43-45)

In carrying out these changes in the light of God's truth, a person experiences a new moral and spiritual freedom—freedom from sin's demands and from its enslaving principles. This freedom, however, is not licence. It is not the freedom to do as we please, but only to do what pleases God. (Rom. 6:14-18,22; Gal. 5:13; Jas. 1:25; 1 Pet. 2:16)

Living in obedience to God's rules and to Christ's teaching is the only way to discover true liberty. Therefore, Jesus says,

*(32) "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (ESV)*

### John 8:33

Jesus' remarks greatly puzzled and even antagonised some of these professing believers. How could Jesus say that knowledge of the truth would set a person free? The Jews had always considered themselves the only people on earth who possessed the truth. To them, had been entrusted the very words of God. (Rom. 3:2) God had set them apart as his own special people—far above all other peoples on the face of the earth. (Deut. 7:7-8) To whom, then, did Jesus think they were in bondage? What did he mean when he said,

*(31) "...If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. (32) And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free?"*

Perplexed by Jesus' words, these professing believers said to the Lord,

*(33) ..."We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free?'" (ESV)*

'God set his love upon Abraham and upon his descendants. We are Abraham's descendants and have never been in slavery to anyone.'

Apparently, these Jews had overlooked the fact that their ancestors had been bondslaves in Egypt for almost 400 years. They had also omitted to mention that the Assyrians had ruled over later generations of their ancestors. Later still, another generation of their ancestors had been taken captive to Babylon and held there for almost 70 years. Again, these Jews failed to mention that—even at the present time—they were living under the yoke and tyranny of the Roman oppressor. Hardly could they claim, then, that they had never been in bondage to anyone!

### John 8:34

Of course, Jesus was not speaking about the bondage of physical slavery, but about the much greater bondage of moral and spiritual slavery. Therefore, the Lord replies most solemnly,

*(34) ..."Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave<sup>27</sup> to sin." (ESV)*

'You thought I was speaking about physical slavery. However, I was speaking to you about a slavery that is greater by far than the chains of physical slavery. I was speaking to you of a slavery that grips the soul and will never let it go. I was speaking of habits, attitudes and practices by which a person enslaves himself *morally and spiritually*. I was speaking of those who—perhaps through years of practice—have enslaved themselves to the desires of their own evil nature. (Rom. 6:16; Titus 3:3)

'Sin has become their master—the dominating principle that rules their lives, and which governs all their thoughts and actions. It is utterly impossible for any person to release

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<sup>27</sup> **8:34** Greek *bondservant*; also verse 35 [ESV footnote]

himself from this kind of captivity. No human being possesses the power, the ability—or any other necessary means—to effect self-deliverance from sin and from sinful habits.’ (Prov. 5:22; 2 Pet. 2:19)

### John 8:35

‘Consider yourselves like bondslaves in a household. A master can dismiss a bondslave at any time. While he remains, however, a bondslave is not entitled to any rights or privileges within the household. He is merely the obedient servant of another master. In this case, your master is sin.

‘In the same household, however, a son occupies a permanent position. Ordinarily, a parent cannot dismiss a son from his own family. As a legitimate heir of the family, all the rights and privileges of sonship are bestowed upon him. He remains a member of his own family for ever. In like manner, only true sons are members of God’s family and God’s kingdom. Slaves possess no rights of sonship and inheritance, and no entitlements to the family and kingdom of God.

‘You Jews, however, are slaves in a far greater sense than has just been depicted. You are slaves to your own evil desires; to your own inordinate passions, and to your own sinful inclinations and dispositions. Therefore, you are by no means free to inherit the kingdom of God. In physical terms, you may lay claim to the fact that you are Abraham’s descendants. Abraham’s *descendants*, you may be—but you are not Abraham’s *children*. Abraham was a man of faith; a man who honoured God and obeyed his Word. If you were truly Abraham’s children, then you would live like Abraham—honouring and obeying the Word of God.’ (Rom. 4:12-13,16)

### John 8:36

‘However, if you truly desire to be set free from your bondage to sin, then it is within my power to release you.’

Therefore, Jesus says,

(36) *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (ESV)*

No other way of escape exists from moral and spiritual bondage, except through faith in Christ and obedience to his teachings. This was the truth that the Lord was attempting to impress upon these professing ‘believers’. It was essential that they recognise their true spiritual condition and cease relying on their physical connection with Abraham. It was imperative that they not only *believe* on Christ as the Son of God, but that they also *obeyed* his teachings. (Rom. 8:2)

However hard it might prove to be, they had to receive and believe every word that Jesus had spoken, and they had to apply his every teaching to their lives. They could gain nothing by professing faith in Christ, if they were not prepared to obey Christ’s words. Through obeying Christ’s words, however, they would attain to a richer, fuller and deeper knowledge and understanding of God’s truth. By applying these ongoing discoveries of God’s truth to their hearts and lives, their knowledge or understanding of the truth would set them free from their sinful attitudes, habits and inclinations.

Therefore, the Lord says,

(36) *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*

The Son applies his teachings to our souls through the Word of God and by the agency of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth. (2 Cor. 3:17)

### John 8:37

(At this point, we should note that some of those Jews who earlier had professed to believe in Jesus, were the very same ones whom the Lord now says were seeking to kill him. (cf. v.37 with v.31) Thus we see that not all professions of faith in Jesus are genuine. Judas Iscariot was not alone in pretending to believe on the Lord Jesus.)

Jesus, of course, did not need anyone to remind him that the Jews were the physical descendants of Abraham. According to the flesh, Jesus himself was a Jew: descended from the royal line of David, and ultimately of Abraham. (Rom. 1:3-4)

The Lord was fully aware of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, and of the promises to Abraham's descendants. However, God had sent his Son into the world in fulfillment of that very covenant. Jesus was God's promised Messiah. He was the Seed of Abraham through whom multitudes of individuals throughout the whole world were to be blessed. The Jews, however, believed none of this. They did not accept that Jesus was the promised Seed of Abraham—the Messiah.

Instead of welcoming the Saviour of the world, the Jews despised and rejected him. In their hatred against God's Son, they did all in their power to destroy him. When all else failed, they plotted to kill him. If they could not silence the message, they would at least silence the Messenger. Jesus, of course, knew all that they were thinking and planning against him. He knew that they were intent on putting him to death.

How desperate is the plight of those who have no room in their hearts and lives for God's Word or God's Son! The Jews rejected the teachings of Christ because it did not agree with their own cherished understanding of God's truth.

We, however, must ensure that we do not reject some of Christ's teachings simply because they do not agree with our own cherished beliefs or interpretations of God's Word.

In verse 38, Jesus continues:

### John 8:38

Jesus reminds these Jews of the origin of his teachings:

*(38a) "I speak of what I have seen with my Father..." (ESV)*

The Jews utterly denied Jesus' claim that he came from God. The Lord Jesus, however, emphatically asserted the solemn truth of this claim. Before leaving his Father's presence to come into the world, the Lord saw and heard everything that God wanted to make known to the world. This included the teaching that Jesus was now presenting to the people. (John 8:26; 5:20; 12:49)

Many of the Jews rejected this teaching; but, in rejecting it, they were rejecting the Word of the living and sovereign God. They were rejecting what God Almighty was declaring from heaven. What, however, became of those who rejected the testimony of God's servant Moses? They died at the hands of two or three witnesses. How much greater punishment do those people deserve who reject the voice of the One now speaking from heaven through his one and only Son? (Cf. Heb. 10:28-30)

Jesus brought to the people the very Word of God—the Word of the Father in heaven. Everything that the Lord thought, said and did proved him to be his Father's Son. Similarly, everything that the Jews thought, said and did proved them to be *their* father's sons. They hated Jesus and were ready to kill him. This was typical of the deeds of their father. Everything else that they did—or planned to do—proved that they were their father's children.



**John 8:39**

Immediately, the Jews protested:

*(39a) "Abraham is our father"... (ESV; cf. Rom. 2:28-29)*

At this stage, the Jews may have been uncertain about what Jesus was implying, but they were intensely proud of their race and heritage. To imply that they were descendants of anyone other than Abraham was taken as an insult. To suggest, however, that their forefathers had been inherently evil, they considered as slanderous. Jesus, of course, had not been speaking of their natural ancestor, Abraham, as his reply clearly shows.

The fact that these Jews failed to follow Abraham's example of faith and obedience was proof positive that they had no more than a mere natural and physical connection with Abraham. However, as the apostle Paul was later to declare:

*"...Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 15:50 ESV)*

**John 8:40**

The Lord was fully aware that these Jews were intent on killing him. They would stop at nothing to see Jesus put to death, even although they must have known that he was telling the truth. The Jews just could not—or rather, *would not*—accept the truth because, in truth, they were not willing to hear what God had to say to them.

These Jews professed to be the children of Abraham, and therefore the children whom God had chosen. However, their actions proved beyond all doubt that they did not know God. Rather, their thoughts and deeds showed that they were the enemies of God. Therefore, when Jesus told the truth, he exposed their hypocrisy. The Jews resented this bitterly, and sought to bring about Jesus' downfall.

This hostile attitude, of course, was the complete opposite to that exemplified by Abraham. Abraham's attitude and actions showed unmistakably that he belonged to God and walked with God. Unlike the Jews of Jesus' day, Abraham was a man of faith: a man who knew God in a real, personal, saving way. As the Scripture says:

*"And he [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness." (Gen. 15:6 ESV; cf. Rom. 4:3)*

**John 8:41**

Repeatedly, the Jews had pointed out to the Lord Jesus that they—and they alone—were the direct descendants of Abraham. They, therefore—and they alone—were the children of God's covenant with Abraham.

Jesus, however, is about to correct their misapprehension. In purely *physical* terms, the Jews may count themselves as Abraham's descendants. However, in *spiritual* terms, they remained totally alienated from God. As Jesus had said to them earlier, they were still in their sins. (vv. 21,24) Therefore, they could not be the beneficiaries of God's covenant with Abraham. Indeed, they could not even reckon Abraham as their forefather. In the true spiritual sense, these children (so-called) bore no resemblance to faithful Abraham.

Thus, Jesus declares,

*(41a) "You are doing what your father did..." (ESV)*

Clearly, Jesus was implying that someone other than Abraham was the real father of the Jews. As can be seen from their reply, this remark offended them vastly.

The Jews now realised that Jesus was speaking in spiritual terms. They were greatly annoyed, however, when the Lord told them that they were not Abraham's children. Descent from Abraham was something of which every Jew was intensely proud. Therefore, they tried to lay claim not only to their descent from Abraham, but also to a direct connection with Abraham's heavenly Father. They knew that Abraham was a child of God; therefore (they reasoned) as Abraham's descendants, we too ought to be considered as God's children.

The Jews replied to Jesus: 'Whoever you imagine our father to be, we assert categorically that God—and God alone—is our Father.'

Once again, Jesus is about to disillusion these Jews.

### Children of the Devil

#### **John 8:42-47**

##### **John 8:42**

(Cf. John 7:28,29)

Clearly, these Jews did not belong to God; nor were they the true children of Abraham—except in the physical sense. Like so many of their forefathers, they despised and rejected the true messengers of God. Their forefathers had rejected God's *prophets*. Now these Jews were rejecting God's *Son*. This demonstrated unmistakably that these Jews were not God's children—for God's children would have accepted and welcomed God's servants. However, these Jews had no love for God or for his messengers. Therefore, Jesus said to them,

*(42a) ...“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here...” (ESV)*

As unspiritual men, of course, these Jews did not wish to hear or to heed the Word of God. Their allegiance was not to God, but (supposedly) to Abraham. They clung tenaciously to Abraham as the forefather of the Jewish race and nation. Their interest in Abraham, therefore, was purely nationalistic and political. The religion to which they held was merely a formal religion—or form of religion. The faith that Abraham professed and practised had become no more than dead orthodoxy: professed belief *in* God, without any true commitment *to* God.

This situation, of course, suited many of these Jews. It permitted them to pursue their own selfish ambitions and worldly enterprises without the restraints of God's law or God's moral standards. In God's sight, however, this amounted to idolatry and unfaithfulness. In the past, God had sent his servants to call people to repentance. However, whenever God's true servants had appeared to challenge the Jews for their sin and unfaithfulness, they had resented this challenge to their worldly way of life. Consequently, they had rejected God's servants, and had utterly refused to listen to what God had been saying to them. (Matt. 21:33-46)

This was one of the reasons why the Jews despised and rejected Jesus. They knew God had sent him; but because he was speaking the words of God, they did not want to hear him. God's Word was challenging and exposing their sinful way of life. However, they had no intention of changing their way of life, therefore they planned to silence God's Word by silencing his Messenger—in this case, the Lord Jesus. (John 15:22-25)

In their hearts, these Jews must have known that the Father had sent Jesus. Even if they did not accept that he was God's Son, they could not fail to acknowledge that Jesus was God's Servant—the Anointed One. Only wilful unbelief and disobedience prevented them from confessing the truth. However, by this same wilful unbelief and disobedience, their hearts were to become hardened so that they *could not* see the truth. They would become utterly insensitive to the message of God's salvation. This is the very great danger for everyone who repeatedly, wilfully and stubbornly refuses to heed the Gospel. (John 12:37-40; Rom. 11:7-8)

#### John 8:43

Jesus knew that these ungodly and unspiritual Jews could not fully understand the truths that he spoke. He knew that they had set their hearts on the things of this world, and that this world's standards of behaviour were governing their minds and actions. They did not have the love of God within them because they loved the things of this world. In spite of their claims to love God and to belong to God, these Jews were materialistic to the core. The things of this world was their true element. The things of God and of the Spirit were totally alien to them.

Therefore, Jesus says, 'You hear with your ears, but you fail to understand with your mind. Spiritual truths lie beyond your comprehension because you are merely natural men—men without the Spirit of God, and therefore without the life of God. How, then, can God be your Father?' (1 Cor. 2:14)

#### John 8:44

'You do not belong to God, but I will tell you to whom you really belong:'

*(44a) "You are of your father the devil ..."* (ESV)

Now, at last, the Lord reveals to these Jews their true parentage: they are the children of the devil. The Scripture tells us that the whole world—i.e., the whole of unregenerate mankind—lies in the power of the evil one. (1 John 5:19)

After revealing to the Jews their true parentage, Jesus then declares:

*(44a) "...and your will is to do your father's desires..."*

These Jews are the willing servants of Satan and sin. They had set their minds on fulfilling their own desires and pleasures. They had determined to live in accordance with the dictates of their own sinful nature. While they continue to live in this state, they remain alienated from God and at enmity with God. Again, while they remain in this state, they are the children of the devil. This is because, like the devil, they live sinful lives—lives alienated from God. It is also because, directly or indirectly, they are subject to Satan's controlling influence. (Col. 1:21; 1 John 3:8-10)

Therefore, when Jesus said to the Jews,

*(44a) "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires..."* (ESV)

the Lord was identifying the spiritual state and condition of every unbeliever. (Cf. Matt. 13:38)

Still addressing these Jews, the Lord continues,

*(44b) "...He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him..."* (ESV)

Like father, like son. From the outset, Satan was guilty of murder (hatred against God being tantamount to murder). So too with the Jews. From the outset, they hated God's Son and planned to murder him.

Satan forsook the way of truth and righteousness. Now, no truth remains in him. So too with these Jews. They forsook God's truth and God's righteousness. Now, they are filled with lies and hypocrisy.

Therefore, Jesus continued by saying,

(44c) *"...When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."* (ESV)

'Satan is a thorough-going liar. He is the originator of lies. You too are filled with falsehood and deceit; therefore, this proves that *"You are of your father the devil...."*

### John 8:45

Jesus, of course, had been speaking nothing but the truth. It was true that he came from his Father in heaven, and it was true that his Father had sent him. It was true that he was who he claimed to be—the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Everything Jesus had just said about the Jews was true. The Jews knew it was true, but the truth utterly enraged them and made them even more determined to destroy Jesus. (John 3:19-20; 7:7)

Jesus had told them the truth and they refused to believe him because the truth had exposed their sin and hypocrisy. The Lord had exposed them for what they really were. They were the children of the devil; certainly not the children of God or even the children of Abraham.

### John 8:46

Clearly, then, these Jews were still in their sins. While accusing Jesus of being a sinner, they themselves were living sinful lifestyles. Jesus was the pure, holy and spotless Lamb of God. Therefore, the Lord said to these Jews,

(46a) *"Which one of you convicts me of sin?..."* (ESV; cf. Heb. 4:15; 7:26)

The Jews accused him falsely, but they certainly could not accuse him truthfully or prove him guilty of any sin. They accused him of breaking God's law and therefore of sinning against God. However, the Lord Jesus had never broken God's law, but had upheld and fulfilled that law on every occasion. He may have overturned the cherished traditions or misinterpretations of the Jews concerning God's law, but he had never violated it.

No, Jesus had not sinned, and the Jews certainly had no evidence to the contrary. Since, however, they knew that he had never been guilty of sin, they ought also to have known that everything he was now saying was true; otherwise, he *would* be sinning. But they steadfastly refused to believe the truth, preferring rather to discredit the one who bore testimony against them.

### John 8:47

(Cf. John 10:26-28)

Everyone who truly belongs to God listens willingly to all that God has to say. They hunger and thirst after righteousness, and they cannot satisfy their souls except by hearing and heeding the Word of God. This alone fulfils their spiritual needs. The more they feed on God's Word, the more they grow in their faith and in holiness of life. The more they grow,

the closer they become to God. Their love for God increases, as also does their love for their fellow-believers and for other people.

These Jews, however, had never undergone such a life-changing experience. They had no interest in listening to God's Word, except for purely intellectual and debating purposes. They did not desire to hear, to obey the voice of God, or to follow truth and righteousness. Their souls remained spiritually dead. They remained alienated from the life of God.

### **“Before Abraham was, I Am!”**

#### **John 8:48-59**

##### **John 8:48**

This assertion infuriated the Jews. Jesus had spoken nothing but the truth; but, in doing so, he had revealed to these Jews what kind of people they really were. These men professed the importance of piety in religion, and they compelled others to observe the laws of God. Yet, they neither knew God themselves, nor observed his laws. (Matt. 15:7-14)

Unable to withstand Jesus' devastating words of truth any longer, they turned on him in furious anger:

*(48) ...“Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (ESV)*

Now, the Jews could no longer restrain themselves. Now, it became evident for all to see what kind of people they really were. Upon losing their temper, they began treating the Lord Jesus with the utmost scorn and derision. They accused the Son of God of belonging to that despised and detested race—the Samaritans. They poured hatred and contempt on God's Son by associating him with those whom they considered as being beneath the lowest of the low.

As if this were not enough, these Jews further insulted the Lord of Glory by suggesting that he must be demon-possessed—and therefore, out of his right mind. So enraged had these Jews now become, that they could think of nothing more despicable to say about the Son of God.

Once again, however, this only proved that God could not possibly be their heavenly Father. As Jesus had already told them, their true father was the evil one himself. So much for their earlier profession of faith in Christ! (Cf. v.31; see also John 10:20-21; Matt. 10:25)

##### **John 8:49**

Most people would have been greatly offended by the Jews' obnoxious insinuations. Suggesting that a person was demon-possessed was akin to saying that he was mentally unbalanced, or even insane. Although, however, the Jews poured scorn and contempt on the holy Son of God, Jesus did not reply in kind. The sinless Saviour did not allow the Jews to provoke him into answering harshly or unwisely. (Prov. 26:4; 1 Pet. 2:23)

Even when the Lord had told the Jews that they belonged to their father, the devil, he did not do so vindictively. He was merely stating the facts. The Lord's intention was to show to these Jews their true spiritual condition in order to that they might see their need of God's salvation. It was this very salvation that the Lord had come into the world to provide. These Jews, however, did not desire to seek God's salvation. They spurned the love, mercy and grace of God; and consequently their hearts became hardened. Out of these

## Expository Notes

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sin-hardened hearts, the Jews accused Jesus of being a despised Samaritan; and of being demon-possessed. (Rom. 10:21)

To this, Jesus replies:

(49a) *"I do not have a demon" ... (ESV)*

It was impossible for any *unholy* demon to possess the *holy* Son of God. No unclean demon could ever take possession of a pure, sinless and perfect body. The Spirit that filled Jesus and that dominated his whole life, was the Spirit of truth and holiness. (Cf. Luke 8:28; Jas. 2:19)

The Father had imparted the Holy Spirit to Jesus without measure. By this same Holy Spirit, he now spoke the eternal words of God. By this same Spirit of holiness, the Lord Jesus spoke out boldly to all the people, fearing no-one and favouring none. Therefore, the Jews found it impossible to withstand or answer the words or the wisdom of the Lord Jesus; for they were the very words of God applied in the power of the Holy Spirit.

In declaring the words of God, Jesus was honouring his heavenly Father. He was making known everything that the Father had revealed to him in heaven and had told him to declare to mankind. The Son is termed the *Word or Speech* (Gk., *Logos*) because he is the living expression and communicator of God's Word to mankind. (John 1:1,14,18) By refusing to hear the Word of God, however, and by vilifying God's Son, the Jews dishonoured not only the Son but also the Father. Therefore, in reply to these Jews, the Lord says,

(49) *"I do not have a demon, but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me."*  
(ESV)

### John 8:50

Never at any time did Jesus seek to exalt himself, or even to seek praise or glory from other people. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus could rightly have sought honour and glory for himself. However, during his earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus sought only to accomplish his Father's will; to fulfil his purposes concerning the redemption of lost men and women, and to glorify his Father's name. In this period of voluntary humiliation, Jesus did not seek personal glory or acclaim. He resolved only to magnify the name of his heavenly Father. (Phil. 2:6-8)

Nevertheless, although Jesus sought no honour for himself, his heavenly Father *did* seek such honour for his Son. Although Jesus sought no personal praise or glory, his Father did intend that people should bestow all praise and glory upon his one and only Son. (Phil. 2:9-11) It was impossible, therefore, for anyone to honour the Father, if he did not also honour the Son. Similarly, it was impossible for any person to approach the Father, if he did not approach him through the Son. Therefore, God's purposes regarding the honouring and glorifying of his Son were fulfilled. (John 5:23; 14:6)

No-one could come to God except through the Son. No-one could find the salvation of God, except by believing on the name of God's Son. (Acts 4:12)

Therefore, Jesus declares:

(50) *"Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge."* (ESV)

### John 8:51

Jesus points out the absolute necessity of hearing and heeding the Word of God. These words impart life to spiritually dead souls. These words of life awaken sinners from the

sleep of spiritual death and restore them to spiritual life and vitality through repentance and faith in God's Son. By these words, born-again believers are nourished and fed with the message of justification, sanctification and eternal life.

Those, however, who reject the Word of God reject the Word of life. They reject the only message that can impart life to the spiritually dead soul, and through which God grants forgiveness and reconciliation to a sinner. To reject the Word of God is to embrace the sentence of condemnation and death. (John 3:15-18)

However, to all who receive God's Word, eternal life is promised. Therefore, Jesus says,

*(51) "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." (ESV)*

'These are the words of my Father in heaven. If anyone not only *hears* my word, but also *keeps* my word—i.e., believes and obeys it—he will never experience death.' (John 5:24; 11:25-26; 14:23-24)

### John 8:52

The Jews misunderstood completely what Jesus was saying. They thought that Jesus was speaking of natural, physical death; therefore, when Jesus said that anyone keeping his word would never see death, the Jews expressed utter astonishment.

The apostle John writes:

*(52) The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death'." (ESV)*

This reply shows unmistakably that these Jews were unspiritual men—men with little, if any, real knowledge of God. They failed completely to realise that Jesus was not speaking about *physical* death, but about *spiritual and eternal* death. These Jews were thinking of only one kind of death—the death of the body. Therefore, they assumed that Jesus was saying that anyone keeping his word would live forever in his present body.

These Jews ought to have known better. However, it seems that they knew very little about the death of the soul, or of the need for spiritual regeneration. Clearly, then—for all their pretended claims to belong to God—these Jews had learned little of practical spiritual value from their Old Testament Scriptures.

From this, we see that it is utterly impossible for natural man—i.e., man without the Spirit of God—to understand spiritual things. These things are folly to him because they require the discernment of a spiritual mind.

From this, it follows that no one can understand God's truth properly, *unless the Holy Spirit reveals that truth to him*. Salvation depends, therefore—not on man's self-will or effort—but on the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's heart and life. (1 Cor. 2:14)

### John 8:53

The Jews reminded the Lord Jesus that the patriarch Abraham had died, and so too had the prophets. They conveniently omitted to mention that the prophet Elijah had not died. At the end of his prophetic ministry—and while still very much alive—Elijah had been escorted by the angels into God's presence. (2 Kings 2:1,11)

Offended by Jesus' words, however, the Jews retorted: "...*Who do you make yourself out to be?*"

Jesus, of course, knew who he was—the eternal Son of God. As such, Abraham could hardly be compared with Jesus. Abraham was merely a man. Jesus was both truly man and truly God—the *God-Man*. (see v.58)

As a man, Abraham died. As the God-Man, Jesus laid down his life voluntarily—only to take it back again. The Lord had received this power and authority over life and death from his heavenly Father. Jesus, then, was infinitely greater than Abraham. (John 10:15,17-18)

### John 8:54

The Lord Jesus had no need to boast about himself, nor any inclination to seek his own glory. His heavenly Father had already set his seal upon him and declared him as his one and only Son. It mattered not one iota what the Jews thought about him; or, indeed, what they said about him.

Therefore, Jesus replied:

*(54) ..."If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God'."*<sup>28</sup> (ESV)

*(John 17:1,5; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11; 2 Pet. 1:17)*

### John 8:55

Jesus points out to these Jews that they do not know the Father. They may claim that he is their God, but they possess no saving faith in God. The only knowledge of God that they possess is head knowledge—a knowledge of bare facts about God, completely detached from God's saving and sanctifying power. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(55) "But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word."* (ESV)

*(1 John 2:4-6; see also Titus 1:16)*

Essentially, this is what is involved in knowing God: keeping his Word. It means believing everything that God has said in his Word and obeying it with all our hearts and souls.

Jesus, above all others, kept God's Word—for he obeyed it perfectly. God's redeemed children endeavour to keep his Word by learning from it and by applying its teaching to their lives. These Jews, however, failed to keep God's Word. Although they possessed

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<sup>28</sup> **8:54** Some manuscripts *your God* [ESV footnote]



the Old Testament Scriptures, they did not believe or obey these Scriptures. If they had, they would have believed what the prophets had predicted concerning the Messiah.

The fact that they wilfully ignored, disbelieved or rejected the Word of God is further evidence that they did not belong to God. This is how we know whether a person is a child of God. Those who belong to God believe and obey the teachings of his Word. Those who do not belong to God do not believe or obey its teachings.

### John 8:56

The Jews laid great store by their descent from Abraham—the father of the Jewish nation. Yet, for all their claims to be Abraham’s children, they knew practically nothing of Abraham’s God. They prided themselves in their physical connection with Abraham, but they conveniently overlooked the fact that Abraham was a man of faith. Abraham believed God. He believed the promises of God—even when some of these promises seemed impossible of fulfilment. Abraham trusted God and walked with God. Consequently, God honoured Abraham by giving him a son, Isaac—the son of God’s promise. Through Isaac, God would make of Abraham a great and mighty nation. The Jews were the descendants of Abraham, but they did not know Abraham’s God. (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:15-18)

Abraham believed that—from his descendants—God would bring forth a great Deliverer. Although Abraham may have understood little of what this signified, he believed that—through his Seed—God would bless the whole world.

Therefore, Jesus says to these Jews,

*(56) “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” (ESV; see Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:4-5)*

By faith, Abraham looked afar off and saw God’s promised Saviour. By faith, he believed that this Saviour would be one of his own descendants. By faith, he believed that—through this Saviour—salvation would come to the ends of the earth. (Gal. 3:7-9,14; Heb. 11:8-19)

### John 8:57

The Jews, of course, knew nothing of ‘seeing’ things by faith. They thought that Jesus was telling them that he had been living centuries earlier, during Abraham’s lifetime. (The eternal reality of this truth must have escaped the Jews.)

Under the impression that Jesus was claiming to have been alive in Abraham’s day, the Jews retorted;

*(57) “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>29</sup> **8:57** Some manuscripts *has Abraham seen you?* [ESV footnote]

Again, the Jews failed completely to understand the spiritual significance of Jesus' remarks.

This teaches us to be careful lest—like the Jews—we should place an unduly literal interpretation on parts of God's Word that are intended to be understood spiritually. By doing so, we may miss the real truth that the Holy Spirit is intending to convey to our hearts and minds.

### John 8:58

The Jews derided Jesus when they thought he was claiming to have been alive in Abraham's day. Little did they know, however, that the Son of God had not only lived during *Abraham's* lifetime, but for centuries before Abraham was born. Indeed, the Son had been alive from before the beginning of creation; for through him all things had been made, and nothing had come into existence without him. (John 1:3; Col. 1:16-17)

Although the Jews did not know it, Jesus was the everlasting God revealed in human form. In human terms, Jesus had been born as a baby at Bethlehem. However, in divine terms, he was—and is—the eternal God. He has no beginning and will have no end. He is the Alpha and the Omega; the First and the Last, and the eternally Living One. (Isa. 9:6 (cf. Isa. 28:29); Isa. 44:6; 48:12; Rev. 1:8,17-18; 21:6; 22:13)

The apostle John records these most solemn words of the Lord Jesus addressed to the Jews:

*(58) "Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (ESV)*

These Jews had despised and derided Jesus for saying that Abraham had seen Jesus' day, and was glad to see it. They failed to understand that Abraham 'saw' the coming of the Messiah by faith; and that Abraham believed God would fulfil his promises concerning the Messiah. However, it was true nonetheless, that Jesus was alive during Abraham's lifetime—although this was not what the Saviour had said to the Jews. Now he says to them,

*(58b) "...before Abraham was, I am."*

We should note that the Lord did not say, "...before Abraham was, **I was**." He said, "...before Abraham was, **I am!**"

By using the present tense, the Lord Jesus was using an expression reserved exclusively as the personal Name of the LORD God Almighty. At the burning bush on Mount Horeb, Moses had asked the LORD what name he should give to the people concerning the Ever-Living One:

*(14) God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (15b) ...This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:14,15b ESV)*

This expression was never used of anyone other than the LORD God himself. In fact, the Jews would not even pronounce the sacred personal Name of God (YHWH) for fear of appearing irreverent. Therefore, when Jesus declared to these Jews, "...before Abraham was, **I AM!**" they knew precisely what the Lord was saying. He was claiming to be God.

**John 8:59**

Because he had claimed to be God, the Jews considered Jesus guilty of blasphemy. The penalty for blasphemy was death by stoning. (Lev. 24:16)

(Had it come to their notice, however, the Roman authorities would not have permitted the Jews from carrying out the death penalty. Roman law required that all persons accused of a capital offence had to be handed over to their jurisdiction for trial, sentencing, and—where appropriate—the execution of the death penalty. (John 18:31))



## John Chapter 9

### Healing of a Man Born Blind

#### John 9:1-12

##### John 9:1

Nothing and no one—however seemingly insignificant or unimportant—escapes the notice of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Lord is passing by, no one is neglected or overlooked. The eyes of the Lord are on all the people, searching out those who cannot see to search for him. This applies whether a person is afflicted with physical blindness, moral blindness, spiritual blindness or all three. (Cf. Ps. 34:15)

Therefore, in verse 1 of chapter 9, the apostle John says of Jesus:

*(1) As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. (ESV)*

Clearly, in his state of blindness, this man could not have seen the Lord Jesus passing by. Had Jesus walked on, the man might never have known that he had come so close to the Saviour—and yet had missed finding God's salvation. Jesus, however, knew about this man's predicament, and the Lord never intended to pass him by. According to the Old Testament prophets, part of the Messiah's mission was to restore sight to the blind—spiritually and physically. (Isa. 42:1-7)

Here, then, sat a man in very great need. Because he was unable to see the Saviour standing nearby, he could not reach out to Jesus for help. The Saviour, however, would not fail to reach out to the one who needed him.

Even so, before Jesus can say anything to this man, his disciples intervene:

##### John 9:2

The Lord Jesus saw before him a person in great need. Not only did this man require physical healing, but he also required spiritual healing. Out of his infinite love, mercy and compassion, the Lord Jesus was able and willing to provide for this man's needs.

In the meantime, however, other thoughts crowded into the minds of Jesus' disciples. They had discovered that the man to whom Jesus was talking had been blind from birth. Therefore, reasoned the disciples, since every effect is produced by a cause, something must have caused this man's blindness. In all probability, it was something this man had done, or that his parents had done.

Determined to satisfy their growing curiosity, they pressed Jesus for an answer. Therefore, John writes,

*(2) And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (ESV)*

The disciples had concluded (mistakenly, in this case) that sin had caused this man's blindness. However, who was to blame? Was it the man's parents, or the man himself? If the man himself, the disciples' logic appeared to imply that a baby could be guilty of sinning while still in its mother's womb!

(At least some of the Pharisees believed this to be true. It is not certain, however, whether they believed that a baby could commit sin in the womb, or whether they were maintaining the doctrine of original sin, i.e., the inherited sinful nature. (Ps. 51:5; 58:3))

The disciples receive their reply:

### John 9:3

Possibly, Jesus' disciples had assumed that every physical or mental affliction resulted from sin in a person's life. Alternatively, they might have believed that God afflicted this man with blindness as a punishment for specific sin. Jesus, however, points out to his disciples their very great mistake. (Cf. Luke 13:1-5)

In certain instances, particular afflictions *do* come upon people because of their sin. In this case, however, the man's blindness did not result from sin. Therefore, the Lord Jesus declares:

(3a) ... *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents..." (ESV)*

It was not sin that had caused this man's affliction. Therefore, it would be grossly unjust, unfair and unkind to imply such a connection.

This man had not been born blind because either he or his parents had committed some specific sin. The reason that he was born with this affliction was so that he might experience the power and the glory of God in his life. (Cf. Exodus 4:11-12) Perhaps, if he had not been so afflicted, this man would never have met with God's redeeming grace. Even before this man had been born, however, God had known about him. In fact, even from before the beginning of time, the Lord God had determined to show mercy to him and to bring him to himself.

Clearly, since he had been born blind, some *moral* or *spiritual* failing on the man's part could not have caused the blindness. It is more likely that some *physical* or *congenital* condition had caused this man's blindness. Whatever the cause, the Lord determined to restore his sight—physically and spiritually—to the glory of his great and holy name.

Still speaking to his disciples, the Lord continues:

### John 9:4-5

As long as the Lord's time on earth remained, he must finish the work that his Father had given him to do. (John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4) It was the Father's will that the blind should receive their sight; that the deaf should hear, and that the dead should be raised. This applied both in the physical and in spiritual realms. Christ effected his miraculous signs in both realms, thereby proving that his Father had sent him. (Luke 4:18; 7:21-22) Specifically, it was the will of the Father that his name should be glorified through the healing of this blind beggar (v.8).

Soon, Christ would leave this scene of time to return to his Father. Then, darkness would descend upon mankind—except where the light of the Gospel prevailed. While Christ remained, however, the light of his truth and his healing power would reach out to all. (John 1:4-5; 3:19-21; 8:12; 12:35-36,46)

The Lord said had said to his disciples:

... *"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." (v.3 ESV).*

Then he added:

(4) *“We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. (5) As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (ESV)*

This man’s most prominent experience in life had been that of life-long physical darkness. Unable to see relatives, friends or even the beauty of creation, he had lived in a world of his own imagining. His world was a world without light, without colour, and without any real appreciation of God’s natural creation. Very soon, however, the Lord would transform this man’s experience. What lay before him was greater by far than anything that he had ever known before, or that he had ever imagined possible. Jesus was about to perform a miracle—a miracle of love, mercy and grace, and a miracle of healing. By the grace of God, this man would be healed, both spiritually and physically. Mankind, therefore, ought to be constrained to praise God’s holy name for his mighty works of love and power toward sinful men and women.

Jesus had corrected his disciples’ mistaken notions concerning this man’s blindness. He had also declared himself to be *the light of the world* (v.5). The apostle John continues with these words:

#### John 9:6

The Lord Jesus had declared himself *the light of the world* (v.5). Now he is about to demonstrate to those standing by, and to the blind man, just what this remarkable phrase signifies. This glorious shining light from heaven would dispel all kinds of physical darkness. In addition, however, this same purifying light would dispel the darkness of sin. Firstly, however, this man needed to recognise that he was not only living in *physical* darkness, but also in *moral and spiritual* darkness. Therefore, concerning Jesus, the Scripture says:

(6) *... he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud. (ESV)*

Clearly, the mud could not heal this man’s physical blindness. However, the application of mud to his body indicated to the man that something more than physical blindness was involved. The covering of dirt over his eyes indicated the presence of sin in the man’s life—and therefore pointed to his moral and spiritual blindness. Sin had not caused this man’s blindness. Nevertheless, the man’s sin needed to be cleansed. (Cf. Rev. 3:18) Jesus, therefore, applied the mud to this man’s eyes.

Just as the mud clung to his eyes, thereby preventing him from seeing (even if he could see), so also the dirt and moral pollution of sin clung to his mind, preventing him from seeing spiritual truths. Yet, the remedy was at hand, Christ identified this man’s true inner need, but he also told him how his needs could be met.

#### John 9:7

The Lord gave the man this explicit command:

(7a) *...“Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”... (ESV)*

‘Wash away the dirt that I have applied to your eyes. In obeying my command you will also discover that the moral pollution clinging to your soul will likewise be washed away. I will cleanse you from all iniquity.’ (Cf. 2 Kings 5:10,14)

Had the blind man disbelieved the Lord Jesus, or failed to obey his command, he would never have made his way to the pool of Siloam. In failing to attend the place of blessing,

however, he never would have regained his sight. Nor would his soul have been cleansed from the pollution of sin.

Through his faith in Christ and through his obedience to the Lord's express command, the blind man found healing—physical and spiritual healing. Now this man understood what the Lord had meant when he said, "*I am the light of the world*" (v.5).

This man had experienced the miraculous power of that light penetrating his blindness and enabling him to see physically. He had also experienced the power of that light dispelling the spiritual darkness in his soul and enabling him to see and believe spiritual truths.

As yet, however, this man did not fully realise who Jesus was. He believed in him—up to a point—but he did not yet appreciate the nature of his person. This would be revealed to him shortly.

Ultimately, this man saw the light of life in Christ Jesus, and thus found eternal salvation. Many of the Jews, however—including many of the religious leaders—continued to walk around in spiritual darkness. For all those who continued in impenitence to the end, this darkness led to their eternal loss and perdition.

In verse 8, the apostle John tells us of how some people reacted to the healing of the blind man:

### John 9:8

From this verse, we learn something of the straits to which his disability had reduced this man. Because of his blindness, he needed to beg in order to live. Begging must have proved necessary in this instance, probably because the man's parents were too poor to support their blind son. No other means of assistance or subsistence, of course, existed in these days. If a person could not work for a living, and had no relatives or friends to assist him, begging remained the only alternative. Many such people—with many different handicaps or conditions—were to be found begging throughout the country.

We know that the Lord pities such people. On other occasions, the Lord healed blind beggars. The Son of God restored to them their health and independence, thus enabling them to work for a living. Some of these people also came to faith in Christ. (Cf. 1 Sam. 2:7-8; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43)

Again—although not blind—the beggar Lazarus experienced God's pity and compassion. Though he suffered much by neglect and hardship in this world, the Lord favoured him with the gift of eternal life and abundant blessings in heaven. (Luke 16:20-22)

Very often, the world may show little concern for the despised, the neglected or the down-trodden members of our society. The Lord Jesus, however, never fails to see them. He sees, and he cares—but he will not hold those guiltless who could have helped, yet failed to do so. (Prov. 14:21; 17:5) This blind man was a familiar sight to many of his neighbours. Yet, for all that appears, his neighbours did little to help him in his time of need. They had been unwilling, it seems, to become involved. They had forgotten the greatest of all God's commandments:

(29b)... "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*

(30) *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*' {Deut. 6:4-5}

(31) *The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'* {Lev. 19:18} *There is no other commandment greater than these."*

(Mark 12:29-31 ESV)



Perhaps, however, all of this man's neighbours were themselves extremely poor, and therefore unable to assist this beggar. Even if this were so, they still ought to have provided him with words of hope and encouragement. They ought to have made his condition known to others who were able to help practically.

Some of the man's neighbours had asked:

(8b) ...*"Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"* (ESV)

In verse 9, John tells us:

### John 9:9

Others of this man's neighbours however, doubted that this was the same person. Certainly, they admitted to a striking resemblance between the two. By what means, however, could anyone have effected such a remarkable transformation in the blind man's condition? How could he have regained his sight, since he had been blind from birth? No, this could not possibly be the same person—although he definitely resembled him.

We must remember that these people were this man's neighbours. Clearly, then, they must have walked past him practically every day—possibly over a period of many months or even years. Yet, in all this time, they must have failed to take notice of the blind beggar by the wayside. They were his neighbours; but, in his need, they had ignored him. They were his neighbours, but they had cared nothing for his plight. Even if they had looked upon him only a few times over the years, they would not have failed to recognise him now. However, they had closed their eyes to their neighbour in need. Now, they did not recognise him as their neighbour.

Since his own neighbours did not know him, the man kept crying out insistently, *"I am the man"* (v.9c).

### John 9:10

Taken aback to discover that this was indeed the same man, his neighbours immediately assumed a hostile and defensive attitude toward him. Previously, the blind man had posed no threat to these uncaring neighbours. Now, however, he was able to see! Now he would discover who his neighbours were. Very soon now, he would realise who it was that had walked past him every day. Soon, he would find out who had not attempted to help him, or even to talk to him. Now the truth about his neighbours would become known. Consequently, many would feel a sense of shame.

Embarrassed, therefore, to find themselves in this position, these unkind neighbours began interrogating the formerly blind man. When, in response to their doubts concerning his identity, he had insisted repeatedly, *"I am the man"* (v.9c), they demanded of him,

(10b) ...*"Then how were your eyes opened?"* (ESV)

'You have been blind all your life. How, then, can you now see?'

In putting this question to the man, we should not think of these neighbours as expressing any kind of genuine concern or interest in how this man had been healed. Their hostile attitude demonstrates the true motives of their hearts and minds. These neighbours were greatly embarrassed to realise that this man could now see—and therefore, could now identify—those who had ignored him and failed to help him in his distressed condition.

In all probability, the man would not even be thinking about condemning his neighbours for their neglect. Indeed, he himself had just experienced the Lord's mercy. He was most unlikely, therefore, to be unmerciful toward his neighbours. Nevertheless, knowing how

they had neglected this man in his great need, his neighbours were almost bound to feel a certain degree of shame and guilt. A guilty and accusing conscience always sets a person on the defensive.

The once-blind man's neighbours had demanded:

*(10b) ...“Then how were your eyes opened?”*

### **John 9:11**

This man's neighbours had demanded an explanation for his healing—although no explanation was owed to them. Indeed, it was they who owed an explanation to this man—and to his parents—for their gross indifference toward them. The neighbours must have seen the son begging by the wayside each day. They certainly knew the blind man's family. Therefore, they must have been fully aware of the family's unfortunate circumstances and daily hardship.

Even so, the man began recounting to his neighbours everything that had taken place. He explained how a man called Jesus—the Light of the world—had covered his eyes with mud, then commanded him to wash at the pool of Siloam.

The man told his doubting neighbours how he had obeyed Jesus' command; and how—as a result—he had returned from the pool of Siloam with his sight fully restored. Boldly and unashamedly, then, this formerly blind beggar testified to what the Lord Jesus had done in his life. This must be considered all the more courageous in view of the hostility and antagonism that these neighbours demonstrated toward the man.

Still, his neighbours were not fully satisfied:

### **John 9:12**

Still demonstrating outright antagonism and disbelief, these neighbours continue to interrogate the man. Referring to Jesus, they asked the formerly blind beggar,

*(12a) ...“Where is he?”... (ESV)*

‘You say he healed you and restored your sight. Where, then, is he? What has become of this miracle worker?’

The man's answer is honest and sincere, and lacks any signs of bitterness or resentment against his neighbours:

‘I know that he healed me. Where he now is, however, I cannot tell. I do not know.’

## **First Interrogation by the Pharisees**

### **John 9:13-23**

#### **John 9:13**

At length, it was determined that this man should make an appearance before the Pharisees. Probably, those responsible for taking him to the Pharisees would be seeking their opinion as to how this man had received his sight. They might also have wanted the Pharisees to say whether this healing was the work of God.

At first sight, it may seem strange that this man was taken before the Pharisees for examination. Normally, when a person was healed of some illness or other condition, the law of God required him to approach the priests in the temple. There, the healed person was

to present an offering for his cleansing, and there he could offer praise and worship to God. (Luke 5:14) Perhaps, on this occasion, the Pharisees were approached so that their more thorough interrogation of this man might produce better results than had been achieved by his neighbours.

The apostle John now provides us with some additional information:

#### John 9:14

John notes that Jesus had healed this man on a Sabbath day. The Lord, of course, did much of his teaching on that day, and often he confirmed his teaching by means of outstanding and miraculous signs. These miraculous signs should have proved to the religious leaders that God had sent Jesus into the world, and had authorised him to teach and to heal in his name—even on the Sabbath day. The Lord Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath by his actions. On the contrary, he was doing those works of which his Father approved—on that day, or on any other day. These were the kind of works that demonstrated practical love, mercy and compassion. (Matt. 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:5-11,16)

The Pharisees, however, knew little of such works. These religious leaders adhered steadfastly to their traditional misinterpretations of God's law, and to their own rules and regulations. The Pharisees' misinterpretations of the Scriptures led them to insist on the strictest policy of absolutely no works of any kind on the Sabbath day. Anyone who failed to observe the Sabbath in the way prescribed by them was considered guilty of breaking the Sabbath and violating the sacred law of God.

The Pharisees, however, seem to have forgotten that even God in heaven did not cease from all his labours on the Sabbath day. On the sixth day, God finished his work of creation. On the seventh day, the LORD rested from all his works—*works of creation*, that is. God, however, did not cease from his other works on the Sabbath day. He continued to uphold the universe that he had just created—even on the Sabbath day. (Gen. 2:1-3; John 5:17; Heb. 1:3)

Even on the Sabbath, therefore, God's works of providence are very prominent. We can observe this in the way in which the LORD sustains the universe, and provides for the necessities of both mankind and animals, even on the Sabbath day. (Ps. 36:5; Acts 14:17)

Again, even on the Sabbath, God's works of redemption are also very prominent. On that day, men and women are led to repentance and faith in Christ. Yet again, believers meet together on the Lord's Day to receive teaching and encouragement from the living and abiding Word of God. When Jesus worked on the Sabbath, therefore, he was doing the kind of things his own Father in heaven would be doing on that very day.

John had told us:

*(14) Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. (ESV)*

Now, the Pharisees begin to question the man:

#### John 9:15

It was not long before this formerly blind man found himself once again the subject of intense interrogation and debate. Once he had been brought into their presence, the proud and obstinate Pharisees wasted no time in trying to determine the cause of this man's healing. These religious leaders must have been greatly annoyed to learn that this healing had taken place on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees, therefore, began their interrogation of the man by asking how he had received his sight. To this, the man had replied,

(15b)...“He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” (ESV)

The man bore simple testimony to what had actually happened. Jesus had covered his sightless eyes with mud. Then, he had instructed him to wash the mud off at the pool of Siloam. The blind man had believed the word of the Lord. In obedience to his command, he had gone to the pool of Siloam and washed. Through his faith and obedience, he had returned from the pool with his sight fully restored.

(As we noted, however, the granting of sight to this man filled some of his neighbours with consternation and dismay!)

Only after he had been healed, did this man begin to experience outright opposition and hostility. While he remained blind, no one had bothered him—or bothered about him. Now that he could see, however, the man began to experience persecution, envy and resentment. Indications of this sinful attitude were exhibited initially by some of his neighbours—those who previously had ignored him. Now, the man was experiencing hostility and scepticism from the Pharisees.

In verse 16, John records:

### **John 9:16**

The Pharisees, of course, realised very quickly that Jesus had healed this man. Their first reaction should have been one of praise and thanksgiving to God for this demonstration of his abundant love and healing power. These religious leaders, however, could not bring themselves to think along such lines. To do so, would require them to concede at least three things:

1. That God had sent Jesus into the world.
2. That the Lord Jesus was invested with the same divine power as his Father in heaven.
3. That God had authorised Jesus to teach and to heal in his name.

The Pharisees utterly rejected all three of these propositions.

Nevertheless, the healing of this blind man resulted in a serious split in the ranks of the Pharisees. Most of them utterly repudiated the idea that Jesus was acting with God's power and authority. Some of them, however, began to entertain some doubts about the matter.

One party argued that Jesus could not possibly have come from God, since, in their opinion, he had violated the Sabbath day. An opposing party of the Pharisees, however, contended that it was impossible for a sinner—and therefore for an ordinary man—to perform such miraculous signs without God's power and authority. (Cf. John 3:2; 7:12)

Clearly, then, the miraculous restoration of sight to this blind man divided the Pharisees. This made it all the more difficult for them to unite in condemning the Lord outright. However, their long-standing opposition to Jesus was such that they would very soon overcome or suppress their internal differences in order to appear united in their stand against the Son of God.

John continues to relate the circumstances of the blind man's interrogation at the hands of the Pharisees:

### John 9:17

Now that a marked difference of opinion had arisen among them, the Pharisees decided to stall. They could not provide a united front in interrogating this unfortunate man. Therefore, the Pharisees ordered that the man himself provide them with a better explanation of this remarkable healing. To this end, they demanded,

(17a)...*"What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?"...*  
(ESV)

Unwilling to further expose their internal divisions, the Pharisees attempted to turn everyone's attention back to the formerly blind man. This man had already explained how Jesus had healed him. What further information the Pharisees now expected to elicit from him is difficult to imagine. Nevertheless, in saying to the man, *"What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?"...* (v.17a), the Pharisees seem to be implying some doubt about the fact of the man's healing. Had this man really been blind? Had Jesus actually restored his sight? In the Pharisees' opinion, this man ought to know more about the matter than he had been telling them—if, in fact, he had been telling them the truth.

The newly healed man must have felt greatly harassed by everything that was happening to him. Probably, too, his experiences and surroundings filled him with fear and foreboding. We must keep in mind that—for the first time in his life—this man was able to see. Never before had he observed people or objects, nor had he observed how people behaved. Never before had he witnessed the austere robes and imperious demeanour of the Pharisees. Never before had he stood before these long-robed figures of authority, like a prisoner on trial.

This poor man must have been very frightened by everything that he now saw and heard. He must have been apprehensive—if not fearful—about what the Pharisees were planning to do to him. Nevertheless, even under tremendous pressure, this persecuted man did not fail to confess what he believed. The Pharisees had demanded,

(17a)...*"What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes."...*

(17b) ... *He said, "He is a prophet."* (ESV)

Here was courage exemplified! Earlier, the blind man had referred to Jesus as a *man* (v.11). Now, in front of the highly esteemed and powerful Pharisees, the man refers to Jesus as a *prophet*. (Cf. Luke 24:19)

A divinely appointed prophet was a person officially accredited by God to act as his spokesman. While acting in this official capacity, God's Holy Spirit filled and inspired the prophet to proclaim the words of the LORD. To refuse to hear and to heed the voice of God's prophet was to refuse to hear and to heed the voice of the living Sovereign God. (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21)

The parallel was not lost on the Pharisees. By saying that Jesus was a *prophet*, the blind man was implying that everyone—including the Pharisees—ought to hear and heed Jesus as God's officially appointed spokesman. Again, by implication, to refuse to listen to the words of Jesus was to refuse to listen to the voice of Almighty God—in whose name a prophet of God spoke.

This implied rebuke must have enraged the Pharisees. They utterly rejected the man's testimony concerning his healing. Therefore, in verse 18, John writes:

### John 9:18

For a formerly blind beggar to assert with assurance and conviction that Jesus was a prophet of God was more than the Jews could endure. Surely they—as the established religious authorities—ought to know better than any beggar that Jesus was no prophet!

It seems that, whereas the blind man could now see, those who imagined that they could see, yet remained spiritually blind! (John 12:37-40)

Completely unwilling to accept that Jesus was a prophet of God, the Jews began to question the validity of the man's claim. Perhaps this man had not been blind at all. Perhaps he had not been telling the truth about his supposed blindness, but was merely trying to gain sympathy from the people by attracting attention to himself. However, if he could not be trusted to tell the truth about his blindness, then he certainly could not be trusted to tell the truth about Jesus.

Determined to pursue this line of inquiry further, the Jews summoned the man's parents before them. Now, once and for all, they would ascertain the truth.

### John 9:19

When the man's parents arrived, the Jews began their interrogation of them by asking them to confirm that he was indeed their son. Having established this fact, they then asked the man's parents, 'Is this the same person whom you allege was blind at birth? We do not necessarily accept that he was born blind, but is this the son whom *you say* was born to you blind?'

'Assuming, however, that we were to accept that your son was indeed born blind, how do you account for the fact that he can now see? Clearly, you are a poor family, for you could not afford to support your son yourselves. You could not have afforded, therefore, to seek medical treatment for him. Yet, he is now able to see. If indeed he was formerly blind—as you claim—tell us how and when your son received his sight.'

In verses 20 and 21, John tells us how the man's parents replied:

### John 9:20-21

At this stage, the man's parents hesitated. What were they going to say to these Jewish authorities? They knew what would become of them if they as much as hinted at any link between Jesus and the promised Messiah (v.22; see also John 12:42).

It was well known that, in the Old Testament Scriptures, it was written that God's Messiah would restore sight to the blind—both physically and spiritually. Jesus was fulfilling these very prophecies. The Jews, however, totally rejected the idea that Jesus was God's promised Messiah. They did this despite the fact that Jesus repeatedly performed the very miracles that identified him as God's Anointed One. (Isa. 29:18; 35:5; 42:6-7, 16; cf. Isa. 61:1)

Therefore, fearful of the consequences of saying the wrong thing, the man's parents answered the Jews,

*(20) ... "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. (21) But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." (ESV)*

**John 9:22**

It is unbelievable that the parents did not know who had healed their blind son. The event had taken place almost on their very doorstep. The man's healing had become notorious throughout the entire neighbourhood. Everyone was aware that Jesus had restored sight to the blind beggar.

When testifying to his neighbours, the man himself had declared,

*"...The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes..." (v.11)*

Clearly, then, the man's parents must have known that Jesus had healed their son.

Verses 22 and 23, however, provides us with the reason why the man's parents were unwilling to acknowledge Jesus before the religious authorities. In verse 22, the apostle John tells us,

*(22) (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus<sup>30</sup> to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) (ESV)*

The man's parents were afraid not only of being suspended from participation in the synagogue services, but also of being totally excommunicated from all forms and places of worship. They feared being cut off from the local synagogue fellowship, and probably from family and friends as well. They feared being 'blacklisted' and thus prevented from entering a place of worship. Most of all, perhaps, they feared being excluded from the temple in Jerusalem, and from being able to worship the Lord in that holy place. (John 7:13)

Such must have been the nature of the fears flooding the hearts and minds of this father and mother as they wrestled with their conscience in an attempt to find a way out of their dilemma.

**John 9:23**

For other reasons, even present day believers may find themselves challenged for what they believe about Christ, or about his teaching or works. Nevertheless, if maintaining the truth about Christ and his teaching leads to exclusion from one place of worship, or area of service, the Lord will certainly appoint his rejected saints to another.

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<sup>30</sup> **9:22** Greek *him* [ESV footnote]

## Second Interrogation by the Pharisees

### **John 9:24-34**

#### **John 9:24**

Eventually, the Pharisees realised that they could not succeed in extracting any further information from the man's parents. They decided, therefore, to recall the beggar himself for further questioning. This time, the religious authorities solemnised the proceedings by invoking God's name. This meant that the person they were questioning—in this case, the blind man—was under a solemn obligation to testify to the truth in the sight of Almighty God.

Previously, the blind man had testified to his belief in Jesus as a prophet, i.e., a prophet of God. The Jews, of course, strongly objected to this designation. Now, they implied to the man, 'You have the opportunity of telling the truth, and of giving praise, glory and honour to God. All you need to do is to admit what we already know about this man; namely, that he is a sinner.'

These words were blasphemous indeed. Such, however, was the desperation of the religious authorities to discredit the name of Jesus in the eyes of the people.

#### **John 9:25**

The blind man confesses only one thing: his total inability to say whether or not Jesus is a sinner. Yet, the man is not content to leave this matter undecided. He may not know if Jesus is a sinner, but one thing he does know—whereas once he was blind, now he can see!

Thus, the man retorts:

*"Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." (ESV)*

*"...How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?"* (v.16 ESV) This was a question asked by some of the Pharisees earlier—the very question that resulted in a division among them (v.16). The blind man must also have reasoned along similar lines. If, as alleged, Jesus was a sinner, why was he able to exercise divine power and authority?

Conversely, Jesus proved his divinity and authority both by his teaching and by his miraculous signs. Manifestly, then, he could not be a sinner. No mortal man or unholy spiritual being could perform the kind of miracles that Jesus performed. These miracles were miracles of God, and of his Holy Spirit.

#### **John 9:26**

The man's answer must have left the Pharisees lost for words! Undeniably, the man could now see; and apparently, he had indeed been born blind. This much at least the Jews were forced to accept—although with great reluctance on their part. Still not satisfied, however, the leaders persisted in questioning the man:

*(26b) "...What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" (ESV)*

Again, the stubbornness and hard-heartedness of the Jews reveals itself. They have already caused the man and his parents immense worry and distress with their intense and outrageous questions. Yet, even when they see that nothing further is to be gained, they continue to pursue the matter. Clearly, they hold little or no regard for this man's welfare,



or for his parent's welfare. Their primary concern is to protect their own cherished reputation and traditions.

### John 9:27

At last, the man can stand it no longer. At this stage, the Jews have been subjecting the man to prolonged and intense pressure for some considerable time. His answer is straightforward and very much to the point:

*(27a,b)..."I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again?..." (ESV)*

The man realised that these Jews had no interest in anyone other than themselves. Their only desire was to discredit the Lord Jesus. This had become abundantly clear during their interrogation of the man. He reminds these Jews, therefore, that—although he had already explained everything to them in detail—they had not listened. They had not believed what he had said to them. Therefore, in making his answer, the man cannot help but expressing his annoyance:

*(27c)..."Do you also want to become his disciples?" (ESV)*

The man knew, of course, that becoming Jesus' disciples was the last thing on these Jews' minds—but now, exasperated by their constant interrogation, he was taunting them. Yet, by phrasing his questions in such a manner, he revealed that he himself believed in Christ; at least as far as his present state of knowledge allowed.

### John 9:28

The enraged Jewish leaders reacted instantly. Showing themselves in their true colours, they began hurling abusive insults at the man. This kind of attitude and language, however, was hardly consistent with a profession of godliness! (Cf. John 7:47-49)

'Now we have heard it from your own mouth. By your own confession, you stand condemned. You have no place among the people of Israel. By your allegiance to Christ, you have made yourself an outcast!

'We know that God never spoke to this fellow. Indeed, we know nothing about his origins. However, we know most assuredly that God spoke to Moses, and we certainly know about Moses' origins. It was through Moses that we Jews received the very words of God on the holy mount.'

Such was a common line of reasoning among the Jews of Jesus' day. However, they conveniently overlooked the fact that they and their ancestors had failed consistently to observe the very law that God had given to Moses. Hardly, then, could they claim to be Moses' disciples, when they did not learn from Moses and obey the word of God! (John 5:45-47; 7:19)

The Jews continued:

### John 9:29

Evidently, this once blind man was not prepared to endure any further harassment or interrogation at the hands of these religious leaders. On several different occasions, the man had attempted to explain how he had received his sight. On each occasion, however, the Jews had expressed considerable dissatisfaction and scepticism at his answers. Now, they had just conceded that they had no idea of Jesus' origins. This proved too much for the former beggar:

### John 9:30

To the blind man, it beggared belief that these supposedly well-informed Pharisees could know so little about Jesus' origins. How could men of such standing in the community, and of such learning in religious matters, know so little about a person who publicly taught the ways of God?

The blind man reasoned that Jesus must truly have come from God since he had been able to open his eyes—eyes that had remained closed from birth. However, if this kind of miraculous power proved to the blind man that Jesus must have come from God, how could the Pharisees say that they did not know where Jesus came from?

These representatives of the religious authorities had just heard about the remarkable miracle that Jesus had performed on this man. They had established that he had indeed been born blind. Undoubtedly, they must have been aware of many other equally miraculous deeds of power performed by the Lord Jesus. How, then, could these Jews continue to maintain that they did not know where Jesus had come from? Was it not abundantly evident that he had come from God? (Luke 7:22)

The blind man continued:

### John 9:31

In the humble opinion of the formerly blind man, the fact that Jesus could perform such miracles proved to him that he was a man of God. The Pharisees had alleged (falsely and maliciously) that Jesus was a sinner, and had attempted to get the blind man to make the same wicked and malevolent allegation about God's sinless Son. The blind man, however, was not prepared to let the Pharisees move him from his convictions. Therefore, the man continues:

*(31) "We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him." (ESV; cf. Ps. 34:15-16; Prov. 15:29)*

This man possessed clear insights into spiritual truths. He reasons simply, logically and with more than a hint of real spiritual understanding.

Implicitly, the man says,

*'Everyone knows that a holy and righteous God does not listen to sinners, or support them in any way. Therefore, since Jesus' miracles show clearly that he is working with the support, authority and approval of God, Jesus cannot be a sinner.*

*'Again, if a person shows by his manner of life that he is a godly man or woman, and that he is intent on obeying God's will, then everyone accepts that God will listen to that person.*

*'Jesus shows by his actions that he is a godly person and that he is being obedient to God's will in everything that he does. Jesus, therefore, must be one to whom God listens, and one of whom God particularly approves. Once again, however, this proves that Jesus cannot be a sinner. You Pharisees, therefore, must be greatly mistaken.'*

This possibly illustrates the reasoning of this once-blind man.

The man continues:

### John 9:32

Apparently, the truth and power of this man's arguments had so stunned the Pharisees that it had rendered them momentarily speechless! Here was a completely unlettered man instructing the highly educated Pharisees in the ways of God!

Gaining courage by the advantage temporarily afforded him, the man continues to address the Jewish religious authorities:

*(32) "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind." (ESV)*

Over the centuries, the servants of God had effected many different miracles in God's name. However, before the coming of Christ, no one had succeeded in opening the eyes of a person born blind. This kind of miracle was unique and utterly remarkable.

The man continues:

### John 9:33

(Cf. John 3:2; Acts 5:38-39)

Therefore, he implies, since Jesus had been able to perform such an outstanding and unheard of miracle, he must be from God. If he were not from God, he would be unable to perform this kind of miraculous sign.

### John 9:34

By this time, the astounded Pharisees had recovered from their initial shock. No longer could they bear to listen to the powerful reasoning of this former beggar. What right had he to instruct them?

Therefore, before he could say anything further, the Jews turned on the man in furious anger, declaring:

*(34)... "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out. (ESV)*

Here, the Jews reveal something of their hypocrisy. They accuse this man of having been steeped in sin at birth. (Probably implying that this was why he had been born blind.) However, these religious leaders failed completely to acknowledge that they themselves had been born in sin. They also failed to acknowledge that—even yet—their sins remained unforgiven; or that, in consequence of their unconfessed and unforgiven sin, they remained God's enemies. (Job 15:14; 25:4-6; Ps. 51:5)

The man's answers had infuriated these Jewish leaders. Their responses had demonstrated just how far their hearts and lives really were from God. Even so, the man's remarks had provided the Jews with the excuse that they sought. Earlier, this man had implied his allegiance to Jesus (v.27). Now, by virtue of his arguments, he had demonstrated his outright support for Jesus as a man from God.

The Jews required no further evidence against the man. By his own testimony, he must be considered a follower of Jesus. If, however, he was a follower of Jesus, then no place remained for him within the congregation of Israel or in the synagogue of the Jews. (John 9:22) The Jews, therefore, threw him out; i.e. they formally excommunicated him from their place of prayer and worship.

## Jesus Speaks of Spiritual Blindness

### *John 9:35-41*

#### John 9:35

At first, it seems as though the Pharisees have placed this man in a desperate situation. They have excluded him from the worshipping assembly and prevented him from re-entering the house of prayer. They have excluded him from fellowship with the synagogue congregation, and from the religious and social life of that place of worship.

Effectively, the Pharisees have done all in their power to make this man an outcast from Israel, and from Israel's God. Here, then, was a man seeking to learn more about the ways of God, but being prevented from doing so by hypocritical men.

The God, however, who keeps his eye upon the sparrow, keeps his eye upon his people. God had caused the expulsion of this man from the Jewish place of worship, in order to bring him within the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There, among God's worshipping people, this man would certainly find a place. It is not surprising to learn that—when this man had been cast out of the Jewish fellowship—the Lord sought him out. God does not permit his own true children to remain out of fellowship with himself or with his people.

The man, however, still had to learn some further spiritual truths concerning the Lord Jesus. So far, he had confessed Jesus as a *man*, and then as a *prophet*. The man needed to see, however, that Jesus was very much more than a mere man, or even a prophet of God. Therefore, John tells us:

*(35) Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"<sup>31</sup> (ESV)*

Here, Jesus uses that title which emphasises his sovereign power and glory as the Messiah or Anointed of God. The title, *Son of Man*, lays particular emphasis, however, on the Lord's temporary and voluntary humiliation for the sake of accomplishing God's will on earth.

Sometimes, as in the Psalms and elsewhere, the expression *son of man*, refers simply to an individual member of mankind. On other occasions, however, it is used as a specific title or form of address. The expression, *son of man* had been used extensively in the book of Ezekiel. The prophet Daniel had also used the expression.

Very likely, the blind man had heard of *The Son of Man*. At present, however, he could not identify the person so designated. However, from hearing the Old Testament Scriptures, he would know that it applied to God's Anointed One.

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<sup>31</sup> **9:35** Some manuscripts *the Son of God* [ESV footnote]

The Lord Jesus Christ used this title frequently himself. However, the blind man may not have been aware of this, if he had not heard of Jesus before his healing. (Matt.16:13,16; John 1:49,51)

Jesus had asked this former beggar:

(35b)...*“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”*

Although believing about such a person, the man does not hesitate to confess his ignorance of this person’s identity.

### John 9:36

Clearly, the man does not realise that the one to whom he is speaking is that very Person. Yes, it is very probable that this man had heard something of the Son of Man. The glories of that Person had been proclaimed in the Old Testament Scriptures. However, to whom did these Old Testament Scriptures refer?

From hearing the Scriptures, the man realised that he should believe on the Son of Man. Furthermore, Jesus, too, was now implying that he should believe in this great Person. Therefore, he must endeavour to discover more about this Son of Man.

For this reason, the man said to Jesus,

(36) ...*“And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him.”* (ESV)

### John 9:37

Jesus knew what was in this man’s heart long before he asked this question. The Lord did not need to be informed about what the man was thinking. However, by asking him the question in verse 35, he is showing to us what the *man* is thinking.

The man’s answer shows that he is willing to receive instruction in spiritual matters. Similarly, he is more than willing to believe in the Son of Man—once he knows who that Person is. Now the Lord makes known the truth to this seeking soul:

(37) *Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.”* (ESV)

*‘I who speak to you am he’*—the words spoken to the woman of Samaria, and reflected here in this verse. (John 4:25-26)

‘Once, you were unable to see me, or to understand spiritual truths. Now, you are able to see both. I am the Son of Man. Now let me ask you again,

*“Do you believe in the Son of Man?”* (v.35)

### John 9:38

Without any further hesitation, the man declares his complete and unreserved faith in Christ. Now he knew that Jesus was not just a remarkable *man*, nor even just a *prophet* of God. Jesus was the *Christ of God*—the promised Messiah. This much the man believed with all his heart. Therefore, to Jesus’ revelation about himself as the Son of Man, the blind man responds in these words:

(38)...*“Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him.* (ESV)

To begin with, the man had believed in Jesus as another *man*; although a man with remarkable powers of healing (v.11). Then, the blind man had believed in Jesus as one of

God's holy *prophets* (v.17). Now, he believes in Jesus as the *Messiah* sent by God—and one whom people ought to worship even as God himself is worshipped. (John 20:28; see also Matt. 14:33; 28:9)

Immediately, therefore, upon confessing his faith in Christ, this man falls down and worships Jesus. In Middle Eastern countries, this was—and still is—the customary method of showing profound reverence in the presence of God.

### John 9:39

By this time, some of the Pharisees had arrived on the scene. Probably, they were curious to know what the Lord Jesus was saying to the man whom they had just expelled from their synagogue.

While they were standing there, the Lord said:

(39) ...*“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” (ESV)*

The coming of God's Son into the world effects judgment—or separation—of mankind into one of two distinct classes: those who believe on Christ and those who do not.

Some time earlier, Jesus had restored *physical* sight to a man born blind. Subsequently, the Lord had given this man *spiritual* sight. Now, the formerly blind man was able to see, understand and believe the truths concerning salvation. The fact that he accepted Jesus as his Saviour and Lord was demonstrated through his confession of faith and his act of divine worship.

This man represented the believing class of men and women. However, another class of men and women existed—including many people like the scribes and Pharisees. Some of these people professed to be able to see spiritual truths. Contrary to their claims, however, they remained blind to spiritual realities—unable to see the truth of God's salvation as revealed in Christ.

Christ, therefore, created a separation—or judgment—between those to whom spiritual sight had been granted, and those who remained in spiritual blindness. Those who acknowledged their spiritual blindness or ignorance, and sought the light, found the Light of the world. Those who failed to acknowledge their spiritual blindness and ignorance failed to see the Light of the world. (John 12:44-48)

### John 9:40

Those Pharisees, who had been listening to Jesus' conversation with the blind man, suspected that the Lord was including them in his remarks about the spiritually blind. To be included among the spiritually blind, however, was considered by these religious leaders as highly insulting and derogatory to their reputation.

These religious authorities prided themselves in possessing a superior knowledge of the ways of God, and of being competent teachers of the truths concerning God. To imply, however, that they were no better than blind leaders of the blind, was considered offensive in the extreme. (Matt. 15:12-14) Yet, the Lord had already declared this truth to the Pharisees on a number of occasions. Truly, they remained in spiritual darkness—alienated from the God they professed to know. How, then, could they be a guiding light to the professing people of God?

In verse 40, John writes,

*(40) Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" (ESV)*

The Pharisees wanted to be sure that Jesus really was including them in his remarks.

The Lord's reply is easy to understand:

### **John 9:41**

The Pharisees had just asked Jesus if he considered them to be among the spiritually blind. The Lord's answer causes them to think about the significance of their question, and about what Jesus had said:

*(41a) ... "If you were blind, you would have no guilt <sup>32</sup>..." (ESV)*

Those who are spiritually blind cannot see the significance of spiritual truths. Because they are sinners, they are unable to appreciate fully the extent of their guilt in the sight of God. Certainly, in their unforgiven state, they remain under God's wrath and condemnation. Nevertheless, because they are abiding in spiritual darkness, God does not consider them as blameworthy or guilty as those in more favoured circumstances. God judges each person according to the degree of light that he possesses. No one, however, will be able to claim total ignorance of God's existence, since—through his works of creation and providence—God has revealed himself clearly to all mankind. (Rom. 1:20-21)

The Lord is pointing out to these Pharisees that they are not guiltless by any means. In spiritual terms, it is true that a veil of darkness covered their minds, preventing them from seeing the light of life in Christ Jesus. However, in the case of the Pharisees, this veil had been imposed upon them because of their own stubbornness and wilful unbelief.

Unlike many others, the Pharisees and other religious classes could not claim total ignorance of God, or of God's ways—nor would they ever have attempted to do so. They *knew* what God required—but they did not *do* what God required. Instead of obeying God's Word, the Pharisees tried to substitute their own rules, regulations and traditions for the requirements of God's holy law. God's holy law required the observance of such things as love, mercy, compassion, justice and righteousness—not rules and regulations imposed by men.

These Pharisees made great claims to the knowledge of God's truth. To the people, men like the Pharisees were fountains of piety and wisdom. They, better than others, were qualified to exemplify a godly life and to provide instruction in the ways of righteousness.

Undoubtedly, these religious leaders possessed many advantages over other people. However—in spite of their claims to the contrary—they did not know the God of truth. Therefore, they remained in spiritual darkness. For all their great learning, they were un-

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<sup>32</sup> **9:41** Greek *you would not have sin* [ESV footnote]

## Expository Notes

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able to see the light of God's salvation. (Cf. Isa. 56:10) Even so, because they possessed the knowledge of the truth, and because they claimed (albeit falsely) that they could see and understand that truth, the guilt of their sin remained. Their rejection of God's truth—in spite of much greater privileges—meant that their guilt increased very considerably. (Luke 12:47-48)

God would judge the Pharisees according to the degree of light in their possession. However, because of their wilful rejection of the truth in the presence of much clearer and greater light, the Lord would judge them much more severely. (John 15:21-25)

This may be why the Lord declared:

*(41) ...“If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” (ESV)*



## John Chapter 10

### The Good Shepherd

#### **John 10:1-21**

In this chapter, the Lord Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. The metaphor of the Shepherd and his sheep or flock should have been very familiar to the Jews, as it was used frequently in their (OT) Scriptures to describe the relationship between God and his people. (Cf. Ps. 23:1-6; 79:13; 80:1; Jer. 31:10; see esp. Ezek. 34:9-16)

#### **John 10:1**

Jesus had just been speaking to the Pharisees of their spiritual blindness. In their unregenerate state, they were unable to see or appreciate spiritual truths. Therefore, they could not be in any position to impart God's truth to others. For the most part, the Pharisees had not entered God's kingdom. They remained outside his fold. They were not his sheep. They did not know the Shepherd. (John 9:41; cf. Matt. 23:16-17; see also Isa. 56:10-11)

There was, however, no other way for a person to approach God, except through the one and only door. Those who attempt to approach God by any way other than through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, are attempting (vainly) to enter God's kingdom by an unacceptable method or means. This, however, is impossible.

The Lord Jesus tells us quite plainly:

*...“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 ESV)*

Again, God's Word declares:

*“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12 ESV)*

Those attempting to enter God's kingdom other than through faith in Christ, are thieves and robbers. (The word translated 'robbers' is a word which also may be translated 'bandits' or 'insurrectionists'.) Such are the kind of people who attempt to enter God's kingdom (or God's church) by any means other than through genuine saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although they are not part of Christ's flock, certain of these individuals manage to worm their way into the church and among God's people, using insidious or persuasive words and behaviour to dominate, beguile and deceive the people of God. (2 Tim. 3:5-7)

Once within the church, some of these evil men or women endeavour to set themselves up as leaders or teachers of God's flock—as did the unregenerate scribes and Pharisees. These same individuals are responsible for leading many people astray by their erroneous and false teachings, or by teaching the doctrines of men as though they were the commandments of God.

Without a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and devoid of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, these men and women seek to promote only those things that are of interest to themselves (carnal or worldly interests) or they seek only their own fame or

glory. They have no genuine interest in the flock of God or in the things of God, for such individuals are not true shepherds of God's flock. (Mark 7:6-8; cf. Ezek. 34:1-24)

The Lord Jesus continues:

### John 10:2

A true shepherd of God's flock is one who has entered God's kingdom by the one and only sheep door (or gate). This door is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus alone provides access to the Father. He is the Chief Shepherd. All the Lord's true servants are his under-shepherds.

Only those who have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, and who have placed their faith unreservedly in the Lord Jesus Christ, can be said to have entered the sheepfold (God's kingdom) by the door. These individuals—and these individuals alone—are the true people of God. And it is from these people alone that the Lord selects and appoints his under-shepherds.

The Lord Jesus entrusts the care of his flock to these under-shepherds. (1 Pet. 5:4; see also Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Heb. 13:20) The under-shepherds are those who have entered by the door into the sheepfold or church, and it is these alone whom God appoints to protect and feed his flock. (Acts 20:28-31) All others are self-appointed, or appointed by men alone rather than by God. These are the false shepherds or false teachers.

Those who exercise oversight in God's church, should be able to recognise the true shepherds of God's flock. They should also be able to recognise and deal with false teachers arising from within the church.

In verse 3, Jesus says:

### John 10:3

The Lord Jesus himself is the true Shepherd of God's flock. The sheep listen to the true Shepherd's voice—and knowing his voice, they follow him and feed on his words. The true Shepherd nourishes God's people on the words of life; he leads them by the waters of eternal life, and he preserves, protects and delivers them with his own life.

What is true of the Chief Shepherd, is true also—in a more limited way—of his under-shepherds: The sheep know that these under-shepherds are feeding them with God's truth. They know also that a true under-shepherd will lead them out by green pastures, i.e., into further spiritual abundance.

God's people recognise an under-shepherd who leads them into the truths of God's Word. They listen to the voice—or teaching—of such shepherds, knowing that their teaching imparts to them real spiritual food. By feeding God's flock on the truth, a true under-shepherd strengthens the people of God, and protects them from the evil one, and from the evil one's ambassadors—the false teachers.

As once was customary among shepherds in the Middle East, a true shepherd knows each of his own sheep by name. He is aware of each one's individual needs. He knows the wounds and afflictions borne by each one. This shepherd tends to these needs. He binds up their wounds. In a spiritual and prayerful sense, the true shepherd carries upon his shoulders the weak, the lame and the weary.

The true shepherd goes before his sheep, leading them out to pasture:

- The shepherd or pastor *teaches* God's Word and the sheep *apply* God's Word.

- The shepherd or pastor *expounds* the Scriptures and the sheep *believe and obey* the Scriptures.

By leading them into the truths of God's Word, the under-shepherd teaches the sheep which way to go—with the Chief Shepherd always leading onward.

Therefore, in verse 4, Jesus says:

#### **John 10:4**

The Lord Jesus knows and identifies every one of his own sheep. These are they whom the Father has given him. These are the sheep belonging to God's fold. None will ever be admitted to the fold, to the kingdom of God, or to the church of God unless they are one of Christ's own sheep. These are the sheep whom the Lord brings out, and who follow him because they have heard and recognise their Shepherd's voice.

And how have they recognised their Shepherd's voice?

By experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling and regeneration, drawing them to Christ, inviting them to receive him, and causing them willingly and obediently to follow the Shepherd who loved them and laid down his life for them.

Now, within the church, the under-shepherds of God's flock leads his people in the way that they should go, i.e., he instructs them fully in the ways and will of God for their lives, imparting to them the teaching of God's imperishable Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Because the sheep recognise a true under-shepherd's voice, they listen to him. They recognise that he is feeding their souls on the abundant riches of God's Word. The 'green pastures' and 'still waters' of Psalm 23 represent just some of the abundant riches of God's eternal living Word.

As they feed on the living Word, God's people receive spiritual nourishment. The Word of God strengthens them in mind and soul, and they grow daily in their most holy faith. The sheep realise, of course, that only the true under-shepherds can provide them with spiritual food. False shepherds could never provide such soul-enriching nourishment.

Therefore, in verse 5, the Lord Jesus says:

#### **John 10:5**

The Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Great Shepherd of God's flock. The sheep who belong to Christ follow him alone, for they recognise only his voice; i.e., the means through which they hear and accept his words or his teaching.

The sheep of God's flock do not recognise—i.e., they do not acknowledge—the voice or teaching of strangers. They know that such teaching is not the teaching of their own Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ, so they refuse to heed it. Far from nourishing their souls on the Word of life, false shepherds with their false teaching threaten only to damage the believers' spiritual lives and arrest their spiritual growth.

Thus, it is the solemn responsibility of the under-shepherds within God's church to instruct God's people aright. When properly instructed, God's true and faithful people will never heed the voice of false or pretending shepherds. They will shun utterly those who distort God's Word, or who fail to provide their souls with spiritual nourishment. God's people will refuse to acknowledge a stranger's voice, because they know that it does not represent the voice of God. (1 John 2:20-21; 4:5-6; Rev. 2:2)

In Jesus' day, the religious leaders like the Pharisees and scribes were claiming to be the only true shepherds and instructors of God's flock. However, these men had failed utterly to feed that flock on spiritual food. Indeed, since they themselves had never entered God's fold by the one and only door, these men were no better than thieves and robbers, or bandits. They had attempted to gain by stealth, deceit, arrogance and self-effort what could only be received as a gift through repentance and faith in Christ. (Matt. 23:13-15) They pretended to be shepherds of God's flock, but they had no part in God's kingdom. Therefore, God's true people did not listen to their teaching, but only to the teaching of God's Word.

### John 10:6

Jesus had been using a figure of speech or parabolic illustration to show the difference between true and false shepherds of God's flock. The Lord made it plain that only one door existed that permitted access into God's fold or church. Those who did not enter by that door did not belong to God's kingdom.

Implicitly, Jesus had been saying that men such as the scribes and the Pharisees were typical of false shepherds. In the parable, he referred to these pretenders as thieves and robbers. These people had not entered by the gate, yet they professed themselves as qualified teachers of God's people. Qualified in many matters they may have been. But qualified in spiritual matters they most certainly could not be, while they remained outside of God's kingdom, and with no personal experience of the Holy Spirit's regenerating power or of his indwelling and sanctifying presence. (Cf. John 8:43-44)

Like all unregenerate sinners, these men were indeed as the Lord described them elsewhere: whitewashed sepulchres—appearing pious, clean and beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones (rank impurity and corruption) on the inside. (Matt. 23:26-28; cf. Isa. 64:6)

In their unregenerate and unspiritual state of mind, the scribes and Pharisees had failed completely to understand the point of Jesus' parable. At this stage, they did not realise that he was speaking about people like themselves.

In verse 7, Jesus expands on the parable:

### John 10:7

I most solemnly declare to you, 'I AM...'

'I am the only door for the sheep. I am the only entrance into the fold and kingdom of God. If you have not entered by me, then you have not entered God's kingdom. If, however, you have not entered God's kingdom, then you are not God's child—much less, a shepherd of God's flock.'

*(7)...“Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” (ESV)*

'No other means of access to God's kingdom exists. Those who would belong to God must come to him through me.'

In verse 8, the Lord continues:

### John 10:8

Many had come, purporting to be from God—but they had never entered God's kingdom. Many had stood in the religious assemblies of the Jews, purporting to teach the Word of God—but they were not God's children. Many had occupied the seats of learning—such

as the scribes and Pharisees—but they had no personal or saving knowledge of God. (Ezek. 34:2-6)

Therefore,

*(8a) “All who came before me are thieves and robbers...” (ESV)*

They professed to represent God, and to teach his ways. However, their distorted and misleading teachings had caused more harm to people than any good they might have done. They had deceived and misled many people, robbing them of the spiritual riches of God’s pure Word. Thieves and robbers they were and are indeed! (Zeph. 3:3-4)

These false shepherds led many people astray by their example and by their teaching. However, they did not succeed in leading astray God’s true children. The Lord’s own children had received the Spirit of God—the Spirit of truth and holiness. He—the Holy Spirit—had guided them into the truths of God’s Word, and helped preserve them from error. (Cf. John 16:13)

Because of the knowledge of the (Old Testament) Scriptures, these believers were able to identify false teachers. Thus, they avoided the false shepherds, who—even now—were everywhere to be found. In accordance with Jesus’ instructions, many of the ordinary people heard and heeded the Scriptures as taught by their religious leaders, but they did not follow the example of their religious teachers’ ungodly and hypocritical lifestyle. (Matt. 23:1-39)

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(8b) “...but the sheep did not listen to them.” (ESV)*

In verse 9, Jesus says even more plainly that he alone is the way to the Father:

### **John 10:9**

The Lord Jesus Christ alone is the only legitimate way to God. No one can approach God in any other way, or by any other means, or by any other person. Those who would come to the Father must come through faith in Christ’s name. They must believe that God sent his Son to accomplish his will. They must believe that that will involves the redemption of lost men and women. (John 14:6; Rom. 5:1-2)

*(9a) “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved...” (ESV)*

All those who come in repentance and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ will be accepted by him. If accepted by the Son, then the Father will accept them also. All those who believe on the Son of God will receive the salvation that he has come to provide. They will receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified through faith in him. They will receive the gift of eternal life. (John 6:37,40)

No one will be excluded who comes to this door seeking refuge in the fold of God. All will find salvation who enter in by the door; i.e., through repentance and faith in the Son of God himself, and through him alone.

All who come to the Son, will be received into the kingdom and family of God. They will go out—led by the Great Shepherd of the sheep—and will find pasture. Their souls will be nourished and enriched with the living and abiding Word of God. They will drink deeply from the wells of salvation, as the Holy Spirit within them opens their hearts and minds to the wonderful truths of God’s everlasting Word. They will feed abundantly on the rich pastureland of God’s eternal truths. (Isa. 40:11; 49:9-10)

The Lord continues:

### John 10:10

False shepherds (or false pastors or teachers) have no genuine interest in feeding or preserving God's flock. The flock does not belong to them, nor has God called and appointed them to care for it. They are spiritual impostors and evil deceivers of God's people. They may interest the people of God in many matters, but not in spiritual matters. Instead of teaching the truths of God's living Word, they offer the rules, teachings and opinions of men.

In order to infiltrate the church and deceive God's people, these men disguise themselves as angels of light (i.e., outwardly, they appear as righteous and holy angels). In fact, however, they are ministers of darkness and servants of Satan. They seek to rob people of their spiritual rights. They seek to kill any spark of spiritual interest in the souls of enquirers. They seek to destroy any feeble hope that spiritual enquirers might have possessed in the things of God.

If it were possible (which it is not), these false shepherds or teachers would lead God's elect away from the truth. Indeed, they may deceive some of God's redeemed people for a time. Ultimately, however, the true Shepherd of the flock will bring back his straying and erring sheep to his fold.

Concerning the false shepherds, Jesus says:

*(10a) "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy..." (ESV)*

Fortunately, these marauders cannot fatally harm God's true children. Although they may mislead some of them for a while, they cannot rob them ultimately of their spiritual heritage in Christ. Nor can they harm them in any other way.

*"I am the door..."* (v.9), declares the Lord Jesus.

The Son of God is the one and only means of access to the Father. Jesus came into this world to provide salvation for truly repentant sinners, and access to the Father in heaven. This salvation includes the gift of life: life in all its fullness, or abundant life.

A person can experience abundant life, however, only when his soul is at peace with God, and he is living in harmony with God's will and purposes for his life. Through knowing the Son (i.e., through believing on, and receiving, him by grace through faith), a person comes to know the Father. Through hearing and heeding the teaching of the Lord Jesus, a person learns about the will and ways of God. When, by the aid of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power, that person applies these life-transforming teachings to his everyday life, he begins to experience the real meaning of life. He begins to taste abundant life—life in all its fullness.

Therefore, Jesus says,

*(10b) "...I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (ESV)*

Up to this point, Jesus has been contrasting true and false shepherds, or good and bad shepherds, pastors or teachers of God's people. Now, in verse 11, the Lord speaks of himself as the Good Shepherd surpassing all others.

### John 10:11

*"All who came before me are thieves and robbers..."* (v.8a)

*(11a) "I am the good shepherd..." (ESV)*

All who ever came before the Lord Jesus, professing to be the Christ, and everyone else who professes to be a leader or teacher of God's people—while never having experienced a personal saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and therefore being devoid of the Spirit of God—are thieves and robbers.

The Lord Jesus alone is the one sent by God as the Messiah and Saviour of his people. He alone is the Good Shepherd; the one who cares for his flock, and the one to whom the flock belong. He knows each of his own sheep by name—and they know him and follow him.

As the rightful owner of the flock that God has given him, the Good Shepherd is prepared to lay down his life for his sheep, and to redeem and secure their lives through his sacrificial and atoning death. (Cf. Ezek. 34:12)

Therefore, the Lord continues:

*(11b) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (ESV)*

This is how we can distinguish the Good Shepherd from false shepherds or leaders of God's sheep. The Good Shepherd does all in his power to protect, guide and feed God's flock—and he protects them even to the point of laying down his life for them. He sacrifices his life for his people to secure their eternal salvation. Thus, verse 11 declares:

*(11b) "...The good shepherd lays down his life **for** the sheep." (Bold emphasis added)*

The Good Shepherd lays down his life *for*, i.e., 'in behalf of' or 'for the sake of' the sheep. Unless he were to do this, they could not experience salvation. *His* life must be given for *theirs*.

No one else pays the same attention to the sheep as does the Good Shepherd. This is certainly the case with the hired hand—the one who tends God's flock principally for payment.

Therefore, in verse 12, the Lord says:

### **John 10:12**

The Good Shepherd is the owner of the sheep. Therefore, each sheep is of inestimable value to him. The Lord Jesus Christ has bought his sheep with the ransom price of his own blood. Therefore, it is impossible to calculate their value. They are priceless.

A hired shepherd, however, has no such interest in the sheep. He does not own them. Therefore, he does not feel the need to protect them to the same degree. He is only a hired labourer, working for a wage. (Zech. 11:16-17; cf. 2 Tim. 4:10) At the first sign of real danger, the hired shepherd abandons the flock, leaving the sheep to fend for themselves.

Perhaps the danger to which the flock finds itself exposed, is that of false teaching. Like ravenous wolves in search of prey, these men set upon the flock, caring nothing for their spiritual welfare. ((Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Pet. 2:1-3)

Meanwhile, the hired shepherds are no-where to be found. The ones who should have resisted the false teachers and their teaching, gave way when pressurised, or deceived and deluded by them. Instead of protecting the flock, they left the flock at the mercy of the false teachers.

No true shepherd of God's flock could do this, however. Only a hired hand could thus abandon the sheep. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(12a) "He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees..." (ESV)*

The false teachers soon realise that the sheep are unprotected. Without godly leadership, there is no one strong or mature enough spiritually to guard the church from the inroads of error and false doctrine. Therefore, the false teachers take full advantage of the situation. They endeavour by every means at their disposal to bring the people round to their way of thinking. They sow in their minds seeds of doubt concerning certain truths of God's Word. At length, these insidious attacks upon the flock begin to wear some of them down, weakening their resolve. Some of the sheep begin to accept certain elements of the false teacher's doctrine. Others, however, still refuse to accept it.

Ultimately, splits develop among the flock. Then, because of irreconcilable differences, positive divisions follow. Before long, the flock becomes separated and scattered abroad. The false teachers have done their evil work admirably. The wolves have attacked and scattered the sheep—all because the hired shepherd failed to protect the sheep committed to his charge.

Therefore, in verse 13, the Lord says:

### **John 10:13**

The hireling abandons God's flock because at heart he has no interest in the people of God. He will remain with them through times of ease and receive from them all the benefits that they bestow upon him as a (supposed) pastor and leader of the flock. However, in times of peril, when God's people are threatened by false teaching, he is not equipped to deal with the situation. His worldly and unspiritual mind cannot cope with spiritual warfare or adversity. Thus, he resigns or forsakes his post, leaving the flock to the ravages of the false teachers or to the errors of their own spiritually immature ways.

There are many other reasons on account of which a false shepherd may abandon his post. However, the point is that these individuals prove wholly unreliable and are of no value to the church or the people of God. This stands in complete contrast to the care shown for the flock by the Good Shepherd, and also—in a measure—by the true and faithful shepherds or pastors of God's people:

### **John 10:14**

The Good Shepherd knows each one of his sheep personally. He knows them because they belong to him. He has bought them and paid for them with his own life-blood. Therefore, he has redeemed every one of these sheep at inestimable price.

Since he has redeemed them with his own blood, and since he is the Good Shepherd, he will never desert them or leave them exposed to the wolves.

*(14b) "...I know my own and my own know me..." (ESV)*

The sheep know him to whom they belong; i.e., they recognise the Son of God as their only true Shepherd. Since they know him, they listen to his voice. They hear everything that he says to them, and they heed his every command.

The sheep follow the Good Shepherd wherever he leads. He leads them to the green pastures and by the still waters. He leads them into the riches of God's grace as revealed in his Word. The sheep follow their Shepherd. They feed on the Word and they drink freely of the water of life.



Therefore, Jesus says:

(14b) *“...I know my own and my own know me...”*

Provided that the sheep follow the Good Shepherd at all times, and feed only from the green pastures (his living Word), they cannot stray. So long as they remain close to the Good Shepherd, no wolves can come near to attack them or lead them away from their Shepherd.

However, if any person strays wilfully from the Good Shepherd, then that person leaves himself or herself exposed to spiritual danger and to the possibility of succumbing to false teaching or sin. Granted, the Good Shepherd will seek for his lost sheep, and will recover it—for none of Christ’s sheep can ever be lost eternally. Nevertheless, while a believer remains astray from the Good Shepherd, that person may become involved in some sin which proves harmful to their spiritual life and testimony, and which requires confession to God. Let us remember David. On one particular occasion, David strayed from the paths of righteousness and committed some very grievous sins. When he repented, God forgave him, but David’s sin brought much suffering to himself and to others.

Moving on now to consider verse 15:

### **John 10:15**

The Father knows the Son in a sense that transcends human understanding. He knows his Son as the one who is bound to him in the closest relationship possible or imaginable. He knows him as his only Son—or his only begotten Son. (John 1:18; 6:46; 8:55,58)

The Father knows his Son as the one who has been with him from eternity, and through whom he created the entire universe. (John 1:3; Col. 1:17)

Above all, he knows his Son as the one who is the manifestation of himself: For the Son is God incarnate. He is the Almighty God in human form. He is the Logos—or Word, Speech or Message of God to mankind. (John 1:1-2) Therefore, the Father knows his Son in the most intimate sense possible. In this same sense, the Son knows his Father.

Again, the Lord Jesus Christ—the Good Shepherd—knows his sheep (here speaking of believing Jews). They are his possession. However, they are his because his Father had given them to him, and also because he was to redeem them.

In order to secure their eternal redemption, his life had to be given for theirs. He had to yield up his life to God as a perfect atoning sacrifice. Only in this way could the sheep be counted as spotless, unblemished and pure in his Father’s sight. Therefore, it was necessary that the Good Shepherd lay down his life for these sheep. (Zech. 13:6-7; Rev. 5:9)

### **John 10:16**

However, these sheep were not the Lord’s *only* sheep. The sheep in this fold (or pen) are sheep that have been gathered from among the Jewish pastures (or Jewish race). Such were the early disciples and other Jewish believers. However, many sheep remained to be gathered from other pastures; i.e., from among the Gentile races.

Therefore, Jesus says:

(16a) *“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold...” (ESV)*

These believing Gentiles were also the Lord’s sheep. They too would belong to God’s flock. Jesus’ atoning blood would redeem these sheep too, and these too would become his own precious possession.

Therefore, Jesus said:

(16b) “...I must bring them also...”

For these too constitute an essential part of God’s universal church.

These sheep too, from among the Gentiles, would hear and heed the Good Shepherd’s voice. These too would follow wherever he led them. However, these sheep would not represent another separate flock, nor would they belong to another separate fold. Rather, there would be only one flock and one fold—one redeemed people of God and one church of God. The flock within this one fold or universal church would consist of all of God’s redeemed children—Jews and Gentiles together. (John 11:51-52; Eph. 2:13-22)

Over this entire flock and over this universal fold, the Father has appointed one Shepherd. The Lord Jesus is that Shepherd. He alone is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. He alone is the head of God’s blood-bought church. (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:20)

There is only one Shepherd and only one flock. Therefore, Jesus says:

(16c) “...So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (ESV)

### John 10:17

The Lord Jesus had said that the Father knew him, and that he knew the Father. In this context, of course, the verb ‘to know’ does not mean merely ‘to have knowledge of’. Rather, this verb means that Father and Son know one another in the sense that they are united to one another in the most intimate spiritual, divine and glorious relationship. The Son is so united to and with his Father that he can do only what he sees his Father doing. In everything that they do, Father and Son act as one—for they are one.

Again, when the Son says that the Father knows him and that he knows the Father, essentially Jesus means that the Father *loves* his Son, and that the Son *loves* the Father with the fullest possible manifestation of divine and holy affection, commitment and devotion. Hence, the expression, ‘*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*’ (Matt. 17:5 ESV)

Loving the Father as he does, the Son obeys his Father’s commands willingly. The Father’s command is that his one and only Son lay down his life for the sheep (v.15b). It was imperative that the Son’s pure, spotless and holy life was sacrificed for theirs.

Yes, it was imperative that Jesus lay down his life for his sheep. It was essential that he yield up his perfect life to suffering and death on behalf of God’s people. However, having laid down his life, the Son of God fully intended to take up his life again—in accordance with his Father’s will and command. Jesus’ atoning sacrifice would be once-for-all, and never to be repeated. (Heb. 9:12; 10:10) However, his death would not be final. His sacrificial and atoning death would be followed by his triumphant and glorious resurrection, and then by his exaltation to his Father’s own right hand in glory.

Therefore, in verse 18, the Lord says:

### John 10:18

As God the Son, the Lord Jesus controlled his own destiny. Jesus exercised complete power over his own life. He remained alive for as long as he intended—for no one could forestall his will, or the will of his Father. When it was his will to do so, the Lord Jesus would lay down his life for his sheep. He would lay down his life *voluntarily*.

Men may have imagined vainly that they could take Jesus’ life from him. However, it was not in any sinful man’s power, or in any evil spiritual being’s power, to take the Lord’s life

from him. The Son of God would lay down his life of his own free will, and by his own sovereign power. In like manner, the Son of God would take up his life again—of his own free will, and by his own sovereign power. (Matt. 26:53-54; John 2:19-22)

To the same effect, the apostle Peter declared:

*(23) “—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. (24) God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:23-24 ESV)*

On another occasion, Peter declared:

*(27) “—for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, (28) to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” (Acts 4:27,28 ESV)*

Therefore, in John chapter 10, verse 18, Jesus says:

*(18) “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” (ESV)*

The Father in heaven had given his Son this command—that is, the power and authority—to lay down his life voluntarily, and to take it up again. This was why no one could take Jesus’ life from him. It did not lie in sinful mankind’s power, but in the Son’s power and in the power of his Father in heaven. (John 14:31; 19:10-11) Certainly, the Lord Jesus would die at the hands of sinful men—for so it had been written of him (Isa. 52:13 - 53:12). However, he would not die because of the purposes of sinful men, but according to God’s eternal purposes—or decrees.

### **John 10:19**

As usual, the unbelieving Jews could not agree among themselves. Unable to comprehend the spiritual nature of Jesus’ teaching, they began debating with one another. Eventually, two opposing factions emerged. (Cf. John 7:40-43; 9:16)

Therefore, in verse 20, John writes:

### **John 10:20**

In wilful unbelief, and out of envy, spite and malice against the Son of God, some of these Jews declared that the Lord Jesus was not of sound mind. They asserted that he was insane, or that a demon had possessed him and was speaking through him. In either event, these wicked individuals considered the holy Son of God as mentally unstable. Therefore, according to their evil line of reasoning, this man Jesus ought not to be listened to, but treated as one who did not know what he was saying. (Cf. Mark 3:21-22; John 7:20; 8:48,52; 9:34)

This faction of the Jews said this, of course, because they themselves did not understand Jesus’ teaching. Their sin had rendered them spiritually blind. Their same sinful condition had blunted and stupefied their minds to spiritual truths. Therefore, because of their own moral, spiritual and mental inadequacy, they failed to see the truth.

However, another faction of the Jews held to a quite different opinion of Jesus:

### **John 10:21**

‘Consider the evidence before you,’ implied this opposing group of Jews. ‘Jesus’ teaching has been consistent. He has presented it simply and logically, but with immense authority and power. No demon-possessed person ever presented consistently logical or coherent arguments. Again, no demon-possessed individual ever spoke with the kind of power or authority invested in this man. Therefore, this man, Jesus, cannot be demon-possessed. (Matt. 7:29; 9:6,8; Mark 1:27)

‘Again, remember the healing of the man born blind. No raving madman or person of unsound mind has ever been able to restore sight to the blind—much less, to a man *born* blind! Therefore, Jesus cannot be raving mad or mentally unstable, as you allege. On the contrary, although we may disagree with his claims, all the evidence in our possession shows him to be of completely sound mind. The evidence at our disposal also proves him to be a man of remarkable power and exceptional ability.’ (Matt. 11:4-6; John 9:32-33)

### **“I and the Father are One”**

#### **John 10:22-30**

##### **John 10:22-23**

It was winter, and the Feast of Dedication had arrived. This was the feast of renewal (or, as Josephus called it, the *Feast of Lights*, now known as *Hanukkah*). This feast had been instituted by Judas Maccabaeus in 165 or 164 B.C. as a memorial to the cleansing of the temple after it had been vilely defiled in 168 or 167 B.C. by Antiochus IV (Epiphanes). Following the cleansing and restoration of the temple, it was rededicated on 25<sup>th</sup> Chisleu (about mid-December). The Feast of Dedication continued for eight days. The ceremony was remembered especially for the temple lights that blazed forth once again. Each household also set up lights in their homes in celebration of this momentous event. (1 Macc. 4:52-59; 2 Macc. 2:23; 10:6-8; see also *Josephus*, Ant., b. xii. ch. 11) This, then, was the feast that now was being celebrated at the temple in Jerusalem.

Solomon’s Colonnade, mentioned in verse 23, was a long narrow walkway providing a sheltered area within the temple precincts. In this area, people could walk or sit, sheltered from the sun, wind and rain. In it, too, crowds of people would gather around Jesus while he taught them. The believers in the early church used to meet here also. (Acts 5:12; cf. also Acts 3:11)

As Jesus walked along Solomon’s Colonnade, the Scripture tells us:

##### **John 10:24**

One can hardly credit the audacity of these Jews in demanding an answer from the holy Son of God. Here were these hypocritical individuals daring to challenge God the Son, and requiring that he respond to their demands to declare who he was. These Jews knew very well who Jesus was. It was only their own sinful rebellion, pride and envy that prevented them from acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah.

Because Jesus had not said plainly to the Jewish religious authorities that he was the Christ, this vastly annoyed these Jews. Yet, evidently they would not have believed anything that Jesus told them. Among the Jews, the Lord had not claimed openly to be the Messiah—but he had certainly implied as much. John the Baptist had testified publicly concerning God’s Beloved Son, and the Lamb of God. Again, Jesus himself had claimed

explicitly that God had sent him. He had claimed to be the Son of God. He had even claimed equality with the Father when he had asserted:

... *“before Abraham was, I am!” (John 8:58 ESV)*

The Jews knew very well the significance of these claims (John 5:17-43; 8:59). However, they wanted to hear Jesus claim explicitly that he was the Christ. Then, they would be able to accuse him formally of blasphemy. In addition, they would be able to accuse him of attempting to undermine or overthrow the Roman government.

At this time, many of the Jews believed that the expected Messiah would be a secular and political figure. They thought of the coming Messiah as one who would cast off the Roman yoke and restore their independence as a nation. Therefore, if Jesus claimed openly to be the Messiah, then these Jews would allege that Jesus had come to raise a rebellion against the Roman authorities.

Either way, they intended to have him arrested and imprisoned. Therefore, the Jews said:

(24c) *“...If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” (ESV)*

### John 10:25

The Lord Jesus, of course, had told these Jews who he was. Many times, the Lord had told them—indirectly—that he was the Christ. Jesus had told the Jewish leaders plainly that God had sent him into this world to accomplish his will, but the religious leaders had refused to believe that Jesus was the Anointed One of God. Again, Jesus had told them clearly that he was the Son of God, but this too they had refused utterly to believe. Yet again, the Lord had demonstrated to these Jews that the Father was in him, and that he was in the Father—but still they had refused, wilfully and inexcusably, to believe that the Lord Jesus was one with God or that God had sent him. (John 8:24-28; 14:11)

Nevertheless, in spite of their stubborn unbelief, the Lord Jesus had provided them with yet further evidence:

(25b) *“...The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me...” (ESV)*

Every miracle performed by the Lord Jesus had testified to the fact that the Father had sent him. These miracles proved that Jesus was the Father's divinely appointed Son. (Cf. John 3:2) How could any ordinary man restore sight to the blind, heal the lame, or raise the dead? Yet, in his Father's name, Jesus had accomplished all these things. (Matt. 11:2-5) The Jewish leaders had seen or heard about these almighty works—yet they had refused to believe what their eyes and ears had been telling them. Nothing that the Son of God said to these Jews, therefore, would convince them of the truth, so long as they remained wilfully opposed to the Lord Jesus and to his works (cf. Heb. 2:3-4).

Clearly, then, these Jews had but one reason for trying to get Jesus to say that he was the Christ. They wanted him to incriminate himself. Then, they could either accuse him of blasphemy or of sedition.

The Jews had attempted to get Jesus to declare openly that he was the Christ. To this, Jesus had replied:

(25) *“I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me...” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 26, the Lord continues:

### John 10:26

The real reason that these Jews did not believe is that they were not Christ's own. Unlike many other Jewish people, these particular Jews were not his sheep. They did not belong to the Good Shepherd's fold. These Jews were not among those whom the Father had given to his Son for their eternal safekeeping. By their own wilful rebellion and stubborn unbelief, they had closed their hearts against the Spirit of truth, speaking or witnessing to them in common grace. (John 8:47; 12:37-43; Rom. 11:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:3-4)

The Lord said:

*(26) "but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock." (ESV)*

Notice the word order here: a person does not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ *because he is not part of Christ's flock*.

In other words, only those who are Christ's own sheep are able and willing to believe on him—and this by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling.

Plainly, then, Christ's sheep become believers because of an initial (and preceding) work of grace in their hearts. They believe in Christ—*freely and willingly*—because, in the first instance, the Father has effectively called them to his Son through the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, in John chapter 6, the Lord Jesus says:

*"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37 ESV)*

And:

*(44) No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (45) It is written in the Prophets, 'And they will all be taught by God.' {Isa. 54:13} Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— (John 6:44-45 ESV; see also v.65)*

The Lord continues:

### John 10:27

That which distinguishes the Lord's own sheep from all others is that Jesus' sheep listen to his voice. They hear and heed what he says to them, and they follow his instructions (cf. vv.3-4,8; see also John 5:25; Rev. 3:20). The Lord's own sheep do not wilfully and consistently stray from their Shepherd (cf. Heb. 3:7-12). They know instinctively that he is the Good Shepherd, and that the Good Shepherd alone will feed them with spiritual abundance. They know too that the Good Shepherd alone has the power to protect them from ultimate harm and danger.

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(27a) "My sheep hear my voice..." (ESV)*

This again demonstrates, however, that the reason why these antagonistic and unbelieving Jews did *not* listen to the Lord's voice is that they were not his sheep.

*(27a) "My sheep hear my voice..."*

Since they listen to the Good Shepherd's voice, Jesus' sheep obey his voice. The Lord's own sheep follow him wherever the Shepherd leads them. Furthermore, the Good Shep-

herd knows each of his own sheep by name. He identifies each one as belonging to him personally and exclusively. He has placed upon and within his own sheep the mark and seal of the Holy Spirit. (Cf. 2 Tim. 2:19) Each one knows that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. With full assurance of faith, therefore, each one of his sheep can say:

*“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1 ESV)*

The Lord knows them, and they know him. They follow the Lord as their only Shepherd, because they know that he, and he alone, will lead them in the paths of righteousness. They know that he will cause them to lie down in peace beside the still waters. When the storms of life rage around them, threatening their very lives, the Good Shepherd will protect them and deliver them: For he loves them with an everlasting love, and he will never forsake his own.

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(27) “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” (ESV)*

In verse 28, the Lord continues:

### **John 10:28**

The Son of God bestows upon each one of his own sheep the gift of eternal life. He personally guarantees to them a place in heaven in the presence of the Father, of the holy angels, and of all the redeemed children of God. This is their spiritual and actual inheritance. (Col. 3:4; 2 Thess. 3:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:5)

The Lord Jesus gives to his own sheep eternal life. No one can take that gift from them. This is why Jesus says:

*(28a) “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish...” (ESV)*

No matter what dangers threaten to encompass them, or cause their downfall, not a hair of their head will perish. They are his—and his forever they will remain. (Luke 21:18) Though they are sorely tried, and grievously afflicted, yet the Great Shepherd of the flock will preserve their souls from all danger. No power in heaven or on earth can deprive them of their eternal salvation or their eternal security. (Ps. 34:7,17-20; 91:1-16)

This is why the Lord says:

*(28a) “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish...”*

No one in all creation is able to pluck these sheep out of his hand. His ‘hand’ represents the Lord Jesus’ sovereign power and almighty control over the entire creation, over the spiritual powers of evil, and over the lives and destiny of all mankind. Their lives are in his hand—i.e., they are under his almighty and sovereign control. (Cf. John 17:11-12) For this reason, nothing and no one in all creation has the liberty or the power to harm any believer’s soul; for each and every child of God is being held securely by the Lord’s almighty hand. Their souls—and therefore their eternal destiny—remain forever under the Lord’s sovereign control. (Ps. 31:15)

*(28b) “...and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” (ESV)*

No human being possesses the power necessary to remove any believer from the Son’s almighty grasp. More than this, however: no other created being throughout the entire universe is able to remove a child of God from the Lord Jesus’ safekeeping. Not all the demons destined for hell can rob a believer in Christ of his or her eternal security. Not even the most powerful of all fallen created spirits—Satan himself—has the power necessary to remove a redeemed child of God from the Father or the Son’s omnipotent hand.

This is why the Son of God says concerning his own sheep:

*(28) "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (ESV)*

In verse 29, the Lord continues:

### John 10:29

(cf. John 14:28)

We must remember that it was not merely of his own volition that the Lord Jesus claimed these sheep as his own. On the contrary, the Father in heaven had given these sheep to his Son. They were the Father's; and the Father had entrusted them to the care of his Son. (John 17:2,6,9-10)

We must remember also that the Father in heaven is greater than all; i.e., greater than anything or anyone in the entire creation. No one and nothing in the entire created universe surpasses him. He is the Almighty and Sovereign God—the Creator of all that exists. All that exists, therefore, must be inferior to its Creator (This, of course, excludes the Son, who is uncreated and eternal).

Since, then, the Father is greater than all, it follows that no-one in all creation has the power to thwart or overturn God's will and purposes for his creation. It is God's express will and purpose that not one of his own sheep should perish. To this end, therefore, the Father has committed these sheep into his Son's hand, and into his safekeeping. (John 6:39-40; 17:12; 18:9)

Jesus had said:

*(29a) "My Father, who has given them to me,<sup>33</sup> is greater than all..." (ESV)*

Immediately, the Lord adds:

*(29b) "...and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (cf. v.28b)*

The Lord Jesus had said already:

*(28b) "...no one will snatch them out of **my** hand."*

Now, the eternal Son of God adds:

*(29b) "...and no one is able to snatch them out of **the Father's** hand." (bold emphases added)*

The Lord God is the Sovereign God of all creation. This much the Jews accepted. They accepted, too, that God is the all-powerful One, and that no one can resist his will. They

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<sup>33</sup> **10:29** Some manuscripts *What my Father has given to me* [ESV footnote]



accepted also that the Lord God keeps his word, and that he keeps his people eternally secure. The Jews, therefore, accepted that no one could snatch God's people out of his almighty hands.

Yet, while the Jews accepted that God in heaven could and did exercise his omnipotence over their lives, they did not accept that the Lord Jesus Christ was invested with the same almighty attributes as God. Nevertheless, what is true of the Father, is true equally of the Father's Son. When Jesus said to these Jews that no one could snatch his sheep out of *his* hand, Jesus was saying that *he* is precisely the same in power, glory and eternity as his Father in heaven.

In case the Jews should be in any doubt about this, Jesus asserted unambiguously:

### **John 10:30**

The Son of God was not speaking merely of being one in mind and purpose with his Father—although, certainly this is true. Rather, the Lord here is asserting explicitly that he is one in being or nature with the Father. While Father and Son are distinct Persons within the Godhead, yet these Persons are essentially and eternally one. (John 1:1-2; 5:17-18; 14:9-10) This is why the Son of God could state categorically that no one had the power to snatch his sheep from his grasp. The Lord Jesus can guarantee absolutely their eternal salvation and security, because of who and what he is. (John 16:15)

Jesus was claiming unequivocally to be one with the Eternal God and Father in heaven. He was inferring unmistakably that he was God manifest in the flesh, or God revealed to mankind in human form. In taking upon himself the form of a servant, the Son had *shielded* his glory—but he had not *shed* his glory. The Lord Jesus remained the eternally divine, but truly human, sinless, holy and perfect Son of God. (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6-7)

This, therefore, indicates a little of what Jesus meant when he said to his hearers:

(30) *"I and the Father are one."* (ESV)

## **The Jews Accuse Jesus of Blasphemy**

### ***They Reject Miracles as Proving Jesus' Deity***

#### **John 10:31-42**

##### **John 10:31**

The Jews knew immediately that Jesus was claiming equality with the Father. They realised that he was not speaking merely of oneness of mind, will or purpose with God, but of something far greater. The Lord Jesus had claimed that no one could snatch his sheep from his hand. Later, he had stated that no one could snatch these sheep from the Father's hand. By saying this, however, the Lord was clearly asserting that the Father and the Son performed the same almighty works. He was also asserting that both the Father and the Son possessed the same divine attributes and exercised the same divine power and prerogatives.

Again, Jesus had claimed that the Father had given these sheep to him. However, the Almighty and Sovereign God entrusts the eternal welfare of his people to no one but himself. Therefore, the Jews must have realised beyond all doubt that when Jesus said, *"I and the Father are one"* (v.30), he was claiming absolute equality with the Father.

To the Jews, this claim from a mere man amounted to the most extreme form of blasphemy. According to the Law of Moses, the penalty for blasphemy was death. Again, ac-

According to the Mosaic Law, the death penalty was to take the form of execution by stoning. (Lev. 24:11-16) (The Roman government prohibited the Jews from carrying out the death penalty themselves. This, however, does not seem to have prevented them from seeking to kill the Lord Jesus.)

The Scripture says:

*(31) The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. (ESV)*

### **John 10:32**

The miracles, or signs and wonders, of the Lord Jesus had accomplished nothing but unmitigated good in their midst. The blind could now see. The lame could walk. The deaf could hear. The dumb could speak. Lepers had been cleansed, and the demon-possessed had been delivered. Furthermore, the dead had been raised to life. (Matt. 11:5)

Thus, Jesus is able to say:

*(32) ...“I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” (ESV)*

The kind of miracles that the Lord Jesus had been performing had testified clearly that the Father had sent him, and that he was acting in his Father's name and by his divine authority.

If the Jews were not prepared to accept or believe the Lord's claims concerning himself, they ought to have believed the testimony of these mighty works of power. Only God can restore sight to a man blind from birth. Only God can restore life to the dead. Only God can work such works of almighty and sovereign power. (John 5:20-21; 9:1,7)

Therefore, the Jews ought to have been well advised to heed what these miraculous signs were saying about the Lord Jesus. They proved that Jesus was who he claimed to be. They proved that the Father had invested the Lord Jesus with almighty power and divine authority. (Acts 2:22; 10:38)

This segment of the Jewish community, however, failed utterly to make the connection between Jesus' miracles and his divine authority, power, and glory. They saw Jesus' miracles only as good works; performed—they had to admit—by someone with remarkable power. Under no circumstances, however, did these Jews think of that power as divine. On the contrary, from their unbelieving and wicked minds, they attempted to attribute Jesus' miraculous power to evil supernatural beings, and especially to Satan. (Matt. 12:22-24)

Therefore, in verse 33, John writes:

### **John 10:33**

The Jews ignored completely the significance of Jesus' miracles. They refused to believe that these miracles proved him to be God's Son, invested with God's almighty power. They saw him only as a 'mere man'. It mattered not to them that Jesus had raised the dead to life—as with the widow of Nain's son, or with Jairus' daughter, or as he would do shortly, with Lazarus. These Jews refused utterly and wilfully to believe the evidence—even although the evidence in Jesus' favour was irrefutable and overwhelming. (Luke 7:11-25; 8:41-42,49-56; John 11:40-44)

Rather than accept the truth, they attempted at every turn to distort and deny the truth. The Jews' primary concern was to accuse Jesus of some sin or crime, and so discredit him. Now, they alleged, he was guilty of the utmost blasphemy against the living God. Je-

sus—a mere man—had claimed to be God! He had identified himself with God, and he had claimed the prerogatives of God!

At this point, the Lord Jesus reminded the Jews of what was written in their Holy Scriptures (the Old Testament):

### John 10:34

{Cf. Ps. 82:6}

In the Old Testament, the sacred writers sometimes applied the term 'god' to any person acting in a civic, judicial or regal capacity as God's human agent or representative. For example, God appointed kings to rule over nations as his vice-regents, and to maintain government in the land. Again, God appointed judges and other law officers to represent his name in the execution of his law. (Cf. Rom. 13:1-4)

In the Old Testament, these kings, judges, magistrates or other law officers were sometimes referred to as 'gods'. This is because such rulers or magistrates were perceived as 'mighty' or 'powerful' in human terms. Indeed, anyone opposing these rulers or magistrates was considered to be opposing God, since God had appointed them to bear the sword and exercise rule and judgment in his name. Being merely mortal, however, these 'gods' possessed none of the divine attributes or power of Almighty God. They simply carried out all the civil, legal and judicial functions required by God. (Cf. Exodus 4:16; 7:1)

Therefore, in Psalm 82, it is written:

(1) [A psalm of Asaph.]

*God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment. (ESV)*

And:

*(6) "I said, "You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; (7) nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince."*

*(Psalm 82:1,6-7 ESV; see also Ps. 138:1; cf. Exodus 21:6; 22:28)*

Possibly, Jesus' point was that—since it was acceptable to refer to mere human beings as 'gods', how could the Jews object if Jesus referred to himself as God's Son? In Psalm 82 verse 6, this much is implied of all human vice-regents—they are all 'sons of the Most High'. ('Sons' here, of course, refers to sons by creation, not sons by regeneration and adoption.)

The Jews, however, knew very well that the Lord Jesus was not using the term in this general sense. Rather, they were aware that—in a very specific and personal sense—Jesus was claiming to be God's *only Son*. He was claiming to be God's unique Son: something that could never be said of a mere human being.

The Lord, however, continues:

### John 10:35-36

Because they were seen as God's vice-regents, the Old Testament Scriptures refer to kings, judges and other government servants as 'gods'.

'This is what is written in the Holy Scriptures—and the Scriptures cannot be broken,' suggested the Lord Jesus. 'God's Word cannot prove false, nor can it be mistaken or errone-

ous in its pronouncements. The Scriptures of truth must ever remain wholly reliable and totally trustworthy. This being so, you Jews must accept—on the basis of Scripture—that even ordinary human beings can be called ‘gods’ when they are acting as God’s representatives. However, if you accept that rulers and judges may be called ‘gods’, why do you object to me calling myself God’s Son? Again, if you accept mere fallible men as though they were from God, why cannot you accept as *from God* the one whom the Father has set apart as his very own and sent into the world? You accept sinful men as ‘gods’, but you reject the sinless Son of God!’

Therefore, Jesus asks:

*(35) “If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—(36) do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” (ESV)*

The Lord continues:

### **John 10:37-38**

Although he had every right to do so, the Lord Jesus was not asking these Jews to believe his claims on the basis of his personal testimony alone. Indeed, the Son of God was saying quite categorically to these sceptical individuals that they must not believe his claims if they were inconsistent with the works of the Father. Under no circumstances were these Jews expected to believe anything that the Lord Jesus told them, *unless they saw him doing the things that his Father did*; i.e., unless they saw him performing works that only the Almighty Sovereign God in heaven could perform.

If, however, the Son was indeed doing the things that his Father in heaven did, then these Jews would be left with no choice in the matter. Even although they refused to accept Jesus’ own testimony, they must accept the testimony borne by the miraculous works or signs. No mortal man could perform such works of grace and power. These could be only the works of God.

Therefore, the Jews must heed what God was saying to them through these miraculous signs. The Father was demonstrating his omnipotence before their very eyes. No mere man could exercise such power. However, if omnipotence was being demonstrated before their eyes, the Jews must acknowledge that the hand and power of Almighty God was performing these miracles. Therefore, it must be evident to them that the Father was working in and through his Son. For this reason—because of these miraculous demonstrations of God’s power—these Jews had absolutely no excuse for failing to believe that the Father had sent the Lord Jesus, and that he was exercising his almighty power through his Son. (John 5:36; 14:9-11)

Therefore, Jesus said:

*(38a) “but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works...”*

To which he adds:

*(38b) “...that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” (ESV)*

The response of these hostile and unbelieving Jews was immediate:

**John 10:39**

Utterly enraged at the authority and power of Jesus' arguments, the Jews again attempted to lay hold of him. They knew very well that the miracles proved his Sonship with the Father. However, they refused resolutely to acknowledge this. Instead, they continued to plot how they might silence Jesus once and for all. On this occasion, they had failed, for the Lord's appointed time had not yet arrived. The Jews, however, would try again to arrest the holy sinless Son of God. (John 7:30)

**John 10:40-42**

Now, the Lord Jesus left Judea once more and crossed over the Jordan to the region of Perea (or Peraea); the area where John the Baptist had ministered. The people here responded more favourably to Jesus' teaching. In part, this may have been because they had heard and believed the testimony of John the Baptist concerning the coming Messiah. In part also, it may have been because the people of Perea were further removed from the disparaging remarks and rank antagonism of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and Judea. Consequently, many of these people placed their faith in the Lord Jesus during his stay with them on the other side of the Jordan. (John 1:28)



## John Chapter 11

### Lazarus Dies

#### John 11:1-16

##### John 11:1

A few miles outside Jerusalem, and east of the Mount of Olives, stood the small town of Bethany where Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha. The Lord Jesus knew and loved this family. (Luke 10:38-42)

Lazarus, however, had taken seriously ill. As he lay sick, his condition began to deteriorate rapidly. Naturally, this worsening of his condition caused considerable distress and anxiety to his two sisters, Mary and Martha.

Concerning Mary, the apostle John tells us:

##### John 11:2

(Cf. Matt. 26:6-7; John 12:3)

The apostle John records this incident in chapter 12 of his Gospel, where he writes:

*(1) Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. (2) So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at the table. (3) Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

*(John 12:1-3 ESV; cf. Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50)*

We will look at these verses more closely in their proper place. Meanwhile, concerning Lazarus' serious illness, John continues:

##### John 11:3

In their deep anxiety for their brother, to whom else could these two sisters turn, but to the Lord? They knew how deeply the Lord cared for them and for their brother. Therefore, they were sure that he would respond immediately to such a heartfelt appeal for help.

Reminding him of the bond of love existing between this family and himself, the sister's message to the Lord read simply:

*(3b)...“Lord, he whom you love is ill.” (ESV)*

On this occasion, the word translated 'love' is φιλέω (from Gk, φιλέω, *phileo*), meaning, 'to esteem with deep affection', or 'to consider as a close or special friend'.

*(3b)...“ Lord, he whom you love is ill.”*

The two sisters knew that no further information would be required. They believed implicitly that the Lord Jesus would know what was wrong with Lazarus, and would come immediately to heal their dear ailing brother.

### John 11:4

Whenever Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he gave this reassuring message:

*(4a) ...“This illness does not lead to death...” (ESV)*

‘It may appear that Lazarus has taken very seriously ill—and so he has. It may appear that his condition is deteriorating by the minute—and so it is. It may even appear that he is slipping away before your very eyes. Even so, I give you this solemn promise:

*(4a) ...“ This illness does not lead to death...”*

In fact, by the time the messenger reached Jesus, it is possible that Lazarus was already very close to death. Jesus, however, was stating quite categorically that Lazarus’ condition would not lead to death, i.e., death would not be the final outcome.

Yes, Lazarus was sick—indeed, this close friend of the Lord Jesus was gravely ill. However, this illness had occurred only in accordance with God’s express will and purposes for this dear saint. God’s purpose was that—through Lazarus’ illness—glory should be brought to the name of the Father and the Son. In due course, Martha and Mary would witness the almighty power of God being exercised on Lazarus’ behalf (v.40; Cf. John 9:3).

John then tells us:

### John 11:5-6

The Lord Jesus must have been greatly concerned by the understandable and now desperate plight of these close friends. The Lord knew all about Lazarus’ illness, long before the messenger reached him with the news. He knew what this dear saint must have been suffering. He knew, too, how deeply concerned his two sisters had become, as they watched his condition worsen daily and hourly.

Similarly, the Lord knew that Lazarus was extremely close to death, or that he had already died before the messenger had reached him. Again, he knew how deeply Mary and Martha must be grieving over the loss of their beloved brother. He knew their hurt, their bewilderment and their disappointment that Jesus had not managed to come in time to save their brother.

Again, he knew that they must have been questioning in their hearts why the Lord Jesus had not healed Lazarus from where he was by a miraculous word of command. Certainly, the Lord’s word of command had restored other sick people to health over long distances. The sisters must have been aware of this.



However, concerning Jesus' response to the messenger, John writes:

*(6) So, when he heard that Lazarus<sup>34</sup> was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. (ESV)*

If this event occurred while Jesus was still across the Jordan in Perea (John 10:40), then the Lord may have been at Bethabara (Gk., Βηθαβαρά). Bethabara is sometimes translated as 'Bethany' (KJV, NAB, RSV, etc.). However, lying as it did on the far side of the Jordan, this village was distinct from the Bethany near Jerusalem where Lazarus and his sisters lived.

If Jesus was indeed at this location, then he must have been about 25-30 miles (40-48 km) distant from Lazarus' home town when he received the message. This represented at least a full day's journey. The messenger himself must have taken a day to reach Jesus. Nevertheless, the Lord decided to remain where he was for a further two days. This meant that four days would elapse before Jesus could arrive at Bethany in Judea.

### John 11:7

This remark confirms that Jesus was not in Judea when the messenger came to him with news about Lazarus. Probably, the Lord was teaching in Perea on the far side of the Jordan; although, he may have travelled north to Galilee. (Cf. John 7:1) However, this would have placed him at an even greater distance from Bethany in Judea.

After the two days had passed, however, the Lord decided that now was the right time to begin the journey back to Judea. According to the plan and purposes of God, now was the time to visit the sorrowing sisters, Mary and Martha, in Bethany.

To this end, Jesus said to his disciples:

*(7b) ... "Let us go to Judea again." (ESV)*

The disciples, however, were most unhappy and alarmed by this proposal. What was the Lord Jesus thinking about by planning to return to the hostile environment of Judea?

Therefore, concerning the disciples' anxiety, John writes:

### John 11:8

Not long ago, and just after the Lord Jesus had been teaching and healing in Solomon's Colonnade in Jerusalem, the Jews had attempted to stone him to death. Because Jesus had said that he and the Father were one, the Jewish leaders had accused the Lord Jesus of blasphemy against the Most High God. They did all in their power to execute the sentence for blasphemy against the holy Son of God. (John 10:31)

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<sup>34</sup> 11:6 Greek *he*; also verse 17 [ESV footnote]

How, then—reasoned his anxious disciples—could he think of returning to Judea? Would not the Jews arrest Jesus whenever they knew that he had returned to that area? Surely, if he put himself at such risk, the Jews would put him to death. (John 10:39)

### John 11:9

God has provided mankind with a specific number of daylight hours. So long as a person walks by the light of the sun, he will not stumble over obstacles, or become caught up in traps or snares. So long as the sun shines, he can see where he is going; so he directs the course of his life according to the light that God gives him. (Cf. John 9:4; 12:35)

The phrase used here by Jesus, *‘the light of this world’* sounds similar to, but is not synonymous with, the phrase more commonly used elsewhere, *‘the Light of the world’*. The former refers to physical light or illumination; although, perhaps with a moral or spiritual connotation. The latter, however, refers expressly to the divine and spiritual light or illumination provided by the teaching of the Lord Jesus—the one who is the true Light of the world.

The Lord continued:

### John 11:10

Just as there is a day, so also there is a night. It is when a man walks by night that he is likely to stumble over obstacles, or to become ensnared or trapped. This is because he is unable to see what lies ahead, and he cannot avoid all the dangers of the night.

Morally or spiritually, this may mean that if we should choose to venture out into the darkness—i.e., to conduct our lives contrary to the light of God’s Word—then we place ourselves in the way of great danger. Under these circumstances, it is indeed quite likely that we will stumble or fall (into sin, etc.). But, while we continue to walk only in the light of God’s Word, then nothing can happen to us outside of God’s express plan and purposes for our lives.

### John 11:11

The Lord, of course, knew that Lazarus had ‘fallen asleep’ in death. We must remember that Christ ever remained in the closest possible union with his heavenly Father. (John 14:10-11) The Son knew everything that the Father did. In his hands, God holds the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. He gives life, and he takes away life. (Job 1:21; 12:10) Being intimately united with his heavenly Father, Jesus must have been fully aware of Lazarus’ desperate situation. He must also have been fully aware of the very moment when his Father in heaven took Lazarus’ life from him.

Therefore, Jesus said to his disciples,

*(11b) ...“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep...” (ESV)*

Lazarus had passed out of the realms of this life. He had ‘fallen asleep’—a term referring to death, but not to ‘soul-sleep’.

Jesus, however, was now about to travel to Lazarus’ home town of Bethany. When the Lord arrived, he would immediately awaken Lazarus from the ‘sleep’ of death. The Son of God would release his close friend from that which now bound him, and endeavoured to claim him—the bonds of death itself.

Jesus' disciples, however, misunderstood what the Lord Jesus was saying to them. In verse 12, John tells us:

**John 11:12**

'Let nature take its course,' suggested the Lord's disciples. 'Lazarus has been very ill. Now (you say) he is sleeping. However, if he is sleeping, this will benefit him. Sleep will enable the body to rest and recover from this debilitating illness. Therefore, we ought not to disturb him. (12b) "...Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover."

Among the Jews, expressions such as 'going to one's rest' (Deut. 31:16), or 'resting with their fathers' (2 Sam. 7:12), or 'sleeping in the dust of the earth' (Dan. 12:2) were commonly used expressions meaning that a person was dying or had died. The variant used by Jesus, therefore, should have been clearly understood by his disciples as referring to death, and not merely to physical sleep.

(In the case of the Lord's people, those who died 'fell asleep in Jesus', or 'died in the Lord.' (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14))

In verse 13, however, the apostle John explains what Jesus had meant:

**John 11:13**

The disciples had made the simple mistake of placing a literal interpretation on words that Jesus had spoken figuratively. Thus, we must be careful not to understand literally what the Holy Spirit intended to be understood figuratively. We must always compare Scripture with Scripture to arrive at a correct understanding of God's infallible Word.

**John 11:14**

To avoid any further misunderstanding, the Lord told his disciples plainly that Lazarus had died. Now, there could be no mistaking Lazarus' situation. He was gone. What hope was there for him now? Certainly, as a believer, God would take Lazarus into his presence—but what about his dear sisters, Mary and Martha? How was this dreadful loss of their brother affecting them?

The disciples must have been questioning in their minds why Jesus had waited two days longer, before leaving finally for Bethany. If he had left as soon as he had heard of Lazarus' desperate illness, perhaps he would have arrived in time to heal the dying man. Now, though, it was too late. Lazarus was dead.

It seemed not to have occurred to the disciples that their Master had been aware of Lazarus' dire plight long before he had heard of it from the messenger. As the eternal Son of God, Jesus must have known that this fatal illness would strike down his friend Lazarus. He must have known of the very moment when Lazarus had started to become ill, and he must have been fully aware of the prognosis for that illness, and of the very moment that he would die.

Of course, the Son of God could have healed Lazarus from where he was at the time. On an earlier occasion, and by a word of command, Jesus had healed the nobleman's son from a distance of 18 miles (29 km), thereby demonstrating that he had no need to travel to an individual's home in order to heal him. Similarly, the Lord could have healed Lazarus from a distance of about 30 miles (48 km), without the need to travel to Bethany in Judea. Nevertheless, this would not have accorded with the express will and purposes of his Father concerning his Son or concerning Lazarus. Therefore, in order to fulfil the purposes of God and to exalt and glorify the name of his Father, Jesus had not intended to travel to

Bethany or to restore Lazarus to health before God's appointed time; and then, only in God's appointed manner.

However, in verse 15, the Lord continues:

### **John 11:15**

True, had the Lord been at liberty to travel to Bethany earlier, Lazarus would not have died. On this occasion, however, it was necessary that the Lord Jesus was absent. It was necessary, too, that Lazarus should die. Moreover, for this reason and for the sake of his disciples, the Lord was glad—not that Lazarus had died, but that he had not been present. For his disciples' sake, Jesus was glad because now they would be able to see in the Lord Jesus the power and glory of his Father. Now, they would know that Jesus was in fact God the Son—invested with all the divine attributes of the Father. When the disciples witnessed the Father's glory displayed in and through the Son, then they would believe in him more firmly. Their faith would be strengthened by what they were about to see.

Therefore, Jesus invites his disciples to come with him, that he might show them greater things than anything they had yet seen. The Lord of glory invited his followers to come to Bethany, where they would witness intense grief turned to joy and thanksgiving, and deep sorrow transformed to laughter and rejoicing. Come, then, and behold the glory of the Lord.

Some of his disciples still failed to understand completely what Jesus was talking about. Therefore, in verse 16, John tells us:

### **John 11:16**

'The case is hopeless,' reasoned Thomas. 'Jesus is resolutely determined to return to Judea in spite of everything that we have said to him. We have told him that the Jews there are still seeking his life, because they believe him to be guilty of blasphemy. However, he will not listen to us. He is determined to go to Bethany—only a few miles from Jerusalem. It is certain that the Jews will learn of his return, and send men to arrest him.'

Apparently, Thomas had not understood Jesus' words about everything being in the Father's hands. He did not realise that nothing could happen to Jesus before the time appointed for him by the Father. Believing, therefore, that Jesus was returning to his inevitable death, Thomas declared to the other disciples:

*(16b)..."Let us also go, that we may die with him." (ESV)*

So the Lord Jesus and his disciples began their journey to Bethany in Judea.

## **'I Am the Resurrection and the Life'**

### **John 11:17-27**

#### **John 11:17**

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus' body had already been lying in the tomb for four days. As noted previously, Jesus probably took at least a day to journey to Bethany. Before that, he had remained where he was for a further two days. The messenger sent to Jesus with news of Lazarus' condition would have taken about a day to reach the Lord Jesus. In all, this totals about four days. This, then, would place the time of Lazarus' death at about the same time as the messenger was hurrying to Jesus with the news that Lazarus was seriously ill.

Jesus, of course, knew that Lazarus was in fact dead by this time. Nothing, therefore, was to be gained by returning to Bethany immediately. Now, however, we learn that Lazarus had been in the tomb for these four days.

In passing, we might note that—although they were used elsewhere—it was not customary in these regions to use coffins. Indeed, these were practically unknown in this area in Jesus' time. Rather, bodies were wrapped in grave clothes, or embalmed, and then laid in the grave. In this case, the place of burial was a cave or rock-hewn tomb, the entrance to which had been closed with a great stone.

The following verses tell us that the family was still in great distress over the loss of their beloved brother.

### **John 11:18-19**

Lazarus, Mary and Martha had many friends in Jerusalem, which lay only about 2 miles (c. 3km) from Bethany in Judea. When they learned of their great loss, a number of these Jewish acquaintances made their way from the capital to the small town of Bethany. On arriving at the home of Mary and Martha, these friends did all in their power to console and comfort the two bereaved and grief-stricken sisters. (Cf. Job 42:11)

From this, we learn that we ought to bear one another's burdens. Where we can assist a friend in need, we ought to do all in our power to provide for their need, or to uphold them in their distress. (Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2) Even when words might prove inappropriate, it is sufficient merely to be present for a time with those who grieve, so long as we realise that sorrowing individuals also need much time to grieve in private.

### **John 11:20**

When Martha learned that the Lord Jesus had come, and was even now approaching their village, she ran out to meet him (cf. v.30). In her haste to speak to Jesus, Martha completely forgot all the guests in the house, and her duties toward them as a hostess; or, at least, she left her sister Mary alone to attend to the guests.

Perhaps this ought to teach us, that—in times of deep distress—the first person we ought to seek out and speak to is the Lord. He, above all others, knows the burdens of our hearts. He, better than the most sympathetic friend, understands our cares and griefs. He, and he alone, is able to heal the wounded soul and restore the troubled mind.

In the circumstances, we cannot imagine for one minute that Mary was any less concerned than was her sister Martha. She too must have been eager to meet the Lord, and to cast her cares upon him. She too must have wanted to unburden her heart to him, and to seek the solace of his comforting words. However, now that Mary had left the house, how could Martha do the same? Then, no one would be left to wait on their many kind guests.

No. Instead of following her sister to meet Jesus on the way, Mary resolved to wait for him in the house. Then, she could attend to all her household duties, including making hasty preparation for Jesus' sudden arrival. Again, Mary could attend to the needs of those kind friends who had come to visit the sisters in their hour of need—although, very likely, some of these friends would be helping Mary to wait on the other guests. Yet, even with such welcome help, Mary would still have found herself with a great deal of responsibility, and with little time to make adequate preparations for Jesus' imminent arrival.

### John 11:21

Unable to contain her sorrow any longer, the distraught Martha cried out to Jesus the moment she met him. ‘Why did this need to happen? Why did God allow my dear brother to die? Why couldn’t the Lord have done something before it was too late?’

These, and many more perplexing questions, must have been crowding Martha’s despairing mind when she met Jesus on the road. If only Jesus had arrived a few days earlier, this would never have happened. We would never have had to endure such sorrow, heartbreak and loss if Jesus had been here.

Therefore, in her pain and grief, Martha cries out:

*(21b) ...“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (ESV)*

It seems as though Martha is almost blaming Jesus for allowing her brother to die. Such may be the outpouring of a deeply distraught soul, that it seeks to accuse or blame others for the cause of its loss.

Yet, Martha had not quite given up all hope. Indeed, in spite of her great sorrow and perplexity of mind about why Jesus had not come earlier, she still exhibited great faith in him. She believed that—somehow or another—the Lord Jesus could do something to ease their sense of loss. In fact, she was utterly convinced that God would answer any request that Jesus made of him. (At this time, such faith was hardly to be found even among the Lord’s disciples!) Therefore, in verse 22, Martha declares:

### John 11:22

‘I know—I am fully assured—that God will answer your prayers on our behalf. I am convinced that he will do anything for you.’

Martha believed totally in the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the shadow of a doubt, this dear saint believed that the Lord could bring his healing touch to her and to Mary’s troubled heart and soul.

Again, Martha believed that the Father would give to Jesus whatever he asked. (It was certain, of course, that the Son would never ask for anything that was contrary to the Father’s will.) However, for all her faith in Jesus, and in spite of what she had just said, it becomes clear from the following verses that Martha did not expect Jesus to raise her dearly beloved brother from the dead.

Thus, in verse 23, John writes:

### John 11:23

‘Death has claimed your brother. I, however, have authority over death, hell and the grave. Furthermore, I intend to exercise that authority on behalf of your brother. (Rev. 1:18) Just a moment ago, you said that God would give me whatever I asked. So he will, for I am doing that which pleases the Father. On this occasion, it pleases the Father to glorify his majestic and holy name through a demonstration of his almighty and sovereign power. Yes, Lazarus will rise again. I most solemnly assure you of this.’ (John 8:29)

Martha, however, failed to understand the significance of the Lord’s statement when he said:

*(23b) ...“Your brother will rise again.” (ESV)*

Therefore, in verse 24, it is written:

#### John 11:24

Yes, Martha was utterly convinced that her brother would rise again. He was a child of God. Martha had no doubts, therefore, that God would include her dear brother in the resurrection of the just. She knew that, one day, he and she would be reunited. Martha knew that, one day, the pain, sorrow and grief of his loss would pass away for ever. (Ps. 49:15; Isa. 25:8; 26:19; Dan. 12:2-3) This dear saint of God believed all this. Nevertheless, this conviction of future glory did not take away the pain that she was now suffering—the pain of losing someone she had loved dearly.

From her reply in verse 24, it becomes clear that Martha has been thinking of the resurrection at the last day. Jesus, however, was not referring primarily to this resurrection, but to a far more immediate and immeasurable greater truth.

#### John 11:25

*(25a) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life..." (ESV)*

*'The whole power to **restore, impart and maintain** life resides in me.'* (JFB)

At the resurrection in the last day, the eternal Son of God will restore the dead to life by his almighty sovereign power.

*(25b)... "I am the resurrection and the life."*

If, on a future day, the Son of God will restore the dead to life by his omnipotence, what was to prevent him exercising that power at the present time—thereby showing forth his Father's glory?

*(25b)... "I am the resurrection and the life."*

Not only does the Son restore life to the dead, but he also imparts life to that which has no life. By his almighty and sovereign power, the Lord of glory imparts life to every living thing. Again, by his almighty and sovereign power, the Son of God imparts spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead. For, just as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted to the Son to have life in himself (John 5:21-29; Rom. 8:11): That is, the Persons of the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are self-existent, self-sustaining, and are the only Persons or Being capable of imparting physical, spiritual or eternal life to others.

(Those disciples of Jesus who raised the dead did not do so by their own inherent power or authority (unlike the Lord Jesus), but only in the name of, and by the power and authority of the Son of God. (Matt. 10:8))

Yet again, no one can continue to live except by the exercise of the Son's almighty power. As the Father works through him, the Son grants life, and he maintains or sustains life. The life of every living creature is in his hands and in the hands of his Father. (Job 12:10; Acts 17:25; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:2-3)

The statement, *"I am the resurrection and the life"* (v.25b) asserts categorically the deity of the Son. No one but God possesses the power to restore, impart or maintain life. Here, of course, we are speaking not just of physical or biological life, but of God-created human life comprising physical/biological life in the body, *together with an immortal soul.*

In the second part of verse 25, the Lord says:

*(25b) "...Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live..." (ESV)*

Martha believed that the Lord Jesus had been speaking about the resurrection at the last day. However, the Son of God had been speaking of much more. Everyone who believed in him would receive the gift of eternal life. Although his body died, that person's immortal soul would continue to live in God's presence forever.

### John 11:26

Anyone living who believes in the Son, will never experience death. Yes, his body will die—temporarily. (John 5:24-25) Yet, let us remember what the Lord Jesus had just said to Martha:

*(25b) ...“I am the resurrection and the life.”*

The body of any believer that dies and is laid in the grave, or committed to the sea, will be restored to life. The body of any believer that is reduced to ashes by cremation, or lost irretrievably in war or conflict or by any other means, will be restored to life. By the Lord's almighty word of commands, their remains will be reconstituted as bodies, and they will arise—regardless of their previous state or condition.

Again, the bodies of all those who have believed on the Son of God will arise never to die again, for their bodies will be changed and rendered spiritual and imperishable bodies. Then, too, soul and body will be reunited forever, and they will dwell forever in the presence of God and of his Son.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus declared to Martha:

*(26a) “and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die ...” (ESV)*

Jesus then confronts Martha with this penetrating question:

*(26b) “...Do you believe this?”*

Martha may not have understood the full significance of everything that the Lord Jesus had just said to her. However, did she believe the essential truths? Did she believe that Jesus was the resurrection and the life? Did Martha believe that the Lord Jesus was the one whom God had sent to impart life to the dead—spiritually and physically?

Martha's answer to the Lord Jesus demonstrates something of her great faith in the Son of God:

### John 11:27

For its time, this must rank as one of the most significant and profound confessions of faith ever made. Martha professed openly her total confidence in Jesus as the Messiah of God. She believed with all her heart that Jesus was the Christ—the one whom God had promised to send into the world.

However, Martha's faith extended much further than this: she believed wholeheartedly that Jesus was the Son of God. She believed implicitly in his union with the Father; that he had been sent by the Father, and that he was now accomplishing the Father's will. The measure or degree of this woman's faith far exceeded that of the vast majority of professing Jewish believers and even of the Lord's own disciples.

Furthermore, Martha believed Jesus' revelation of himself as the resurrection and the life. Although, as yet, she could not fully understand how it could happen, this dear woman was convinced now that Jesus was able to give life to the dead. This was in addition to her faith in God as the one who would raise the dead to life at the last day. Now, she understood that God would do this through his Son. Martha earnestly believed all this, and



she was prepared to believe any other truth that the Son of God was pleased to reveal to her.

Such was Martha's undoubted trust in the eternal Son of God—the one who had just declared himself to be *'the resurrection and the life'*. When, therefore, we stand in the presence of Life eternal, let us never lose hope in his ability to help us in our time of most desperate need and at the point of seeming despair. Even if a miracle, or a signal intervention of God's providence, be required to help us, such is not beyond the Lord's almighty power—as we shall see shortly.

## Jesus Weeps

### John 11:28-37

#### John 11:28

Martha had just confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God and the one whom God had sent into the world. This confession of faith is very like that of Simon Peter's. On that occasion, the Lord told Peter that flesh and blood—i.e., human intellect or reasoning—had not enabled him to learn this truth. Rather, the Father in heaven had revealed to Peter the truth concerning his Son. In a similar way, the Father in heaven had made Martha aware of this divine truth about Jesus' person and work. (Matt. 16:16-17)

Now, however, Martha hurries back home. Jesus has given her a message to take to her sister Mary who is even now awaiting the Lord's arrival.

Therefore, concerning Martha, John writes:

*(28) When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." (ESV)*

'Jesus has come, Mary—the Lord has come! He will be here at any moment—and he is calling for you.'

Until now, *Martha* had been the centre of the Lord's attention. However, it now becomes clear that the Lord had not forgotten Martha's sister, *Mary*. She, too, was very much in the Lord's thoughts. Therefore, we see that the Lord never overlooks or forgets anyone—even when he is attending to other people's needs.

#### John 11:29

On hearing that Jesus was asking for her, Mary rose in great haste and ran through the village to meet her beloved Master. Of course, now that Martha had returned, Mary felt free to leave the house. So, in her eagerness to find help and consolation from the Lord, she hurried through the village to meet the Lord Jesus.

#### John 11:30

Jesus had not yet entered Bethany. The Lord was still on the outskirts of the village where Martha had met him. Perhaps the Lord was still attending to the needs of others, or explaining to the disciples what was about to happen. John, however, does not tell us the reason for the delay.

### John 11:31

Naturally, these Jews were greatly concerned about Mary. They knew that her brother's death had distressed and shocked her deeply. Perhaps, they thought it would be better to accompany her outdoors, to ensure that she came to no harm. Assuming, therefore, that Mary had left the house suddenly to mourn again at the tomb, the Jews followed her outdoors.

Mary, of course, did not intend to return to the tomb at this stage. Her only thoughts were that she might speak to the Lord Jesus, and find comfort from the one whom she and the family loved. Therefore, in verse 32, John writes:

### John 11:32

In reverence and awe, Mary fell at Jesus' feet. Like Martha, she believed that Jesus was the Son of God. She expressed this belief by her act of homage and worship. (Cf. Luke 17:16-18; Rev. 5:8,14) Mary's first words to the Lord Jesus are the same as those of her sister Martha. Both sisters believed—independently—that Lazarus would not have died had the Lord been present at the time (v.21).

### John 11:33

Overwhelmed with sorrow and grief, Mary began to cry bitterly at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Here she was in the very presence of the one who could work miracles of healing, and yet he had not arrived in time to heal Lazarus. Mary was heartbroken. As she lay weeping at the Saviour's feet, her broken heart affected Jesus deeply. (Heb. 4:15-16)

The Jews who had followed Mary out of the house also wept bitterly in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, concerning Jesus' reaction to these expressions of grief, John writes:

*(33b) ...he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.*

The verb used here for 'deeply moved' (in spirit) (KJV, *groaned* (in spirit); Gk., ἐμὲ βριμάομαι), means literally 'to be moved with anger', 'to be indignant', or 'to experience intense emotion' (about something). The following verb translated 'troubled' means 'to be in inner turmoil' 'agitated' or 'stirred up'. These verbs show the very deep emotion felt by the Lord Jesus over the fact that death had claimed his close friend, Lazarus, and over the pain and grief that this bereavement was causing to his two sisters.

Here, we see how the holy Son of God expressed deep indignation and grief for the fact that those whom he loved, and whom he had come to redeem, were subject to the ravages and penalty of sin. Only by the Lord's completed work would sin, death and the grave be overcome at last.

Knowing that the sisters' grief for Lazarus was inconsolable, the Lord put this simple question:

### John 11:34

'I can see how deeply you are grieving for your beloved Lazarus. Now, take me and show me where you have laid him.'

The Lord Jesus, of course, knew where Lazarus had been laid. However, he wanted the grieving sisters to accompany him to the tomb, where he would demonstrate his divine power and sovereign control over death and where he would glorify his Father's name in their presence.

The two sisters might have responded thus: ‘Come with us and we will bring you to the tomb. Come now, and share with us in our mourning. Come, and remember again the one who meant so much to you and to us, but who now has been taken from us.’

Thus, the Lord Jesus, together with Martha and Mary, began the short journey to the place where the two sisters had laid their beloved brother’s body. Soon, they arrived at the entrance to the tomb—now concealed by a great stone.

At this point, John records these poignant words:

### John 11:35

The verb used here for ‘wept’ is different from the one used concerning Mary in verse 31. Here, the verb is ἐδάκρυσεν. In Greek, verse 35 reads, ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, which BDAG and others render as ‘Jesus burst into tears’. However, the phrase *Jesus wept* probably denotes silent or quiet weeping as distinct from an outburst of uncontrolled emotion, and as opposed to the Jews’ loud wailing for the dead—especially on the part of the ‘professional’ mourners.

Jesus’ tears were not so much an expression of his grief over the loss of Lazarus—a loss, which nevertheless, he must have felt very keenly—as an expression of his love, compassion and love toward his family. From Jesus’ point of view, undue grief would have been inappropriate. The Lord knew what was about to take place, whereas the mourners did not.

Nevertheless, at this point, the Lord Jesus did experience very deep emotion, and he began to shed tears, or weep. The Lord must have called to mind the many happy times that he had spent in the presence of Lazarus, Martha and Mary in the family home at Bethany. The Lord wept over Lazarus’ death; but he must have wept even more over the grief being endured by his family and friends. He wept over their sense of loss, abandonment and near despair. He wept over their failure to realise or believe that Lazarus’ sickness would not *lead to* or *end* in death; i.e., death would not be the final outcome. (Cf. Isa. 63:9; see also Luke 19:41)

Here, the believer in Christ can be greatly encouraged; for he or she too is reminded in no uncertain terms that their death will not be the final outcome. The Lord of glory has triumphed and risen victorious over sin, death, hell and the grave for ever. Therefore, death holds no uncertainties, fears or terrors for anyone who belongs to the Lord.

Here, too, we see that there is an appropriate time for shedding tears or weeping. Even though the believer is assured that death is merely the entrance to his Father’s home on high, yet it is appropriate to grieve for those who have gone before—but not as others do, who have no hope. (1 Thess. 4:13). Likewise, it is appropriate to grieve with those who mourn, and to comfort them in their deep distress with love, compassion, and understanding. (Rom. 12:15)

### John 11:36

‘Look at the Lord Jesus!’ inferred the Jewish mourners. ‘He is weeping! How much he must have loved Lazarus! How great must have been the bond of friendship that united them in life, but that now separates them from one another in death! Jesus must have loved him intensely to weep for him as he does now.’ (John 14:21)

Others, however, proved more sceptical toward the Lord Jesus:

### **John 11:37**

Among the people, Jesus was well known as one who worked remarkable miracles. Many of those who had come to share the family's mourning were familiar with the Lord's works of healing. They had seen or heard of many people throughout the city of Jerusalem and beyond whom the Lord had healed of one disease or another. Indeed, they had never yet heard of anyone whom Jesus had failed to heal. Not long ago, he had even healed a man who had been born blind. This man could now see—and so could many others who once were blind (John 9:5-7). 'How then,' they must have reasoned, 'could Jesus not have healed Lazarus? Why did he let him die?'

Clearly, these people were at a loss to understand why Jesus could heal all those other people, who were strangers to him, and yet not heal one whom he knew personally, and loved especially.

Yet, as we know from the Scriptures, God's ways are not our ways. His ways are past finding out. God's saints often suffer greater affliction than do others—and often we cannot understand why this should be so. We believe, however, that God works all things according to his greater plan and purpose for each one of his beloved children. We believe, too, that the Lord will ultimately glorify his name through the trials, griefs and sorrows of those who are dear to him and close to his heart. (Rom. 8:28)

Whatever happens, God's love for his saints prevails for ever. He will never abandon them in their time of perplexity and distress. In one way or another, the Lord will deliver them—far beyond their expectations. (Ps. 46:1-11; Isa. 54:10)

## **Jesus Raises Lazarus**

### **John 11:38-44**

#### **John 11:38**

The Lord Jesus stood before the tomb that held the body of Lazarus. This tomb assumed the form of a cave or vault—either naturally formed or artificially excavated. From this, it appears that Lazarus and his family may have been a family of comfortable circumstances.

Across the entrance to the cave, lay a large stone. This stone effectively sealed the tomb against all intruders. According to Jewish custom, it was considered highly offensive to break open a sealed tomb. Furthermore, anyone who did so would incur defilement if they came into contact with a dead body.

At this point, Jesus gives an explicit command to the accompanying mourners:

#### **John 11:39**

Jesus commands the sisters to remove the obstacle that now stood between Lazarus and them. God was about to reveal his power and glory in their midst. Therefore, the sisters must remove that which would hinder them from seeing what was about to happen.

Martha hesitates momentarily. She considers the consequences of removing the stone after so long a time. Lazarus' body had been lying in the tomb for the past four days. By this time, the natural processes of decomposition and decay would have caused a very

unpleasant odour. 'Under these circumstances,' implies Martha, 'it would hardly be right to open the tomb—especially with so many mourners present.'

**John 11:40**

Here, the Son of God mildly rebukes Martha for her hesitant faith. Concerning Lazarus, the Lord Jesus had already told Martha and Mary that their brother's sickness would not lead to (or, end in) death (v.4). Rather, this had happened so that God's name might be glorified through what the Son was about to do. Jesus had also stated categorically to Martha and Mary that he was the resurrection and the life (v.25). In consequence of this statement, Martha had reaffirmed her complete faith in him (v.27). Therefore, she and Mary need only continue to believe on the Son. Assuredly, they would not be disappointed. But, as a token of their implicit trust in the Son of God, they must now take away the stone that imprisoned their brother's body. Very soon, now, something of God's glory would be revealed to the sisters—and to the other mourners—in all its resplendent power and majesty.

**John 11:41**

Perhaps with the aid of others, the two sisters removed the stone from the entrance to the cave. Now, everyone could see for themselves where the body of Lazarus was lying, bound with grave clothes. Now, all the Jewish mourners who had accompanied Martha and Mary to the tomb would be able to witness at first hand God exercising his almighty power through his Son.

Before exercising his divine power, the Lord Jesus prays to his heavenly Father. He offers thanks publicly to God in heaven, thereby associating God's name directly with the miracle that he was about to perform. Thus, those who heard him praying, and then seeing the miracle, would be constrained to glorify God for what he had done through his Son.

Again, this demonstration of God's power would prove once more that the Father had sent Jesus into the world. It would prove that Jesus was not acting in his own name or on his own authority, but in the Father's name and with his Father's authority.

Therefore, in his prayer to his Father, Jesus said:

**John 11:42**

The Lord Jesus could assert with full confidence that the Father always heard and responded to the prayers of his beloved Son. However, for the benefit of Mary, Martha and the other mourners present at the tomb, the Lord Jesus prayed publicly to his Father in heaven. Jesus knew that the Father's answer to his prayer would demonstrate unmistakably the Son's inseparable union and communion with the Father. Furthermore, it would demonstrate that the Son was acting in the name of, and by the express authority of, his Father in heaven. Thus, the mourners and others present would be given every possible reason for believing that the Father had sent his Son into the world, and that Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be—the holy one of God and the Saviour of sinful men and women.

By manifesting that omnipotence that was attributable to God alone, Jesus, the Son of God, would be shown to be the one who alone could give life to the dead—spiritual, physical and eternal life. To disbelieve the witness of this miraculous demonstration of God's power and glory, would be to despise the Father's testimony and to show disdain for his Son. Repudiating such a signal miracle, however, would amount to nothing less than wilful unbelief and rebellion against the testimony of the most high God to his Son.

### John 11:43

'I, who am the resurrection and the life, command you to arise from the dead! By my almighty and sovereign power and authority, I order you to come forth from the tomb! Come forth now from the grave, and present yourself to these witnesses!'

Here, the Lord proves beyond dispute the reality of his divine nature. Already, Lazarus' body had begun to decompose. Humanly speaking, it was impossible to reverse the processes of dissolution and decay. Jesus, however, overrides these natural processes. By a word of command, the Lord Jesus restores life, health and strength to Lazarus' once-decaying body. Once again, Lazarus becomes a living being.

Therefore, in verse 44, John writes:

### John 11:44

Lazarus arose. The previously dead man came out of the tomb. Still wrapped in the grave clothes, Mary and Martha's brother now stood before the group of astonished witnesses.

We must remember that—for the most part—these witnesses were not believers. Although they were close friends of Martha and Mary, these mourners were Jews, and held to the Jewish faith. Now, however, they had just witnessed a demonstration of God's creative power exercised through Jesus. As Jews, they knew that only God could restore to life a person who had been dead for four days. Therefore, they would reason, Jesus must have come from God—as he said. He must be the promised Messiah, for to no one else would God give this kind of power and authority. (Cf. John 5:21)

Had this miracle occurred only in the presence of Martha and Mary, very few people would have believed that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. They would have refused to believe that Lazarus had died in the first place. Alternatively, they would have suggested that he was not dead when laid in the tomb. Therefore, Jesus—or someone else—needed only to release him from his imprisonment and revive him.

In one way or another, these people would have attempted to discredit the testimony of the two women, and to deny Lazarus' resurrection. However, in the presence of so many independent, competent, trustworthy and reliable witnesses, a denial of the facts proved virtually impossible. Only those who were prepared to deny truth itself, and castigate the witnesses as untruthful and unreliable—or as deluded en masse—could claim that Jesus had not raised Lazarus from the dead.

Now, however, we return to the graveside scene where Lazarus is standing before the amazed mourners. As Lazarus stands there still bound in his grave clothes, the Lord speaks again:

*(44b) ...Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (ESV)*

'Handle Lazarus for yourselves. Approach him now and remove the grave clothes. As you can see, you are not looking at a spirit. You are looking at—and touching—the resurrected and living body of Lazarus.'

'Martha and Mary, you are looking at your brother—your own flesh and blood. You friends of Lazarus, see now that this is a living human being, comprising flesh and blood. This is no spirit of your imagination. Therefore, release him from his grave clothes, and receive him back into you home and hearts.'

## The Sanhedrin Plots Jesus' Death

### John 11:45-57

**John 11:45**

With their own eyes, these Jews had just witnessed a glorious demonstration of Jesus' power and authority. They knew that no mortal man was ever given such power or authority. Therefore, they must have concluded that Jesus' ability to raise Lazarus from the dead could only have been given him by God. However, if Jesus received such power from God, then God must indeed have sent him to exercise that power. Jesus really must be the Messiah or Saviour of the world.

Because of what they had just seen, many of these Jews put their faith in the Lord Jesus. How could they fail to believe in him now? How could they continue to doubt Jesus' claims after this demonstration of divine power and authority? (Cf. John 12:9)

However, not all of these Jews were convinced of the truth regarding Jesus. In verse 46, John writes:

**John 11:46**

These Jews refused to believe the truth—even although they had witnessed this miracle with their own eyes. They refused to believe that the power and authority by which Jesus acted came to him from God. They rejected the idea that this power and authority proved him to be the Christ. (Luke 16:30-31; John 12:37-40)

That the miracle of Lazarus' resurrection had occurred, they were unable to deny. Too many other independent and reliable witnesses had been present at the scene, so it was pointless to dispute the fact. These Jews' aim in reporting this miracle to the Pharisees was in the hope that the religious authorities might be able to stop Jesus from performing further such miracles.

Therefore, in verse 47, John writes:

**John 11:47**

To the religious hierarchy, this matter was most serious. The implications of a formerly dead man now walking the streets of Bethany for all the people to see did not bear thinking about. Bethany was a small town, and Lazarus had been well known. The whole population would have heard of his death. Many would have attended his burial. Now, these same people would be able to see him again restored to life at the hands of the man called Jesus. (Cf. John 12:10-11)

In their view, therefore, something had to be done to stop Jesus from performing any more miraculous signs. However, it would be necessary to discuss and debate this matter in the presence of the whole religious council. Therefore, these Jewish leaders convened an immediate meeting of the Sanhedrin.

Very soon, this august religious assembly began discussing the issue: 'So far, we have achieved nothing. We have failed to stop this man from teaching in God's name and from performing miracles. Now, however, we must do something to stop him once and for all. We must take steps to end his teaching and works.'

Therefore, in verse 48, John writes:

**John 11:48**

Completely exasperated by their failure to stop the Lord Jesus, the religious leadership asserted that if Jesus were to continue teaching and working miracles, then, ultimately, the entire population would believe on him. They contended that—if the Lord were not

stopped—his teaching would have an adverse effect on the Jewish religion and way of life. Jesus' teaching would overturn the Jewish faith and the traditions of their forefathers. Furthermore, these leaders imagined that the Roman authorities might be given cause to think that those people gathering around Jesus were preparing to revolt against the Roman government.

If this should happen (the Jewish Council surmised)—or if the Romans believed that it *might* happen—they would act decisively against the Jewish nation. If the occupying Roman authorities felt threatened in any way by Jesus and his followers, they would dispatch their armies against Jerusalem and against the whole land. They would destroy the holy temple. They would raze the holy city to the ground. They would deprive the Jewish people of their land and liberty.

In view of this imagined threat, the Jewish religious Council were convinced that they must act immediately to prevent Jesus from gaining any more followers, or from extending his preaching any further. But how? What action could they take against the Lord Jesus? His followers surrounded him almost everywhere he went.

John continues:

### **John 11:49**

At this point, Caiaphas, the presiding high priest intervened.

'You do not know what you are talking about! Why are we discussing among ourselves how we can stop Jesus? Is it not obvious what we must do?'

### **John 11:50**

'We are discussing and debating how we can stop Jesus from performing miracles, and from gaining even more followers. We—the members of this prestigious Jewish Sanhedrin—are practically trembling in fear, in case Jesus and his followers cause a Roman backlash. We fear the end of our people, nation and temple at the hands of the Romans. What are we thinking about? If we do not want the nation to perish, then surely Jesus must die to spare the nation. We must sacrifice his life to save the people.'

Caiaphas, of course, spoke as he did merely from political expediency. He wanted to dispose of Jesus permanently, so that the Jewish nation might not find itself exposed to the wrath of their Roman overlords. Nevertheless, although spoken with evil intent, Caiaphas *did* prophesy unintentionally of Christ's vicarious suffering and death.

Therefore, in verses 51 and 52, John writes:

### **John 11:51-52**

Unquestioningly, Caiaphas spoke more accurately than he knew. Christ would indeed die for the people—but not as Caiaphas intended or anticipated. Jesus would die, however, not only for that nation, but also for all of God's children throughout the world. (John added this latter comment. It was not part of the high priest's unwitting prophecy.) (Cf. Exodus 28:30)

### **John 11:53**

Caiaphas had provided the Sanhedrin or Jewish religious court with an excuse for destroying Jesus. Although they had long desired it, individual members or groups within the Sanhedrin could not by themselves initiate the proceedings that would result in Jesus'



death. Now, however, no less a person than the high priest himself had just proposed and sanctioned such a move. To this wicked proposal to bring about the death of Jesus, the majority of the religious Council willingly assented.

There were, of course, some exceptions. Not every member of the Sanhedrin consented to this evil proposal. A small number of the religious leaders already believed on Jesus. However, for fear of expulsion from the Sanhedrin and from the synagogue, they concealed their faith. Even so, it is safe to assume that none of these secret believers would vote in favour of the Lord's death. Nevertheless, the high priest had set the wheels in motion. From this point onward, the religious leadership would seek earnestly to have Jesus arrested and executed.

Although the Jews were unaware of it, however, this could happen only if it accorded with God's plan and purposes for his Son. That it accorded with God's plan in no way mitigates or excuses men's evil deeds. However, even men's evil intentions can serve to further God's design for the redemption of sinners.

**John 11:54**

Jesus was well aware of the Jewish religious leaders' wicked intentions. For this reason, he stopped moving about in public places. Jesus would indeed allow himself to be taken at the hands of sinful men—but not before his appointed time. His enemies would not—and could not—arrest Jesus before he had accomplished the work that God had given him to do.

A number of things remained to be accomplished before allowing himself to be taken. Therefore, Jesus and his disciples retired to the seclusion of a village possibly about 15-20 miles (24-32km) north of Jerusalem, and close to the desert. This village was called Ephraim. There, the Lord would continue his ministry. Soon after, he would leave the village to make his final journey up to Jerusalem—at the appointed time.

**John 11:55**

Once again, the Jewish Feast of Passover drew near. As was customary among many of the Jews, large numbers of pilgrims made their way up to Jerusalem a few days before the festival began. Being a holy Feast, they considered it essential to purify themselves at the temple before participating in the sacred ceremonies of the Passover. Only by observing the strict purification rites of the Mosaic Law, would they feel able to share in the hallowed Feast. Only then would they be able to think of themselves as those whom the destroying angel had spared, because cleansed and protected by the blood of the paschal lamb. (Cf. 2 Chron. 30:17-19)

**John 11:56**

Naturally, when they arrived at the temple in Jerusalem, these Jews from around the country and from abroad expected to find Jesus already there. After all, he was a religious Teacher sent from God. Many of these people probably believed him to be the Messiah (without necessarily understanding the spiritual nature of the Messiah's office or work).

Where, then, was Jesus now? The Feast of Passover had almost arrived, yet Jesus was no-where to be found. He must have realised that this was one of the feasts that God required every male to attend. Where, then, was he? Indeed, on previous occasions when the Jewish pilgrims had come up to Jerusalem for the Passover or other Feast, they had found Jesus already there, teaching the people in the temple courts. Where, then, was he on this occasion?

Another group, too, sought diligently for news of Jesus' whereabouts. In verse 57, John tells us:

### **John 11:57**

The religious authorities fully expected Jesus to attend the Passover. Therefore, they had arranged to arrest Jesus whenever he appeared in the temple precincts. To this evil arrangement, Judas Iscariot was shortly to become an eager and willing party. (Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:2-6)

Meanwhile, the religious authorities ordered that anyone knowing of Jesus' whereabouts was to report it immediately to them. In addition, the authorities planted informers among the crowds of pilgrims and others thronging Jerusalem to try to determine where Jesus could be found. Once the religious leadership had laid hands on him, they would engineer the Lord's death—or so they imagined vainly.

Jesus' destiny or death, however, was not in their hands—at that time or at any other time. On the contrary, the Lord held in his hands their lives, their breath, and their very existence. (Acts 17:25,28; see also Ps. 31:15a)

The Lord would die when it pleased him to lay down his life according to God's plan and purposes. He would not die one moment before that time or one moment after it.

## John Chapter 12

### Mary Anoints Jesus

#### *John 12:1-11*

##### **John 12:1**

The Lord Jesus had never intended to stay away from Judea just because the Jewish religious authorities there were scheming to kill him. He knew that they planned to arrest him on sight. He knew also, however, that they could not lay a finger on him before his appointed time. Even so, this time was drawing closer by the hour.

Having completed his work elsewhere, the Lord journeyed back to Bethany in Judea—the town of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Being just about 2 miles (3.2km) from Jerusalem, Bethany was conveniently situated to afford some peace and quietness; yet, it was located within easy travelling distance of the holy city and temple. (Matt. 21:17)

Very soon, the annual Passover celebrations would begin in Jerusalem. Even now, many pilgrims would be making their way in from the other parts of the country to attend this important religious Feast. (John 11:55) Jesus, of course, would be attending this Feast—regardless of the Jewish religious leaders' intention to kill him. Therefore, he arrived in Bethany six days before the Passover, and he remained at that village for a short time before travelling on to the city of Jerusalem itself.

##### **John 12:2**

Ordinarily, the Lord Jesus and his disciples stayed with Lazarus and his two sisters while in Bethany. However, from Matthew and Mark's accounts of this incident it becomes apparent that the Lord and his followers had received an invitation to the home of Simon the Leper. Like Lazarus and his two sisters, Simon also had his home in Bethany. (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9)

On this occasion, Lazarus (whom Jesus had raised from the dead), Martha and Mary had gone to the home of Simon the Leper. Out of love and gratitude for what the Lord had done for Lazarus and his two sisters, they prepared a dinner at Simon's home in the Lord's honour. Perhaps, Simon had no one to help him serve his invited guests, and therefore Martha volunteered to assist him. In any event, it seems that the two families united to provide hospitality for their beloved Lord Jesus and his disciples.

At least two trophies of the Lord's divine power and grace reclined at table with him that day. One was Lazarus, whom the Lord had raised from the dead. The other was Simon, whom, apparently, the Lord had cleansed from an obnoxious, disfiguring, and highly contagious skin disease. In their own way, the Lord had restored each to life, health and strength by a signal demonstration of his almighty and creative power. (John 11:43-44)

##### **John 12:3**

Nard—or spikenard—was the name given to a well-known aromatic herb. This herb grew on the lower slopes of the Himalayan Mountains, between India and Tibet. The name 'nard' is also applied to the fragrant oil produced by this herb. In perfume form, nard was a most expensive preparation.

As a token of her love for the Lord Jesus, Mary poured out the precious anointing oil upon his head and his feet. The apostle John says only that Mary anointed the Lord's feet with the oil. However, according to both Matthew and Mark's accounts, Mary—there unnamed—poured the ointment on his head. Apparently, then, Mary anointed both the Lord's head *and* his feet. (Matt. 26:7; Mark 14:3).

(A similar account appears in Luke's Gospel. However, in that account, Jesus was dining at the home of Simon the Pharisee, not Simon the Leper. Clearly, then Luke's account relates to different people and to a different occasion. (Luke 7:36-50))

Normally, the head alone was anointed with oil. However, in this instance, Mary shows deep humility in the presence of her Lord by falling down at his feet and anointing his feet as well. Like her sister Martha, Mary believed Jesus to be the Son of God. Therefore, as a mark of love, worship and devotion, she fell at his feet, and applied the precious oil to her blessed Saviour's feet. Having anointed his feet with oil, Mary then unbound her hair and wiped the Lord's feet with her hair.

Mary's purpose in anointing the Lord's feet with oil would be to refresh his feet after walking about outdoors. It was the customary practice among the Jews to wash their visitor's feet. However, a servant normally performed this act. Foot washing was considered as an act of humility and servitude.

On a number of occasions, the Lord Jesus had told his disciples plainly of his impending death and resurrection, but they had failed to understand or believe his words. Perhaps Mary had heard of what Jesus had told his disciples, but—unlike them—she believed what he had said. If so, then Mary may have intended this anointing for the Lord's burial a short time later.

John continues:

### John 12:4

Those most find fault with others, who are most at fault themselves. (Cf. Luke 6:41-42)

Judas Iscariot objected strenuously to Mary's act of love and devotion. Devoid of any love and devotion himself toward the Lord Jesus, Judas could only criticise and condemn Mary for her act of kindness and selfless giving. Judas professed himself a disciple of the Lord, yet he speaks out unkindly against one who is truly the Lord's disciple. How the children of the devil love to accuse the children of God! How those who *pretend* to belong to Christ, try to discourage those who *really* belong to Christ! (John 6:70-71; 13:2,26; cf. Rev. 12:10)

Judas continues:

### John 12:5

'What utter waste! Think how much money you could have gained by selling that perfume! It must be worth at least a year's wages'—i.e., the average annual earnings for a labouring man. (By present day standards, this would amount to several thousand pounds or dollars.) (Cf. Matt. 20:1-2)

'You could have sold that perfume, and used the money to help the poor! However, you have wasted it! You have squandered this most valuable ointment!'

From the parallel accounts in Matthew and Mark, we learn that some of the other disciples thought the same as Judas Iscariot. (Matt. 26:6-9; Mark 14:3-5)

How careful we, as believers, must be, not to condemn our fellow believers for their apparent over-generosity toward others. When an act of kindness is done as unto the Lord,

we should not criticise that act—even if we believe that the resources involved could have been put to better use. What better use, than to honour the Lord?

Judas asked:

*(5) “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii<sup>35</sup> and given to the poor.” (ESV)*

Such remarks only serve to heighten the hypocrisy of Judas’ heart and life.

### **John 12:6**

The needs of the poor did not concern Judas in the least. This was not why he objected so vehemently to Mary’s use of this precious oil. Rather, it was to further his own evil intentions, and to cover his sin. (Prov. 29:7)

This verse tells us that Judas was a thief. The word rendered ‘thief’ means an ‘embezzler’ or ‘pilferer’. Judas was thinking of the considerable amount of money that might have been contributed to the funds for which he was responsible. He was thinking of how much more money he might have embezzled, if this extremely costly perfume had been sold and the proceeds placed at his disposal.

*(6) He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it. (ESV)*

As treasurer for the Lord and his disciples, Judas carried the moneybag. None of the other apostles knew that Judas was a thief, but the Lord knew. Apparently the other disciples trusted Judas with the money, otherwise they would have checked their funds and discovered the discrepancies.

We are not told what Judas did with all his embezzled gains. He must have concealed it somewhere. Had he used the money openly, or for his own person, the others would have become suspicious when it became apparent that he had some pecuniary resources which were incompatible with his present position and occupation.

In verse 5, Judas had asked,

*(5) “Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii<sup>35</sup> and given to the poor.”*

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<sup>35</sup> **12:5** A *denarius* was a day's wage for a labourer [ESV footnote]

In verse 7, the thief receives his reply:

### John 12:7

(7) ... *“Leave her alone, so that she may keep it<sup>36</sup> for the day of my burial.”*  
(ESV)

‘Do not complain about, or criticise, Mary as she has done something wrong. Far from doing wrong, Mary has done what is right and honourable in my sight.’

Alternatively, as Matthew’s account renders Jesus’ words:

...*“Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me”*  
(Matt. 26:10 ESV)

‘Mary has anointed my head and my feet with oil. She has wiped my feet with the hairs of her head. She has demonstrated the extent of her love and devotion to me—her Saviour and Lord—by this act of kindness and extreme generosity. She has prepared my body for burial. What she will be prevented from doing later, she has done for me now.’ (Matt. 26:12; cf. John 19:38-40)

Therefore, said Jesus:

*“Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”* (Matt. 26:13 ESV)

When the good deeds of others have been long forgotten, Mary’s act of loving kindness will still be remembered.

Concerning Mary, Jesus had said:

(7) ... *“Leave her alone, so that she may keep it<sup>36</sup> for the day of my burial.”*  
(ESV)

Then, concerning the poor, the Lord adds:

### John 12:8

‘There will always be occasions for you to do good to the poor. The poor are to be found among you even now, and they always will be found among you. You can minister to their needs at any time. You need not wait for special occasions, as Mary has done with me. (Deut. 15:11)

‘Indeed, if the poor concern you so much, why have you not done something to help them before now? Some of you at least were once able to provide for the needs of the poor. Nevertheless, did you help them when you could? Why, then, do you find fault with Mary, when greater fault might be found with you?’ (Luke 12:33; 18:22)

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<sup>36</sup> 12:7 Or *Leave her alone; she intended to keep it...* [ESV footnote]

**John 12:9**

Before long, word spread throughout the small town of Bethany and beyond that Jesus was dining at the home of Simon the Leper. Consequently, a large crowd of Jews assembled and began making their way toward Simon's house. These Jews wanted to meet Jesus, possibly to hear him teach, or to see him perform more miraculous signs.

However, besides seeing Jesus, these Jews also desired to see Lazarus. Although they had heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, many of these people had not actually seen him. Now, however—upon learning that Lazarus too had been invited to the home of Simon the Leper—these Jews determined to see Lazarus for themselves.

The religious authorities soon discovered what was happening, and why this large crowd of Jews had assembled outside Simon's home.

Therefore, in verse 10, John writes:

**John 12:10-11**

Something had to be done to Lazarus as well as Jesus. The chief priests had already planned to arrest Jesus and put him to death. Now, however, they would have to do the same to Lazarus. What else was to be done? Not even they—the Pharisees and the scribes—could deny that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Too many independent and reliable witnesses present at the scene had testified to this fact. (John 11:43-45; cf. Acts 4:14)

Again, the fact that Lazarus was walking about alive and well, and was even now eating at the home of Simon the Leper, was beyond dispute. Indeed, it was because of the obvious miracle of his resurrection that so many of the Jews were now turning to Christ and believing on him.

Lazarus, therefore, had to be destroyed. This was the only effective way of stopping the Jews from turning to Christ in ever-increasing numbers. If they destroyed Jesus, but failed to kill Lazarus, people would still believe in everything that Jesus had said. Lazarus was the resurrected living witness of Jesus' power and authority over death. If, because of Lazarus, the people believed everything the Lord had said, they would believe what Jesus had told them about rising from the dead on the third day. (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34)

The chief priests, of course, were invariably chosen from among the Sadducees. Unlike the Pharisees and the scribes, the Sadducees denied the very possibility of a resurrection. The Sadducees also denied the existence of angels or spirits. Immensely wealthy materialists, this small religious group did not believe in life after death. (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:6-8)

Therefore, the Sadducean chief priests concluded that they must kill Lazarus as well as Jesus. Only in this way, would they prevent the myth of a resurrection from gaining ground. It would also stop people from believing what Jesus had been saying about rising again on the third day.

**'Behold, Your King is Coming...'****John 12:12-19****John 12:12**

The following day, Jesus and his disciples left the town of Bethany to make the two-mile journey up to Jerusalem. By this time, a great crowd of Jewish pilgrims had already gath-

ered in Jerusalem in readiness for the Passover. These pilgrims had travelled from all over the country and from foreign lands to come to the Feast. Now, they heard that Jesus was making his way toward the holy city.

Therefore, in verse 13, John says:

### John 12:13

{Cf. Ps. 118:25,26}

A vast number of these Jewish pilgrims made their way back out of the city to meet the Lord Jesus. As they lined his way, they waved branches of palm trees before him. These were the symbols of victory and triumph. (Palm branches and leaves also formed part of the ceremony during another important Jewish Feast—the Feast of Tabernacles. (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15)) Then, the people laid their garments and the palm branches on the ground in front of the Lord Jesus.

Laying down garments or palm branches in this way indicated the approach of a royal personage such as a prince or ruler. (Cf. 2 Kings 9:12-13) These Jews recognised Jesus as a Ruler and a King—as the latter part of verse 13 makes clear. However, such a pronouncement on the part of these Jewish pilgrims would upset the Jewish religious authorities even more. Now, even greater reason would be afforded the religious authorities for fearing the wrath of the Roman government. If the Romans heard of these things, as surely they must, they might immediately suspect an imminent popular uprising, with Jesus at the head.

*(13a) So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna!..." (ESV)*

The word 'Hosanna!' possibly means 'Save!' 'Save now!' or 'Save, we pray!' However, the Jews may also have used it as an expression of praise.

The thronging crowd of Jews then cry:

*(13b) ... "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord..." {Ps. 118:25-26}*

Praise be to the one who comes in the name of God Almighty—the Lord of hosts! Blessed is the one who represents the name of God Most High!

Seemingly, many among this vast multitude of Jews believed Jesus to be the promised Messiah. However, it is very likely that the majority saw him as a political saviour and secular messiah, rather than the spiritual Saviour or Messiah. These Jews probably expected Jesus to deliver them from their bondage to Rome, rather than from their bondage to sin.

The crowd then adds:

*(13c) ... "even the King of Israel!" (ESV)*

'Praise be to the one who comes to rule over all Israel, i.e., over the entire Jewish nation! All praise be to the one whom we gladly acknowledge as our only true king!'

Again, the expression in the last part of verse 13 seems to imply that this vast crowd looked upon Jesus only as a divinely appointed king, similar to king David or Solomon. (Mark 11:10; cf. John 6:15) Jesus was indeed a King, but he was much more than a King. Jesus' kingdom was not of this world—as most of these Jews imagined. His was, and is, a spiritual kingdom. It was, and is, an everlasting kingdom. The kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of God. (John 18:36-39)



In verses 14 and 15, John writes:

### John 12:14-15

{Cf. Zech. 9:9}

Just outside Jerusalem—near the Mount of Olives—lay the village of Bethphage. Into this village, Jesus had sent two of his disciples to bring out a donkey and her colt. It was while the Lord was approaching Jerusalem, seated on the donkey's colt, that the Jewish pilgrims lined his way. (Matt. 21:1-2)

This Jewish multitude now thronging Jesus' way, most likely had misunderstood the nature of the Lord's Messiahship and Kingship. Now, however, in verses 14 and 15, the apostle John provides us with the correct interpretation of these momentous events. To this end, the apostle quotes from the Old Testament prophecy of Zechariah. In riding into Jerusalem on a donkey's colt, Jesus was fulfilling that prophecy to the letter. In that prophecy, however, Zechariah refers to one who was to be king over a *spiritual* realm—the King of Righteousness and the King of Peace.

In Zechariah, the prophecy reads:

*(9) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

*(10) I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zech. 9:9-10 ESV)*

### John 12:16

At the time this happened, even Jesus' disciples did not understand that he was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy about the Messiah. Perhaps the disciples too shared the belief common among the Jews that their Messiah would be a political king. Perhaps, like many others, the disciples thought of the Messiah as one who would overthrow the Roman yoke, and rule over the Jewish nation as King David's successor. At any rate, the Lord's disciples did not seem to realise that Zechariah's prophecy spoke of a *spiritual* Messiah. However, it is clear from the words of the prophet that he is announcing the coming of the Messianic King—one would bring salvation to his people, and who would establish peace in their hearts.

Initially, then, the disciples failed to realise that Zechariah's prophecy referred to Jesus. Later, however—following Jesus' resurrection and glorification—the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in fullness of power. As promised, the Spirit guided them into all truth, enabling them to understand the Scriptures much more clearly. (John 14:26; Acts 2:33) Only then did the disciples come to realise the full significance of the Old Testament Scriptures, including the prophecy of Zechariah. Only then did they realise that Zechariah was speaking of Jesus as the King. Only then did they see that Zechariah was not speaking of a temporal ruler, but of a spiritual Ruler.

Many years later, by the time the apostle John came to write this Gospel, he fully understood the significance of all these prophecies.

### John 12:17-19

Much to the considerable annoyance and despair of the Pharisees, the crowd who had witnessed the Lord Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead continued to blaze abroad this wonderful news. This was why so many of the Jewish pilgrims went out to meet the Lord Jesus on his way up to Jerusalem.

Seeing this swelling throng of pilgrims lining the road to meet Jesus, the by now desperate and enraged Pharisees said to one another:

(19b)...“ You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.” (ESV)

(We may excuse the Pharisees' slight exaggeration!—and, yet, perhaps they spoke wiser than they knew. Before much longer, and through the preaching of the Gospel, people from around the world would be turning to Jesus and believing upon his name.)

The religious leaders must have considered their case all but hopeless. Almost in despair, they must have been declaring to one another, ‘The people are flocking to Jesus because of Lazarus! He’s got the whole world in his hands! If we do not put a stop to him right now, the entire Jewish nation will accept him as their Messiah-King. Then, everyone will follow him!’ (vv.9-11)

### Jesus Must be Lifted Up

#### John 12:20-36

##### John 12:20

The Feast of Passover commemorated the Hebrews' redemption from slavery in Egypt. It especially commemorated their deliverance from the destroying angel whom the LORD had sent to kill all the firstborn of Egypt. (Exodus 12:21-27) Every year, therefore, Jews from throughout the land and from much further afield came to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Passover. During this sacred festival, they would remember how God had freed their forefathers from almost 400 years of cruel Egyptian bondage.

This festival would last for a total of eight days. The *Feast of Passover* itself lasted for only one day (each day running from sunset to sunset); but this feast would be followed immediately by the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, which continued for a further seven days.

Although, therefore, the vast majority of worshippers were Jews, a small number of non-Jews also came to worship. (Cf. Acts 17:4)

Perhaps the Greeks<sup>37</sup> whom John mentions in verse 20 were seeking further knowledge of the only true God. If so, they had started in the right direction. According to the Lord Je-

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<sup>37</sup> Greeks: the reference may be to non-Jewish (i.e. Gentile worshippers) rather than to Greek nationals. [GL]

Jesus himself, "... *salvation is from the Jews.*" (John 4:22) That is, the way of salvation can be found only through the God-inspired Holy Scriptures. (Up to this time, of course, God had entrusted his Holy Word, or sacred oracles, to the safekeeping of the Jews. Again, at this time, the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written. (Rom. 3:2))

These Greeks, however, were not content to follow only the religion of the Jews. Apparently, they wanted to learn more about God. They would have heard of the One called, 'the Son of God'. Now, they wanted to meet this religious Teacher for themselves. Perhaps he could tell them more about Israel's God.

Therefore, in verse 21, John writes:

### John 12:21

These Greek worshippers approached the apostle Philip. As with certain others of the apostles, Philip's name was Greek. This may be why these Gentile worshippers came to this disciple.

The Greeks put their request to Philip: 'We have heard much about this great Man. We have heard that he is a Teacher come from God. For some time past, we have been worshipping God, but we have been doing so as outsiders. We would like to meet your Teacher. Perhaps he can tell us how we can worship God acceptably, and what we must do to become one of God's people. (Cf. Acts 8:27-35) We have heard that we can become proselytes to the Jewish faith, provided we accept circumcision. However, from what we have heard about your Teacher, he seems to speak of a different way of coming to know God. Therefore, "*Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*"'

John continues:

### John 12:22

Philip then relayed this message to the apostle Andrew. Then both apostles told the Lord Jesus about the enquiring Greeks.

John does not tell us of the outcome of the Greeks' request to see Jesus—although, it may be inferred from the passage that follows. However, we know that Jesus never turns away anyone who comes to him, whether Jew or Gentile. (John 6:37; Rom. 1:16; 10:12-13)

Again, in verse 32 of this chapter, the Lord declares:

(32) "*And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.*"  
(ESV)

The Lord, therefore, would draw to himself Gentiles as well as Jews. However, more on this verse in its proper place.

Philip and Andrew tell the Lord Jesus about the Greeks who have asked to meet him:

### John 12:23

Now, the Lord Jesus' appointed time had arrived. The Father had sent his Son into this world to fulfil his will for the redemption of sinful men and women. All that God the Father had given to his Son, had—and would—come to his Son. Jesus had lost none of those whom his Father had given to him. (John 6:37-40)

Now, however, the time has come for the Son to finish his Father's work on earth. To this end, the Lord Jesus must lay down his life for the redemption of sinners. However, as he

had said before, the Lord was going to lay down his life voluntarily. No one would take it from him; for no one had the power or authority to deprive the Lord Jesus Christ of his life.

By the same power that the incarnate Son of God was about to exercise in laying down his life, he would exercise three days later in taking up his life again. This command had he received from his Father. (John 10:17-18)

(23)...*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” (ESV)*

Through the Lord’s death, resurrection and ascension, the Son of Man would be glorified. Through this great work of redemption, glory, praise and honour would redound to his Father’s name and to his own name. By his atoning death and resurrection to glory, the Lord Jesus would purchase a full and free salvation for all who called upon his name. Whatever may be their colour, creed or nationality, the Son of God would receive all who came to him seeking forgiveness of their sins.

Yes, these Greeks too might come to Jesus, and the Lord would receive them. By coming to the Son of God, they would find the God they sought. Through repentance and faith in him, they would experience a full and free salvation. The Lord Jesus would bestow upon them—and upon all who came to him—all the blessings of abundant and eternal life.

Therefore, the Lord declared:

(23)...*“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”*

It was now time for God’s Son to finish this great work of redemption, that sinful men and women might be delivered from the wrath and curse of God, forgiven of their iniquities, and reconciled to the Father in heaven. (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20)

In verse 24, the Lord continues:

### **John 12:24**

Using an agricultural or horticultural analogy, the Lord Jesus declared in most solemn terms that a grain of wheat or some other seed must be buried beneath the ground so that it would spring to life, grow to maturity, and multiply. If it was not buried, it could not germinate. And, if it could not germinate, it could not produce a living plant. And, without a living plant, no further seed could be produced. That seed would remain dead and infertile.

However, if that seed was buried beneath the ground, then—in the normal course of events—it would germinate. Ultimately, it would produce a living plant, which in turn would produce yet more seed—*ad infinitum*.

So it was in the Lord’s case. Of necessity, Jesus must die and be buried beneath the ground. Unless this happened, he could not rise to life. Upon the Lord’s death and rising to life, however, depended the life and vitality of the church. Only by Jesus’ death and resurrection, would the seed of the church germinate and begin to grow. Only by the Lord’s vicarious and atoning sufferings and subsequent glorification, would the church flourish and multiply—like a living, growing plant. (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-38)

Therefore, that others might receive life, the Lord Jesus must die. That others might be raised to newness of life, the Lord Jesus must purchase their salvation by his death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to glory (Isa. 53:8-12)

### **John 12:25**

The disciples had told the Lord Jesus that some Greeks were seeking him, in order to learn more about God. However, what is involved in knowing God? Among other things,

to know God, or to experience true fellowship with God and with his Son, means to forfeit one's life in this world, in order to gain eternal life. It means to take up the cross every day and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt. 16:24-27; Mark 8:34-38)

Taking up the cross involves turning one's back on those things that the world holds dear. It means walking in the paths of righteousness, holiness and truth. If, however, anyone prefers to enjoy himself in this life—to the detriment of his soul—then he will forfeit the life to come. If anyone would rather waste his life by enjoying this world's sinful pleasures, he will most certainly forfeit life eternal. However, if any person despises this world's sinful pleasures and luxuries, he will keep his life—i.e., he will preserve his soul—to all eternity. (Heb. 11:25-26)

In verse 26, the Lord continues:

### John 12:26

Whoever desires to be the Lord's servant, must also become his follower. Whoever desires to receive eternal life, and to belong to the Lord Jesus, must commit himself to the Lord and Saviour unreservedly. Whatever may be the cost, the would-be servant must follow Jesus' example. (Luke 6:46-49) If the Lord's example leads to the paths of suffering, then his servant must follow him there. If Jesus' example leads to sacrificing his life for others, then—in his own way—the Lord's servant must sacrifice his life for the sake of others. (1 John 3:16)

That is why the Lord said:

*(26a) "If anyone serves me, he must follow me..." (ESV)*

The Lord continued:

*(26b) "...and where I am, there will my servant be also..."*

If a person is truly the Lord's disciple, then that person will do what their Master has done. Where the Lord is *comforting* those in distress, his servant also will be—comforting the anxious, the fearful and the depressed. Where the Lord Jesus is *encouraging* the weary and faint-hearted, there his servant will be—encouraging the heavy-laden, the burdened and the discouraged saints of God. Where the Lord is *grieving* with others in the house of mourning, there his servant will be—sharing the heartbreaks, griefs and sorrows of those who weep over the loss of friends or loved ones. (Eccles. 7:2-4)

If, in these or any other ways, anyone serves the Son of God, his Father will honour that disciple of Christ. Those who, for the Lord's sake and in Jesus' name, minister to the needs of others, *minister to him*. And those who minister to him, minister to the One who sent him.

Therefore, the Lord says:

*(26c) "...If anyone serves me, the Father will honour him." (ESV)*

The disciples had told the Lord Jesus that certain Greeks had come, seeking an interview with him. What, therefore, the Lord had just said to his followers, applied also to these Greeks. If anyone was prepared to lose his life in this world, he would gain it for eternal life. If anyone truly desired to know God, he must come to know God's Son.

Moreover, if anyone desired to serve the Lord Jesus, he must follow him. He must take up his cross daily, and follow in his Master's footsteps. In everything that he says and does, this would-be disciple must follow the Lord's example of righteous and holy living. If anyone was thus prepared to use his life in the service of Christ and of others, then the Father in heaven would surely honour him. (Rom. 14:17-18; 1 John 2:6)

### John 12:27

At this point, the Lord again contemplates everything that lies immediately ahead of him. He knows that—in a matter of a few hours, and in accordance with his own and his Father's express will and purposes—he, the holy One of God, will allow sinful men to take him, and to mock, scourge and crucify him.

More than this, however, the Lord knew that when wicked men impaled him to the cross to suffer the most cruel and agonising physical and mental torments, God would place on him the sin of the world; i.e. the holy Son of God would bear the wrath and punishment for every sinner worldwide, and throughout the ages, whom God had included in his plan of redemption.

On that cross, Jesus would endure God's unmitigated wrath. The holy Son of God would endure God's wrath, however, not for any personal demerit or wrongdoing but because his righteous Father would be punishing him for our sins and transgressions. (Isa. 53:4-5)

The Lord Jesus knew too that God could not and would not look upon evil. Therefore, the Lord realised that, of necessity, his Father must abandon his only Son temporarily—while he endured our punishment in his own body on the tree. (Hab. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:24)

This was why the Lord declared:

*(27) "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour." (ESV)*

Jesus knew the terrible agonies that awaited him on the cross. He agonised over the pain and suffering that he must endure on our account. Briefly, he considered appealing to his Father to be spared from the dreadful torments of the cross—not only the physical torments, but also the torments of his soul. Yet, almost immediately, the Lord realised that this was the very reason he had come into the world. He must suffer. He must die, if sinful men and women were to find forgiveness and reconciliation with God. (Luke 22:41-44) Therefore, in joyful anticipation—not of the cross—but of seeing the fruit of the travail of his soul, the Lord cried out to God in heaven:

### John 12:28

'Let your will be done! Let my life be given for the redemption of lost men and women! Let me bear upon myself the punishment due to them, that they may be forgiven and find peace with God. (John 10:16-18)

'Glorify your name, Father! Let the whole world be constrained to praise you for showing love and mercy to sinful mankind when you could have demanded only justice without mercy. Let them thank and praise you that you gave your one and only Son, that sinful men and women might be redeemed.'

Now, from heaven, thunders the awesome and majestic voice of the living God:

*(28b)..."I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (ESV)*

God had glorified his name through the work that his Son had done on earth. In particular, Jesus had brought glory to his Father's name by the miraculous signs he had performed. These miracles proved beyond all shadow of a doubt that Jesus was acting in the name of God, and by his power and authority. (John 9:3; 11:4,40; 10:25-26, 37-38; 14:11; see also 2 Pet. 1:17)

Again, these miraculous signs demonstrated that Jesus possessed all the attributes of deity—including omnipotence. The miracles proved that Jesus was indeed the Son of God—

God manifest in the flesh. In these ways, the Father had already glorified his own name in and through his Son.

God, of course, had glorified his name in many other ways while Jesus walked among men. The Father glorified his name through his Son's holy, righteous and perfect life. He glorified his name through all the good things that his Son did for other people. He glorified his name through all the kind words that his Son spoke, and through all his acts of love, mercy and compassion. Throughout his life on earth, therefore, the Lord Jesus glorified his Father's holy and righteous name.

God had already glorified his name. However, he would glorify his name even more in the future. Very soon now, his Son would die on the cross for the redemption of lost men and women throughout the world. However, following his death and burial, the Lord Jesus would rise again on the third day, in fulfilment of the Scriptures. By his triumphant resurrection, God's name would be glorified; for it would vindicate the claims of his Son, and demonstrate his almighty power over Satan, sin, death and the grave.

Again, after six weeks, God's Son would ascend through the clouds to the right hand of his Father. There, his Father would highly exalt him, giving him that name which is above every name. (Phil. 2:6-11) Once more, then, the Father would glorify his great and awesome name. Redeemed saints and holy angels alike would be constrained to praise him for his wonderful deeds to the children of men. (Ps. 107:8)

In response to this awesome voice from heaven, John says:

#### **John 12:29**

All the people presently surrounding the Lord Jesus heard the voice that spoke from heaven. They may not have been able to distinguish the words, since these words came from the majestic and holy throne on high. Even so, the people heard the attendant thundering as God's voice resounded through the heavenly realms. (Cf. Ezek. 10:5; Rev. 11:19; 2 Pet. 1:17-18)

It was not unusual for God to speak in the midst of thunder, lightning and other heavenly disturbances. Much the same thing happened with God's servant Moses on Mount Sinai. God spoke to Moses on the holy mount. The people standing at the foot of the mountain, however, saw and heard only the effects of the thunder and lightning. They could not distinguish clearly the voice of the Lord God. (Exodus 19:16-19; 20:18-21)

Unable to explain this dreadful phenomenon, yet unwilling to attribute it merely to electrical disturbances in the atmosphere, other people claimed that a holy angel had spoken to Jesus. These people knew, of course, that the angels were the ministering spirits of God. They knew that God sent them to protect and sustain his people. Therefore, they would assume that God had now sent his angel to strengthen and encourage the Lord Jesus.

We know, of course, that—as God—the Lord Jesus does not need any holy angel to sustain him. However, we know also, that—during his humanity on earth—the angels of God did minister to the Lord Jesus in the desert and in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Mark 1:13; Luke 22:44)

We know, too, that the Lord could have called upon twelve legions of holy angels to destroy the world, and to deliver him from the hands of sinful men. However, we also know, that—as God—the Lord Jesus did not need the myriads of powerful angels of God to deliver him. By a word of command, he could have effected his own deliverance from death. By a like word of command, he could have destroyed the world. However, on this occasion, the Son of God was not about to sit in final judgment on the world, but to confer the blessings of salvation on vast multitudes of people throughout the world. (Matt. 26:53; see also Acts 17:30-31)

Then, in verse 30, we read:

### John 12:30

The awesome and majestic voice that had resonated from heaven itself was not for the Lord's benefit but for the benefit of those who were present. The Father had indeed glorified his own name through his Son's life and works. He would do so again through his death, resurrection and glorification. However, since the people around Jesus had just heard God's voice speaking from heaven, they ought to be convinced that the Lord Jesus was indeed God's beloved Son. This voice from heaven ought to have proved to the people that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah of God, and the Saviour of the world. Moreover, since this was so—and God had just attested to the truth of it—then the people ought to believe in God's only Son. Only by believing in the name of Jesus, could they experience God's salvation.

Therefore, Jesus said:

*(30) ... "This voice has come for your sake, not mine." (ESV)*

In verse 31, the Lord continues:

### John 12:31

In John chapter 3, verse 17, the Lord Jesus says:

*"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3:17 ESV)*

And in verse 47 of this present chapter, Jesus declares:

*"If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (ESV)*

However, the judgment of which the Lord speaks in verse 31 of this chapter, is not speaking of God's final judgment on mankind and angels, but on the evil principles and principalities of this world (or age). Most especially, it is a judgment affecting the evil one himself, and the sphere of his malevolent influences. (John 16:11)

The time has come when the destroyer will be destroyed. God's wrath and condemnation will be poured out upon all that the evil one represents. Most especially, it will be directed against the evil one himself—the *'god of this age'*, or Satan. (1 John 3:8) Through the blood shed on the cross, Christ would destroy Satan's immense power over mankind. The Lord would triumph over him so that he would no longer be able to exercise the same degree of evil as once he did. (Consider, for example, the numerous instances of demon-possession or demon-oppression among the people of Christ's day.) (Luke 10:17-19; Heb. 2:14-15)

Satan would still be able to tempt mankind to sin, but even his power to tempt and to seduce would be restrained. On the cross, Christ would win the victory over Satan. Again, God's Holy Spirit would grant the necessary grace and power to overcome temptation. (Col. 2:15)

Sometimes, it seems to us that Satan's power is still as effective as ever. However, in reality, this is not so. Christ destroyed the full power of Satan when he triumphed over him on the cross. Christ has indeed defeated Satan. Nevertheless, a defeated enemy remains a dangerous enemy—until he is finally disarmed and contained.

Very often, however, what we attribute to the temptations of the devil, ought to be attributed to our own sinful nature and evil desires. Frequently, it is these evil desires arising



from our own hearts, that tempt us and lead us into sin—rather than Satan. (Mark 7:21-23)

Yes, Satan does prowl around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. However, he is no match for the Lion of the tribe of Judah! The Spirit of the Lord Jesus indwells us; and, by God's grace, the Spirit of holiness grants us the victory. (1 Pet. 5:8-10) We, however, must stand our ground, in the assurance that Satan's flaming arrows cannot harm the saints of the Lord. Let us repel his attacks with the all-prevailing sword of the Spirit, and the power of prayer. (Eph. 6:16)

Let us remember again the triumphant declaration of the Lord Jesus:

*(31) "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out." (ESV)*

Having spoken of Satan's imminent defeat, the Lord continues:

### **John 12:32**

In John chapter 3, verses 14 and 15, Jesus said to Nicodemus:

*(14) "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15 ESV)*

Now, as he anticipates the sufferings of the cross, the Lord reiterates this thought. Very soon now, Jesus would be lifted up from the earth. The Son of God would be raised upon a cross to endure God's wrath against sinners. Upon his own body, he would bear the sin of all God's people throughout the world. (Cf. John 8:28; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24)

No longer would God confine his salvation to the Jew and the Jewish nation alone. From now on, men and women of every nation would call upon his name for salvation. Indeed, wherever this Gospel was proclaimed, it would have the effect of drawing to Christ individuals from every tongue, tribe, people and nation; and from among every colour and creed of mankind. (Isa. 49:6; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9)

This Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes—to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. Everyone, therefore, whom the Spirit draws to the Son, will come to the Son; and whoever comes to him, he will never cast out. (Rom. 1:16; John 6:37)

In verse 33, John explains:

### **John 12:33**

The Lord declared that he was going to be lifted up; i.e., on a cross. Therefore, he knew that he would die at the hands of the Romans, not the Jews—although it was they primarily who were responsible for his death.

Crucifixion represented a Roman method of execution. Had the Jews succeeded in putting Jesus to death themselves, they would have done so by some other method, possibly, by stoning him—as later they did to Stephen.

In earlier centuries, God had commanded the people to execute those guilty of capital offences and then hang them on a tree. However, this was not the method of execution practised by the Jews in Jesus' time, nor would the Roman authorities have permitted them to execute anyone (legally). (Deut. 21:22-23)

### John 12:34

How easy it is to misunderstand or misinterpret God's Word without the guiding influence and illumination of the Holy Spirit! These Jews possessed the Word of God in the form of the Old Testament Scriptures. They knew what was written in these Scriptures concerning the Christ—or, at least, they thought they did.

However, these people had failed to consider all of God's Word concerning the Christ. They had chosen selected passages of God's Word. These particular passages spoke of the Messiah's everlasting kingdom and of his eternal reign over that kingdom. Yet, these people had failed to realise that the Scriptures were not speaking merely of an earthly and secular kingdom, but of a heavenly and spiritual kingdom. (Isa. 9:6-7; John 18:36; Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:12-14)

Again, these Jews selected those passages of Scripture that spoke of the unending victorious reign of the Messiah. They conveniently overlooked all those passages that spoke of his prior sufferings and death. Consequently, these people completely misunderstood the teaching of God's Word concerning the Messiah. Thus, they failed to see in Christ's sufferings the literal fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures. (Ps. 22:6-8; Isa. 52:14 - 53:12; Zech. 13:6-7)

Such misunderstandings are always a strong possibility when we select certain passages of God's Word to support our own point of view, but fail to consider other related passages. If we would understand God's truth properly, we must always compare Scripture with Scripture.

### John 12:35

The Jewish religious leaders claimed to know the Scriptures, yet clearly they had mistaken what these Scriptures said about the Christ. Unless a person knows God through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, that person cannot possibly understand God's Word properly. To know God, however, is to know the One whom God has sent. The Father sent his Son into this world to become its light and salvation. God sent his Son to enlighten all those who truly seek to know the truth about the Father. The Lord Jesus declares, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life*. (John 14:6) He alone is the Light and Life of the world. He alone reveals the truth concerning the Father. He is the one and only way to the Father. (John 8:12; 9:5; 14:6)

If anyone would really understand what the Scriptures are saying, then they must listen to the Lord Jesus' teaching—and believe it wholeheartedly. The light that, by his Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus sheds upon God's Word is the only true light—the only right interpretation of that Word. Therefore, Jesus exhorts the people crowding around him to walk in the light of his teaching. Only by doing so, would they begin to understand the truth. (John 12:46)

*(35a)...“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you...” (ESV)*

If these Jews were to heed the Lord's teaching, then they would come to know the truth; and the truth would set them free. The knowledge of God's truth would set them free from bondage to sin; free from bondage to man-made rules, regulations and traditions; free to see the truth as it is in Jesus, and free to love and serve the Lord God with a willing heart and mind.

However, if these Jews or any other groups or individuals, were to reject the Lord's teaching, then they would continue to walk in the darkness. This is the darkness of ignorance concerning the truth of God's Word, and the darkness of sin. (Heb. 3:7-12)

Ultimately, this darkness would overcome them. By their continued rejection of the truth, they would find themselves no longer susceptible to the truth. By rejecting the light when it was available to them, they would become lost in the darkness of unrighteousness and sin. They would become lost from the love, truth and fellowship of the Father. They would become lost in their sinful ways, and unable to determine which way to take. (Jer. 13:15-16; cf. Rom. 11:7-11)

Therefore, in the second part of verse 35, the Lord Jesus says:

*(35b) ...“Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 36, the Lord declares:

### **John 12:36**

These people claimed to know the *Scriptures of truth*, but they did not know the *truth of the Scriptures*. They said that they knew *the Word of God*, but they did not know *the God of the Word*. Therefore, if they really desired to know the truth, they must come to know the Lord Jesus—for he is the Truth. If they truly desired to understand the meaning of God’s Word properly, they must trust the Lord Jesus and accept his teaching. For it was the teaching of the Father: the very Word of God.

Now, however, these people had the opportunity to believe. Therefore, says the Lord Jesus to them:

*(36a) “While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light”... (ESV)*

Only through faith in Jesus—the Son of God—could these people come to know God. If, however, they were to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the Lord Jesus, and believe everything that the Son of God said to them, then they would become the heavenly Father’s children. Then, the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth—would guide them into all truth. Therefore, they would become both the children of God and the children of light. ‘Children of light’ are those people whose lives are characterised by righteousness, holiness and truth. (1 Thess. 5:4-10; Eph. 5:8-16; 1 John 2:8-11)

At this stage, the Lord Jesus took his leave of the crowd and sought out a place where they could not find him. He had brought to them the full message of eternal life. He had taught them all that was necessary to bring them to repentance and faith. Now, they must decide how they would respond to the truth. Those whom God had predestined from eternity would respond by faith, as the Holy Spirit regenerated them and granted them the ability to repent and believe—freely and willingly. Those, however, who preferred the darkness to the light, or who preferred to live the lie of hypocrisy instead of living according to truth and sincerity, or who chose a life of sin instead of righteousness, would remain under the wrath of God until the day of final judgment.

## **Jewish Leaders Profess Faith in Christ**

### **John 12:37-50**

#### **John 12:37**

Unbelief involves not only rejection of the truth, but also wilful rebellion against the truth. In this case, the truth is God’s Word. It is the truth of the testimony that God gave about his one and only Son. It is the truth of the Lord Jesus’ teachings and work—including his miracles. (1 John 5:9-12)

In spite of the clearest evidence to the contrary, these people refused to believe that Jesus' miracles proved him to be the Son of God. They refused to accept that no one but God could perform such miraculous signs. Indeed, in their desperate attempts to escape the conclusion to which all the evidence pointed some of them even tried to attribute Jesus' miraculous power to the power of Satan. (Matt. 12:24) Such was the perversity and depravity of the minds that wilfully rejected the truths of God's salvation, and spurned the grace of God. Terrible indeed will be the judgment awaiting them on the last day.

However dreadful it may be, this rejection of Jesus and his words was not by any means unexpected in the counsels of God. Indeed, it had long been prophesied in the Scriptures of truth.

To this end, the apostle John tells us in verse 38:

### John 12:38

*(38b) ...“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” {Isa. 53:1} (ESV)*

Hundreds of years earlier, the prophet Isaiah—inspired by the Holy Spirit—spoke of Israel's rejection of God's Word. No one—so it seemed—would believe the message of salvation. No one—or very few—would experience the LORD's power to save or to deliver from sin (the '*arm of the LORD*').

In verses 39 and 40, John continues:

### John 12:39-40

{Cf. Isa. 6:10}

This solemn passage goes a long way toward explaining why so many of the Jews rejected Jesus and refused to heed his words. They could not believe—i.e., they were *unable* to believe—because of God's righteous judgment upon them. (Rom. 9:18)

For a very long time, God had held out his hand to these people, and to their forefathers, inviting them to return to him in repentance and faith. However, instead of accepting God's offer of mercy, these people had refused—repeatedly and wilfully—to heed God's voice. They had despised, rejected and even killed God's prophets. Eventually, they had hardened their hearts against God and against his holy Word. (Ezek. 12:1-2)

In consequence of their repeated sin and rebellion, God acted in judgment. Initially, they had hardened their hearts against God. Ultimately, however, God had blinded their eyes (i.e., the eyes of their minds or their spiritual understanding) and deadened their hearts. As a result of God's judgment, they were no longer able to 'see' (or comprehend) the truth of God's Word, or to respond favourably to his message of grace and mercy. By their own repeated and wilful disobedience, they had brought upon themselves the just punishment of God. Now, they could not see; i.e., they could not understand the truth of God's Word.

Since they were now unable to understand the truth and so repent, they *could not* turn to God seeking his mercy. This happened to them, however, only because—previously—they *would not* turn to God seeking his mercy. (Isa. 6:9-10 with Luke 8:9-15; Acts 28:26-27; see also Rom. 11:7-10)

In consequence, therefore, of their repeated and wilful sin, these people found themselves unable to turn to the LORD, and to experience his healing hand upon their lives. In this dreadful situation, they were destined to remain, unless—in his grace and mercy—God decided to lift his just punishment, soften their impenitent and stubborn hearts, and draw them to himself. (Isa. 57:15-21; Jer. 3:21-22)

**John 12:41**

Although prophesying of the sufferings of God's Servant, Isaiah saw something of the glory that would follow. Although he prophesied of many who would reject the message of salvation, yet he saw also many others who would believe that message. (Heb. 1:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:11) Isaiah knew that God would judicially harden the hearts of those who proved wilfully stubborn and impenitent. The prophet knew also, however, that the Lord would show abundant mercy to all who—from a humble and contrite heart—called upon his name.

**John 12:42**

The Old Testament prophets had long foretold the people's rejection of God's suffering Servant, the Messiah. As can be seen from Isaiah, the prophets also foretold that God would punish the people by making their hearts and minds insensitive to the message of the Gospel. As we have seen, however, God did this only because of the people's earlier wilful and repeated rejection of his Word, and because of their shameful treatment of his messengers.

From verse 42, however, we learn that not everyone rejected the Gospel message. Many did profess faith in Christ. Among these, were a considerable number of Jewish leaders. Like many of the ordinary Jewish people, some of these Jewish leaders held to a genuine saving faith in God's Son. As we shall see shortly, however, not all of those professing faith in Christ possessed genuine saving faith. (Even so, at a later stage, many more Jewish leaders—principally, priests—joined the ranks of true believers. (Acts 6:7))

For at while at least, however, the Jewish leaders to whom reference is made in this passage concealed their faith in Christ.

From this, we learn that most of the leaders who professed faith in Christ did not belong to the party of the Pharisees. Probable exceptions to this were Nicodemus (a known Pharisee) and possibly Joseph of Arimathea. Both of these men were members of the influential and powerful ruling body of the Jews—the Sanhedrin. Some time later, these two would be joined by another former Pharisee, the apostle Paul. (John 3:2; 7:48-51; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50,51; Acts 23:6; 26:5)

Apart from these men, very few Pharisees joined the ranks of believers. Therefore, the majority of the other believing leaders must have been priests, teachers of the law (scribes) and rulers of the synagogue (such as Jairus). (Mark 5:22) These leaders, therefore, professed varying degrees of belief in Christ's teaching, but they greatly feared the adverse reaction of the powerful and influential Pharisees. They knew that if the Pharisees learned of their belief in Christ or his teachings, these Jewish leaders would be stripped immediately of their office. In addition, the Pharisees would ensure their expulsion from the synagogue, from the worship of God, and from the fellowship of those professing faith in God. (John 9:22)

At this time, of course, the New Testament church had yet to be formally established. Therefore, for the time being, the synagogue (and temple) remained the only recognised place of worship. Indeed, the Lord Jesus himself attended regularly local synagogues and the temple at Jerusalem.

As we shall see in the next verse, many of these 'believing' Jewish leaders possessed an ulterior motive for remaining in the synagogue or for maintaining their present religious offices. Others, however, may have had a completely different reason for not wanting to be expelled from the synagogue.

If these other Jewish leaders were put out of the synagogue, where could they meet to worship God? So far, no other means or place of worship had been divinely instituted or had received the divine sanction. Therefore, these believing leaders faced a great dilemma. They could believe on Christ secretly, and continue to attend the synagogue. Alternatively, they could confess their faith in Christ openly, and be cut off from all possibility of worshipping God in their local synagogue or at the temple in Jerusalem.

The next verse, however, reveals something of the true motives and character of many of these so-called believing Jewish leaders:

### John 12:43

These particular Jewish leaders were not so much thinking about how or where they might worship God if expelled from the synagogue. Rather, they were thinking about the loss of power, prestige and honour they would sustain as a result of their excommunication.

Many of these men gloried in their position as religious (or perhaps, civic) leaders of the community. To be deprived of their position—for whatever reason—would mean that the community would no longer afford to them the same degree of respect or honour to which they had become accustomed. (Matt. 23:5-7)

For many, this was too great a cost to pay. These individuals,

*(43) ...loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. (ESV)*

Therefore, in pursuit of their own selfish ends, they concealed their professed faith in Christ.

Clearly, of course, these professing Jewish leaders would need to decide between following Christ openly, and following their own interests. Those who later followed Christ openly—and many did—experienced great blessing in the midst of intense persecution. Those, however, who continued to cherish praise from men more than praise from God forfeited not only the spiritual blessings but any right to be regarded as a true follower of Christ (v.26).

Turning his attention again to the Lord Jesus, John writes in verse 44:

### John 12:44

Jesus cried out in a loud voice for all to hear. 'When a person believes on me, he does not believe in me only. He believes also in the one who sent me into this world; namely, my Father in heaven. (John 13:20) Of course, the converse is also true. If a man refuses to believe in me, he cannot possibly believe in the one who sent me. It is impossible to believe in the Father, without also believing in the Son. And it is impossible to come to God, except through faith in the Son.

'Therefore, I say to you,

*(44) ...“Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me.” (ESV)*

In verse 45, the Lord continues:

**John 12:45**

The Jews said (rightly) that there is only one God, and that God is one. This, most certainly, was true. God is indeed one, and there is no other God but he. (Mark 12:29,32) Nevertheless, this one true God consists of three divine Persons—yet, these three distinct Persons are one. Therefore, when an individual looks upon one, that individual effectively looks upon each of the others. When a person sees one, that person effectively sees each of the others. When an individual believes in any one Person of the Godhead, that individual believes in each of the others. (Matt. 28:19; John 14:9-11) However, it is impossible for anyone to believe in God the Father—or to be accepted by him—without also believing in God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Expressed differently, the attributes of the one true God are common to all Persons of the Godhead or Trinity. The Father possesses almighty and unlimited power. So also does the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Father knows the thoughts of everyone everywhere in the world. So also does the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Again, the Father's character is demonstrated by everlasting love, mercy, compassion, righteousness, holiness and truth. So also is the character of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, though there is but one God, this one God exists in three equally glorious and almighty Persons. (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3)

This is why the Lord Jesus said to the people:

*(45) "And whoever sees me sees him who sent me." (ESV)*

Those who have seen the Son have seen the Father. Those who have witnessed the Lord Jesus' power and glory are in fact witnessing the power and glory of God. Those, therefore, who accept the Son, accept the Father also (v.41 with Isa. 6:1-5).

Then, in verse 46, the Lord declares:

**John 12:46**

These great truths would forever remain a mystery to many of these Jews. This, however, was one of the reasons why the Son of God had come into this world. The Lord Jesus had come to enlighten men and women's spiritually darkened minds. He had come to shed light on all the great spiritual truths that are essential to any person's knowledge of God, and consequently to their eternal salvation. The Lord Jesus had come to reveal to the Jews—and to the Gentiles—the way of light and life (v.35-36; John 8:12).

That way is through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Only through believing in him—and receiving his teaching—would people understand the truth. Only by understanding the truth, would sinful men and women come to a true saving knowledge of God. Only in this way, could they experience forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Only through the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives, could they receive the gift of abundant and eternal life.

That is why I say:

*(46) "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." (ESV)*

### John 12:47

A person may hear the words of Christ or the Word of God, and yet utterly reject the truth that he hears. Such a person is already abiding under the wrath and condemnation of God. (John 3:17-21,36) The miseries that his sin and unbelief brings upon him forms part of God's judgment upon his sinful way of life. (Rom. 1:18-32)

Jesus, therefore, is not saying that unregenerate men and women are not presently being judged by God. What he *is* saying is that they have yet to face the final judgment. On that day, Christ himself will be their judge. That day, however, has not yet arrived. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(47) "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (ESV)*

In verse 48, the Lord continues:

### John 12:48

There is indeed a judge for all who reject the Son of God, and who refuse to accept his teaching. The very words that the Lord Jesus has spoken will be used in evidence against them on the last day. (Deut. 18:18-19; Heb. 12:24-29)

The Lord called them to repentance, but they refused to repent. For their refusal to repent, The Son of God will judge and condemn them. The Lord Jesus offered them the opportunity to believe in him, and they refused to believe. For their refusal to believe, Jesus, the Son of God, will judge and condemn them. The Lord Jesus offered them the words of life and showed them the way of salvation, but they rejected his gracious invitation. For their refusal to seek life and to accept the gift of salvation, the eternal Son of God will judge and condemn them.

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(48) "The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day." (ESV)*

### John 12:49

It were bad enough to reject man's word, when that man is speaking the truth. It is worse to reject the word spoken by a servant of God, when he is proclaiming the Word of God. However, it is an indescribably greater sin to reject the Word of the living God himself.

The Lord Jesus had not said anything to these Jews of his own accord. Every word that he had spoken to them reflected the mind and will of God.

The Son of God is also the Word of God—the eternal Logos. The Son is the one who expresses God's mind and will to all mankind. (John 1:1; 14:10) To refuse to heed the Son is to refuse to heed God. This is why these people's sin was so serious in God's eyes. This is why the Lord Jesus said to them:

*(49) "For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak." (ESV)*



In verse 50, the Lord continues:

**John 12:50**

There is no other way to eternal life except through heeding God's Word. However, everything that the Son had said to these people was the very Word of God; the very expression of the Father's mind and will concerning the salvation of lost men and women. If, therefore, these—or any other—people rejected Jesus' words (or teaching), they were in fact rejecting God's words, and with it the gift of eternal life. (1 John 5:11-12,21)



## John Chapter 13

### A Lesson in Humility

#### *(Jesus Washes his Disciples' Feet)*

#### **John 13:1-17**

#### **John 13:1**

The time had almost come for the Passover celebrations to begin, incorporating the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally, these were two distinct feasts occurring in immediate proximity to one another. However, at the time of which John is speaking, the *Passover* and *the Feast of Unleavened Bread* were considered as one feast, and the terms were used interchangeably.

Beginning with the Passover, the entire feast would last for eight days inclusive; i.e., from 14<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> Nisan (later extended by the inclusion of 'semi-holy' days).<sup>38</sup> We should bear in mind that the Jewish day began in the evening, and ran from sunset of one evening to sunset of the following evening. The paschal lamb itself was slain "between the two evenings" ("ben ha-'arbayim"); interpreted by the rabbis to mean "between afternoon and nightfall" of the Passover (14th Nisan; formerly, *Abib*). (Lev. 23:5) The remaining seven days constituted the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Lev. 23:6)

Until now, the Lord Jesus had declared repeatedly that his time had not yet come; i.e., the time when he would be glorified through his sufferings on the cross. This, however, was the very reason why the Father had sent his Son into the world; to glorify his name by accomplishing redemption for lost men and women. (John 8:20-28; 17:1)

In his death and subsequent resurrection, the Son of God would demonstrate something of the Father's love, mercy and compassion toward multitudes of people from among fallen mankind. At the same time, Christ's sufferings on the cross would reflect something of God's justice, righteousness and holiness, and of his wrath against sin. Taken together, these characteristics of God demonstrate something of his infinite glory. The glory of the Father, of course, is the same as the glory of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Following his sufferings, Jesus would return to his Father in heaven. There, his Father would exalt him to heavenly glory, bestowing upon him the name that is above every name. Christ would be supreme ruler and judge of all creation. (Phil. 2:9-11)

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<sup>38</sup> See online Jewish Encyclopaedia: [www.jewishencyclopedia.com/](http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/) under *Passover*.

## Expository Notes

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Therefore, John writes:

*(1b) ...when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father... (ESV)*

The apostle continues:

*(1c) ...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*

...*'his own'* are not just his immediate disciples but all those whom the Father had given to his Son from before the creation of the world. They—and they alone—constitute his sheep. They—and they alone—belong to his fold. (John 6:37,39; 17:2,6,9,24; 10:4,14,16,26-28)

...*'his own'* comprises all truly born-again believers throughout the world. These are his elect—his 'called out ones'. No others have any part or lot in the kingdom of God or of his Christ.

Now, Christ was about to show to *'his own'* the full extent of his love for them. He would do this by atoning for their sins on the cross, and rising again for their justification and sanctification. His love for them to the end is shown also by his constant intercession for his own at his Father's throne. Again, his love for his own is shown by the fact that he will preserve and protect them to the end; i.e., when he comes for them or calls them into his immediate and glorious presence.

Christ's love for his own was not to be confined to those believers living in his own day and age. At the cross, the Lord Jesus demonstrated the full extent of his love for *all* his own. This applies whether they lived in the generations before his incarnation, sufferings, death and resurrection, or in the generations after these momentous events.

### John 13:2

Bearing in mind the information provided by the Synoptic writers, this event probably occurred during supper (in the sense that the Lord and his disciples had just begun, or were about to begin, the Passover meal. (v.1)) However, some commentators believe that this was a distinct supper preceding the Passover meal itself, and one which may have been eaten 24 or even 48 hours in advance of the Passover.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> At this point, we should note that the Synoptic writers do not present these events in chronological order. According to Luke, Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper before Judas was unmasked as the betrayer. However, according to Matthew and Mark, the order of these events is reversed. Again, the information provided by John provides certain details omitted by the Synoptic writers, while the apostle John omits any reference to the institution of the Lord's supper—perhaps because this had already been covered in detail by the other three writers.

During the course of this supper (not, when it was ended), Satan put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot to fulfil his pledge to the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus. Judas, of course, had approached the religious leaders earlier, and they had agreed to pay this false disciple to betray the Lord Jesus when no crowd was present. (Matt. 26:14-16; Mark 14:10-11; Luke 22:3-6)

Satan had found a willing agent in Judas Iscariot. All along, Judas had not been true to Jesus. Jesus had numbered him among his disciples, but Judas had never been a true disciple of Christ. With the other disciples, Jesus had sent Judas to proclaim the word of the Lord, but the word of the Lord had never taken root in Judas' own heart and life.

Judas Iscariot had walked with the Lord and with Lord's people. However, he did not belong to the Lord, nor did the Lord ever count him as one of his own. This man had professed to be a follower of Christ, but his profession had been false. Judas was a thief and a hypocrite, and no unrepentant and unforgiven thief and hypocrite can ever enter God's kingdom. (Mark 14:18; John 6:70-71; 12:6)

Later, Jesus referred to Judas as '*the son of destruction*' (KJV, 'the son of perdition')—i.e., the man destined to perish eternally. Now, in his intention to betray Jesus, Judas showed himself in his true colours. He was not only a thief and a hypocrite, but also a traitor and a deceiver. (John 17:12) Although, outwardly, this man had experienced so much of God's love, mercy and grace, yet he despised God's grace, rejected his love and repudiated his mercy. By his own utter rejection and impenitence, then, Judas made himself 'the son of destruction' or 'the son of perdition'.

Concerning such apostates, the writer to the Hebrews says:

*(4) For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*

*(7) For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

*(Heb. 6:4-8 ESV)*

Again, this writer says:

*(26) For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

*(28) Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. (29) How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

*(30) For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." {Deut. 32:35} And again, "The Lord will judge his people." {Deut. 32:36; Ps. 135:14}*

*(31) It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

*(Heb. 10:26-31 ESV)*

### John 13:3

Jesus was (and is) the divine Son of God. The Father has committed to his Son all power in heaven and on earth. Jesus was and is the Creator and Ruler over all creation, and all creation remains subject to his sovereign power and authority. This was Jesus in his glory. This was he whom the Father had sent into the world. (Matt. 11:27; 28:18; John 3:35; 5:22-23; 17:2)

While in the world, however, the Lord had veiled his glory—although he ever remained the divine Son of God. For a time, the Lord Jesus had assumed the form of a servant. Now, however, he was about to return to his Father. (Phil. 2:6-8) Upon returning to God in heaven, the Father would exalt the Lord Jesus to occupy that place which is far above all others; i.e., Supreme Ruler over all creation. (Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:2-4)

Jesus knew the full extent of his glorious majesty and power. He knew the glory that awaited him in his Father's presence. He knew that he was above all others, and that all power in heaven and on earth was his. Even so, before he leaves this world, the Lord of Glory prepares to perform one final act of humility and menial service.

Thus, in verses 4 and 5, the apostle John writes:

### John 13:4-5

Herein lay another example of the Lord's act of supreme humility. Already, the Son of God had laid aside the fullness of his glory to assume the form of a servant. Now, he performs the task of the most menial servant of the household. He washes his disciples' feet, and dries them with the towel wrapped around him.

So intense was Christ's love for his own, that he humbles himself to the position of a domestic servant or even a slave. Thus, he provides an example for each one of us to follow. Though he was the Son of God and the King of Glory, yet he did not lay claim to his glory, honour or supremacy. On the contrary, he treated others as better than himself—although, of course, no-one could begin to approach his holy, righteous and sinless character. Although they were immeasurably inferior to himself, the Lord Jesus humbled himself for his disciples. How much more ought his disciples to humble themselves for their Lord—and for one another? (Luke 12:35-37; 22:27)

### John 13:6

The disciples must have been greatly ashamed when they realised what Jesus was about to do. He—their Lord and Master—was about to perform the service of a servant or slave toward them. They—his disciples—ought to have assumed the servant's position in order to wash the feet of their Sovereign Lord. None, however, had volunteered to perform this necessary and customary service. Jesus, it seems, was the only one among them who did not consider himself above performing menial tasks. Rather, he humbled himself to minister to the needs of his servants, the disciples.

For Peter, however, this act of humility by his Lord and Master caused him a great deal of embarrassment. Therefore, John says:

*(6) He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?"  
(ESV)*

'Not my feet Lord! It is not fitting that you, my Lord and Master, should stoop to washing your servant's feet; especially not the feet of this unworthy servant!' (Cf. Luke 5:8)

By now, Peter must have felt very guilty. He was the spokesman for the Twelve. Yet, he had neither requested any of the other disciples to wash his Master's feet, nor had he done so himself.

Therefore, Peter expostulates:

(6b)...*"Lord, do you wash my feet?"*

### John 13:7

Along with all the other disciples of the Lord Jesus, Peter needed to learn a particular lesson. Jesus was about to perform one act of menial service toward his followers. However, the Lord was not merely laying stress on the importance of this one act. Rather, by this one act, he was emphasising the general principle of humility and willing servitude toward others. In many other ways, the followers of the Lord could show humility, patience, love and servitude. This was the example the Lord intended to set before his disciples—as becomes apparent from comparing other related passages of God's Word.

We can see this principle further exemplified on the occasion when the disciples' questioned whom among them should be considered as the greatest. (Luke 22:24) To this question, the Lord replied:

(25) ... *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. (26) But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. (27) For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves."*

(Luke 22:25-27 ESV)

Peter, however, remains adamant:

### John 13:8

'Absolutely not, declares the apostle. I will never, ever permit you to wash my feet! It would be most unbecoming for you—the Lord of All—to stoop to wash my feet!' (Cf. Matt. 16:22-23)

Clearly, Peter had not understood what the Lord had been saying to him. Nor had he realised that this one act of humility merely typified that immense act of humility performed by our Lord when he left heaven's glory to assume the form of a servant. All this had escaped Peter's understanding. Later, however, these matters would become much clearer to him and to the other apostles. Nevertheless, for the time being, Peter remained adamant that he would not allow Jesus to wash his feet.

'I am your Sovereign Lord and Master. As such, you are not at liberty to refuse the service I offer. If you refuse my ministry toward you, this would amount to wilful disobedience and rebellion. And, if guilty of such sins, you can have no part with me—no share or inheritance in the kingdom of God.'

Perhaps, too, the Lord was alluding to another form of cleansing in which Peter must share a part—the cleansing of his soul. If Peter lacked the humility to accept *physical* cleansing at the hands of the Lord Jesus, then it is probable that he would lack the humility to accept the free gift of *moral and spiritual* cleansing from these same gracious hands. Without spiritual cleansing, however—cleansing in the atoning blood—then indeed Peter could have no part in the kingdom of God. (Cf. Ezek. 36:25-27; Zech. 13:1; Titus 3:5; Heb. 9:22; 10:22)

### John 13:9

Realising for the first time the full significance of Jesus' remarks, Peter cries out for the Lord to make him wholly clean. Not content with the cleansing of his feet alone, the apostle appeals to the Lord to cleanse his hands and head as well.

In effect, we might see this as an appeal to cleanse his *thoughts and words* (his head), his *actions* (his hands) and his *walk* (his feet). In any event, Peter wanted to be united with his Lord and Master. Now, he realises that—to be *united with* Christ—he must first be *cleansed by* Christ. (Ps. 26:6; Matt. 27:24; John 15:3-6)

Therefore, Peter cries out to his Lord:

(9)...“*Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!*” (ESV)

### John 13:10

Those who had bathed recently did not need to bathe again. It was sufficient that their feet be washed to cleanse them from the dirt and pollution of the streets. Potentially and spiritually, Peter had been bathed already; i.e., he had been washed, cleansed and sanctified by the Spirit and the Word. Effectively, then, his whole body was clean. (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26-27) However, although the apostle had been cleansed or justified once-for-all (looking forward to the cross and resurrection), it is necessary that he be continuously sanctified. By this means, Peter—and all other followers of the Lord Jesus—would receive cleansing daily and hourly from ongoing sin and pollution. (1 John 1:7-9)

Foot washing typifies the cleansing of a believer's daily walk with God. It is not necessary for their whole body to be washed again. This was done once-for-all when they were justified. Therefore, their whole body (including heart or mind and soul) is clean already.

The Lord observes that not every one of his followers was clean; i.e., morally and spiritually clean. One of the disciples had never been 'washed'. He had never experienced spiritual regeneration, justification or sanctification. The Spirit and the Word had never cleansed him, nor would he receive cleansing in the atoning blood.

Therefore, the Lord declares:

(10c) “*...And you<sup>40</sup> are clean, but not every one of you.*” (ESV)

### John 13:11

Jesus, of course, knew full well that a traitor was in their midst. The Lord knew that Satan had put it into the heart (or mind) of Judas Iscariot to betray him (v.2). He knew that the unregenerate and unsanctified Judas had consented willingly to Satan's evil suggestion. Jesus knew that Judas had arranged earlier with the Jewish religious authorities to betray

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<sup>40</sup> **13:10** The Greek words for *you* in this verse are plural [ESV footnote]



him; and that—even now—this so-called disciple was waiting for an opportune moment to commit this foul treachery. (vv.18,21,26; John 6:64,70-71).

Therefore, John writes:

*(11) For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." (ESV)*

In verse 12, John continues:

### **John 13:12-15**

‘Do you understand the significance of this act? Rightly, you address me as your Teacher and Lord—for so I am. I am the one who exercises sovereign control over all creation. You are part of my creation. You are my servants—servants who ought always to wait on their Lord, and obey his every command. However, although—as your Teacher and Lord—I stand far above you, yet I have stooped down to wash your feet. I hold in my hands your life, your breath—your very existence. Yet, I have brought myself down to the level of my creation—and even to the level of a servant—in order to minister to your needs. (1 Cor. 8:6; 2 Cor. 8:9)

‘If I, therefore, so serve you, so you also ought to serve one another. If I—the Lord of All—am prepared to wash my servant’s feet, my servants ought to assume this kind of humility in ministering to one another’s needs—whatever the nature of the task.’

Then, in verse 16, Jesus continues:

### **John 13:16**

(Cf. Matt. 10:24-25; Luke 6:40; John 15:20)

Very soon, now, the Lord’s disciples would be charged with a great responsibility. As Christ’s apostles and ambassadors, they would be appointed to proclaim the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles from among every nation on earth, to lead, guide and pastor the early church, and to exercise church discipline. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 15:22-29; Gal. 2:9; 2 Cor. 10:6)

Although, at present, they were unaware of it, a task of immense proportions lay ahead of the Lord’s disciples. Granted, at Pentecost, the Lord would fill them with his promised Holy Spirit. In the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles would guide, teach and pastor the church of the living God. (John 14:26; Acts 2:1-11)

Because of their privileged and responsible position, however, in course of time, some of these apostles of the Lord Jesus might be tempted to usurp their place within the church. As recognised church leaders, one or more of them might be tempted to assume a domineering or controlling influence in the church. This, of course, had been strictly forbidden by the Lord Jesus himself, and later by the apostle Peter. (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3)

From the very outset, therefore, the Lord teaches his disciples this lesson in humility and servitude (demonstrated by the washing of his disciples' feet). By this act, the Lord makes plain to all his followers that even those considered the most senior or the most important among them, are still servants. As such, they must still be prepared to serve others in love and humility—a love and humility springing from a caring and contrite heart. (Phil. 2:1-5) If Christ so expressed love and humility, so must they.

To this end, therefore, the Lord reminds them:

*(16) "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant<sup>41</sup> is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 17, the Lord adds:

### **John 13:17**

Now that the disciples realised and understood the truth of this principle, they would experience great happiness or blessing by applying this principle. If, in their service to others, they showed genuine love and deep humility, then their service toward them would be greatly blessed. God in heaven would take note of their gentle unassuming spirit, and he would reward his humble and faithful servants for what they had done.

## **Jesus Identifies His Betrayer**

### **John 13:18-30**

In verses 10 and 11, John had written:

*(10) Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet,<sup>42</sup> but is completely clean. And you<sup>43</sup> are clean, but not every one of you." (11) For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." (John 13:10-11 ESV)*

Now, about his betrayal, the Lord declares in verse 18:

### **John 13:18**

{Cf. Ps. 41:9}

The Lord Jesus was not speaking of every one of his disciples, then gathered in the upper room. Jesus was referring only to one individual in their midst. The Lord knew those whom he had chosen to eternal life. However, this one individual of whom he spoke had

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<sup>41</sup> **13:16** Greek *bondservant* [ESV footnote]

<sup>42</sup> **13:10** Some manuscripts omit *except for his feet* [ESV footnote]

<sup>43</sup> **13:10** The Greek words for *you* in this verse are plural [ESV footnote]

no spiritual or eternal life in him. (John 6:70-71) Yes, the Lord Jesus chose this man to be one of the Twelve. In all the time that he spent with Jesus, he had opportunity to seek life through repentance and faith in the Son of God. He failed to do so, however. On the contrary, he sought only to pursue to own evil desires—for he was a thief. (Matt. 10:1-4) And does not the thief come *only to steal, and kill, and destroy?* (John 10:10)

Although, therefore, Jesus chose this man as one of the Twelve, the Lord did not choose him to inherit salvation and eternal life. Rather, by his own impenitence, he had chosen for himself the way of death and destruction. (John 17:12)

In Psalm 41 verse 9, David says:

*(9) Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. (Ps. 41:9 ESV)*

(We should note that, in his quotation of this verse in John 13:18, the Lord Jesus omits the first phrases: i.e., *Even my close friend in whom I trusted...*)

He who walked in close fellowship with the Lord Jesus, later betrayed the holy Son of God. He who ate with the Lord, and enjoyed communion with him, turned completely against the spotless Lamb of God's appointing. The Lord's companion (so-called) had lifted up his heel against the sinless Saviour. Those who despised and rejected the Lord Jesus, accused him openly to his face. Judas Iscariot, however, had conspired secretly to betray the Lord behind his back. (Acts 1:17)

Although Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray him, yet Judas is no less blameworthy for his heinous crime. His was an act of gross betrayal, perpetrated willfully, maliciously and inexcusably against the holy and innocent Son of God. Judas must be judged as a fully responsible and accountable human being. The fact that Satan put the thoughts of betrayal into Judas' mind in no way excuses his crime or mitigates his guilt. Judas *chose deliberately* to confer with the Jewish religious leaders, specifically in order to betray the Lord Jesus for a price—and for this act of treachery alone he was wholly responsible and totally inexcusable. (Matt. 26:14-16,47; Acts 1:18; Jas. 1:13-15)

In verse 19, the Lord continues:

### **John 13:19**

The Lord Jesus was telling his disciples this now, so that they would not be surprised or shocked when it happened. Rather, the other disciples would be more prepared for the fact that not everyone who followed the Lord belongs to the Lord. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus was telling them this now, so that his disciples would know that he had been fully aware of all these things beforehand. (Cf. John 14:28-29)

If, however, the Lord was fully aware of all these things before they happened, then this ought to convince his disciples that Jesus was whom he claimed to be—the Son of God, and the promised Messiah (or Christ). When, therefore, they saw all these things happen as the Lord had told them, this ought to confirm their faith in the Son—the 'I Am' or Eternal One of God. (Cf. John 8:58; see also Isa. 43:10-11)

Then, in verse 20, the Lord says:

### **John 13:20**

At this point, Jesus directs his attention to the other eleven disciples.

Soon, the Lord Jesus would be sending his disciples out into the world with the commission to preach the Gospel to all nations. Therefore, they must not allow their Master's im-

minent betrayal by one of their number to alarm or dismay them. When the Lord sends them out to preach and teach in his name, the betrayer would no longer be counted among their number. The remainder of the Twelve, however, were the Lord's true disciples, and to all his true disciples the Lord Jesus says most solemnly:

(20) “...whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” (ESV)

The Son of God was about to send his apostles into the world with the message of eternal salvation. Anyone who welcomed and accepted their message, was—in effect—welcoming and accepting the one of whom the Gospel message spoke; viz., the Lord Jesus himself. Moreover, whoever accepted the Lord Jesus, accepted the one who sent him; i.e., his Father in heaven. (Matt. 10:40-42; 25:40; Luke 10:16; John 12:44-45)

### John 13:21

Once again, the Lord Jesus returns to the subject of his imminent betrayal. Now, he is greatly troubled inwardly—troubled, probably, that one of the Twelve should betray him. Had someone else betrayed him, this would not have caused the Lord so much grief and sorrow. However, Jesus grieved deeply over the fact that the traitor was one who ate and drank with them. He was one who had followed them for the past three-and-a-half years, and one whom the Lord himself had chosen. Here we see the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility acting together.

Because, therefore, one of his own followers was about to betray him into the hands of sinful men, Jesus expressly declares:

(21b)...“Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” (ESV)

Not an outsider; not a stranger, but *one of you*—one who walked with the Lord.

### John 13:22

Naturally, eleven of the twelve disciples must have received this news with astonishment, and they must also have greatly alarmed and distressed on hearing Jesus' voice these solemn remarks. Who among this close-knit fellowship could possibly think of doing such a thing? Which of their own number could possibly contemplate such a vile and wicked deed? Had they not all been followers of Jesus from the very beginning? Had they not all believed on him, and committed themselves to his teaching? How, then, could they now betray him? They believed that Jesus was the promised Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of God. Surely not one among them could ever consider betraying the Holy One of God! (Matt. 16:13-16)

How wrong they were! Even now, one among them was waiting for an opportune moment to sell the Son of God!

### John 13:23

This is generally considered to be the apostle John, the writer of this Gospel. At the table, John was reclining next to the Lord Jesus. (Cf. John 19:26-27; 21:20-21)

### John 13:24

Like the other disciples, the apostle Peter was disturbed and alarmed by Jesus' remarks. Observing, therefore, that John was reclining beside his Master, Peter signals to John to ask Jesus which of the Twelve was going to betray him.

**John 13:25-26**

In response to Peter's signal, John leant closer (lit., *fell back*) to Jesus to ask him, "*Lord, who is it?*"

For the first time, the Lord identifies the betrayer in their midst. Taking a piece of bread—by which he shared fellowship with his disciples—he dipped it into the dish. Then, he handed the bread to Judas Iscariot. Now, the Lord had indicated plainly that Judas was the traitor. Now, Judas realised that Jesus had exposed him for the man he was.

In verse 27, John writes:

**John 13:27**

Judas, at this point, had not decided for the first time to betray Jesus. He had already planned to do this—as verse 2 above reveals. (See also Luke 22:3; John 6:70) However, at this point, Judas realised that his wicked plan had been uncovered. He was no longer safe in the company of the Lord's disciples. Overcome by the prompting of Satan, Judas Iscariot decided that the time had now come for him to implement his wicked plan. (Cf. Acts 5:3)

None of these events had taken the Lord Jesus by surprise. From the beginning, the Lord had been fully aware that Judas Iscariot was a child of the devil (John 6:70), and also of Judas' evil intentions to betray him. Therefore, now that the Lord had exposed the betrayer, the Son of God commanded him to proceed quickly with his evil designs.

The outcome, however, would not be in accordance with the plans and purposes of evil men—except insofar as God permitted. Rather, the outcome of Judas' betrayal would be in accordance with the eternal plans and purposes of the Almighty Sovereign God. Nevertheless, both Judas Iscariot and the Jewish religious leaders would remain wholly accountable and responsible to God for their deliberate and willing participation in this most vile act of treachery and violence against the holy Son of God.

**John 13:28-29**

Still stunned and shocked by the news that a betrayer was in their midst, the eleven remaining disciples could not fully understand what Jesus was now saying. Confused by the shock announcement of imminent treachery, and unable to believe the truth, the disciples sought desperately for a reason why Jesus had told Judas to act quickly. (John 12:5-6; cf. Gal. 2:10)

As Judas was the treasurer, some of the disciples assumed that the Lord Jesus was telling him to use some of their money to buy all that was necessary for the feast; i.e., the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which would occupy a seven-day period immediately following the Passover (making a total of eight days).

Again, some of Jesus' disciples thought that the Lord was instructing Judas to provide some of their money to meet the needs of the poor. Since they had not heard what Jesus had said to John, most of the disciples had not realised the significance of the bread being dipped in the dish and then handed to Judas. Indeed, in keeping with oriental custom, they would have assumed this act to have been an act of fellowship. Therefore, when the Lord commanded Judas to go his way, it is probable at this stage that the remaining disciples (except John) would not have realised what Judas was about to do.

### John 13:30

Now, Judas assumes his true identity: He went out—into the darkness of the night. Judas rejected spiritual light to walk forever in spiritual darkness—darkness leading to his eternal perdition. (Cf. Job 24:13-14; Jude 1:13)

How dark is the night for those who once were exposed to the light, who heard the truth, who learned the way of salvation, who were in full possession of the facts concerning the Lord Jesus Christ's mission to the world, and yet who ultimately despise the truth and reject the light. To have experienced such immeasurable privileges, and yet to have spurned wilfully and wickedly the grace of God, leaves a person with no alternative but to bring upon himself a state of permanent spiritual darkness, involving his insensitivity to (or hardening against) all further matters relating to the truth of God, and resulting in his complete and final impenitence. The destiny for all such can only be as the Scriptures clearly foretell: eternal punishment in hell, suffering justly for their vile sins and iniquities at the hands the Most Holy and Righteous God, and of the Lamb upon his throne. (Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31; Rev. 6:15-17; 14:4)

### Jesus Speaks of His Glorification

#### John 13:31-38

##### John 13:31-32

Now, the time had come for the Father to glorify his Son. Now, the moment had arrived when the Lord Jesus would honour, praise and glorify his Father's name and his own name through completing the work of redemption. Now, the time had come for the Lord Jesus to lay down his life voluntarily, making atonement for sinful men and women. (John 17:1-5)

Through this great work—the work of redemption—God's name would be glorified. The sins of the ages would be dealt with once-for-all in the Person of the holy, spotless Redeemer. Throughout the world, lost men and women would turn to seek the Lord, finding in him a full and free salvation. (John 12:23-24; Acts 3:13; Eph. 1:12; Rev. 5:9-13)

Christ's work on earth, therefore, was about to reach its climax and conclusion on the cross. Very soon, now, the Lord would offer up his life a perfect sacrifice for sin. (Heb. 1:3-4)

In verse 33, the Lord continues:

*(32) "If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once." (ESV)*

##### John 13:33

Knowing his time is short, the Lord addresses his still shaken disciples. Yes, it was true that he would be leaving them very soon now. However, as he would reveal shortly, he would not be leaving them alone. (John 16:16-22)

Even so, Jesus' disciples could not understand the reason for his leaving them, or for his death. Although the Lord had told them of his coming death and resurrection on a number of previous occasions, they had failed to appreciate what this involved. (Mark 8:31; Luke 18:31-34) The Lord knew that his disciples would look for him. He knew too that they would not be able to follow him—at least, not at this stage. Firstly, the Lord must return to his Father. Then, he must prepare a place for them.

Meanwhile, however, Jesus has been preparing a great work for his disciples, and preparing his disciples for this great work—the task of evangelising the nations. (John 14:2-3; Matt. 28:18-20)

In verse 34, the Lord continues:

#### **John 13:34**

The apostles were soon to receive the Great Commission. They were to exercise this commission, however, from a heart of love. The followers of the Lord Jesus were to be characterised by love—love for one another, and love for lost men and women.

This was to be true spiritual love. It was to be the same kind of love that Jesus expressed toward each one of them. It was to be the same kind of love that the Father expressed toward his Son, and toward the world of lost mankind. (John 3:16) This was to be a pure, holy, spiritual and practical love—a love that expressed itself by what it did for others. This is the kind of love God has for us, and that Jesus has for his people. (John 15:12-13,17; Rom. 12:10; 1 Cor. 13:4-8,13)

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(34b) "...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (ESV)*

'You must show to one another the same *kind* of love that I have shown to you—a pure and holy love. To the limits of your finite being, you must also show to one another the same *degree* of love that I have shown to you—an intense and unremitting love.' (1 Pet. 1:22)

In verse 35, John writes:

#### **John 13:35**

This would be the sign that these were the Lord's disciples: they would be known as his by the quality and intensity of the love that they showed toward one another. The world knows nothing of this kind of love. This is the love that comes down from God above; i.e., from the heavenly Father. This is that love which the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts. This is that love which is the fruit of the Spirit, and which is accompanied by deep joy and inward peace. This is the love that is the evidence in our lives that the Spirit of God indwells us. (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22)

Of these things, the world knows nothing. Therefore, the world cannot experience this kind of love. When, however, the world sees this kind of love in the Lord's followers, they will know that this is indeed the love of God, and not just human love—intense as this may be at times.

#### **John 13:36**

Peter, it seems, was thinking more about Jesus' remarks concerning his departure, than about the command that he had just given his disciples to love one another. Unable to understand the significance of the Lord's remarks, Peter asks him directly,

*(36a)..."Lord, where are you going?"... (ESV)*

Once again, Jesus explains to this disciple that he cannot follow him now. Later, he will follow. At present, however, Jesus' task on earth is almost finished. Very soon, he will return to his Father's glory in heaven. The task of the apostles, however, is just about to begin. Only after the completion of their work on earth, will Peter and the other apostles follow their Master to glory. (John 21:18-19; 2 Pet. 1:13-14)

Peter, however, completely fails to comprehend the import of Jesus' words. Therefore, in verse 37, John writes:

### John 13:37

Clearly, Peter believed that the Lord was speaking about going to a different part of the country, perhaps to hide himself from those Jews who were seeking to take his life. 'However, if this is so' (the apostle might have reasoned), 'why cannot we go with him? Why should the other apostles and I be left behind on this occasion? We have followed Jesus for the past three-and-a-half years. Why would the Lord abandon us now?'

In desperation, Peter attempts to express something of his intense devotion for his beloved Lord and Saviour:

*(37)...“Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.”  
(ESV)*

'Lord, I would do anything for you. If need be, I will sacrifice my life to protect you. While I am with you, no one will be able to lay a finger on you, or harm you in any way. I will stand by you always—even unto death.'

### John 13:38

The Lord knew Peter's heart better than he knew it himself. For all his ardent zeal and fervent devotion, Peter would prove false to his promise. The apostle fully intended to stand by his Master to the very last. However, when exposed to personal danger, his courage would fail. He would deny and forsake the Lord whom he loved. (Prov. 16:18)

Jesus, of course, knew exactly how Peter would react under pressure. He knew too—that in the crises of the moment—this apostle would deny all knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. (Luke 22:31-34,56-62)

Therefore, Jesus declares,

*(38)...“Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.” (ESV)*

But they who fail their Lord on some occasions, are not necessarily disqualified by their Lord from future service. As Peter's case ultimately shows, those who repent of their momentary failure, the Lord restores to walk again with him and to serve him where he wills.



## John Chapter 14

### Jesus Goes to Prepare A Place

#### *John 14:1-4*

#### **John 14:1**

Two matters in particular greatly alarmed Jesus' disciples:

- The Lord had told them that he was about to leave them, and that they would not be able to follow him at present.
- He had exposed one of the Twelve as a traitor to his cause, and a betrayer of his person.

The remaining eleven disciples must have felt shattered to realise that—very soon—they would not see Jesus again. They must have been greatly distressed too, to discover that one of their own number did not really belong to Christ. Although he had followed Christ for the last few years, and had preached and worked miracles in the name of the Lord, yet Judas was not one of Christ's sheep. These circumstances left the disciples in a state of turmoil and distress. Jesus, of course, knew how deeply troubled their minds had become. Therefore, the Lord says to them:

(1) *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God;<sup>44</sup> believe also in me."*  
(ESV)

The Lord Jesus exhorts his disciples not to let these events overwhelm them with distress and anxiety or with sorrow and grief. They were to continue to believe in him. They were to trust in God, for he was their heavenly Father. Their heavenly Father would never fail them in their hour of need. They were their heavenly Father's children, and he would protect and deliver them from all harm (to their souls)—for they were precious in his sight. (Ps. 72:14; Isa. 43:4)

Their Father in heaven loves each one of his children with an everlasting love. He will not therefore let them go, or suffer them to be snatched from his hand. They are his—and his they will remain for all the ages of eternity. Therefore, Jesus says to his bewildered disciples, *"Believe in God..."* (v.1; Jer. 31:3)

(1b) *"...Believe in God;<sup>44</sup> believe also in me."*

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<sup>44</sup> **14:1** Or *You believe in God* [ESV footnote]

Although he is the eternal Son of God, yet Jesus had come to be their Lord and Redeemer. The Son of God had come into this world that his followers might have life through faith in him. Therefore, his disciples were to continue to believe in him. They were to believe wholeheartedly that the Lord would never leave them nor forsake them. Yes, at present, Jesus must leave his disciples—but he would send them the Helper or Counselor to be with them for ever. It was true that the Lord must leave this present location, but only to conclude the work of redemption and to intercede for his people in heaven. (John 16:6-7; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25)

Although, therefore, the Lord Jesus must leave his disciples, he would return to them in the person of his Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Therefore, the disciples were not to permit any distressing circumstances or upsetting news, cause their faith in the Lord Jesus to waver or to deprive them of their peace with God (v.27; Isa. 26:3-4).

Therefore, the Lord declared:

(1) *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God,<sup>44</sup> believe also in me.”*

Yet, there was another reason why the Lord Jesus must leave his followers for the present:

### John 14:2

Jesus had just comforted and reassured his distressed disciples. Now, the Lord begins to explain to them why he must leave them. Firstly, however, he describes to them something of his Father’s dwelling place. Jesus likens his Father’s dwelling to a house: a magnificent mansion in the heavens. Unlike a tent or tabernacle, which is temporary, a house speaks of that which is permanent. The Father’s house endures throughout the eternal ages. This is his permanent dwelling place: the place where his glory and his goodness are always being revealed. (Isa. 6:1-3)

The Father’s house, or abode, is the place where all the holy angels dwell, and where all the redeemed of the Lord will abide forever in perfect peace and rest. (Dan. 7:10; 2 Cor. 5:1) In this house, are many individual rooms (lit. *many dwelling places*). In the ESV and NIV etc., this word is rendered *‘rooms’*, and in the KJV, it is rendered *‘mansions’* (from an old word meaning *‘abiding places’*). The emphasis, however, is not on the nature or composition of the heavenly *‘building’*, but on its permanence as a dwelling place. It is an eternal rest for the people of God. (Cf. Heb. 4:9-11; 11:14-16; 13:14)

Thus, inferred the Lord Jesus: ‘I am not misleading you concerning these things. I am not telling you that there is only one room in my Father’s house, and that that room has been set aside for me. On the contrary, there are many rooms in my Father’s house.

‘These rooms have been set aside—not for me (who eternally occupies my Father’s glorious throne)—but for all those whom the Father has given me. This is the solemn truth. If this were not so, I would have told you otherwise. However, on previous occasions, I told you that—at the last day—I would raise to life everyone who believed on me.

‘This, then, is one of the reasons why I must leave you and return to my Father. I go to heaven to prepare a place for you. I go to set aside these glorious heavenly dwelling places for every one of my sheep. Every one of my redeemed people will inherit a permanent place in my Father’s house.

(2b) *“...If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (ESV)*

**John 14:3**

It was certain that the Son of God would return soon to his Father's presence. It was just as certain that Jesus was going there to prepare a place for the disciples, and indeed for all his redeemed and holy people. However, since the Lord was going there to make ready a dwelling place for his own, then it follows that he will return one day to take them to himself. (Acts 1:11) Then, they will be with him where he is. Then, they will share with him in the glory of his Father. Then, the disciples and all of God's redeemed people, will participate in the heavenly inheritance laid up for them in glory. (Matt. 25:34; Rom. 8:17; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 1:4)

Many of the Lord's people would fall asleep in Jesus before the Lord's Second Coming. However, the immortal souls of those who die in the Lord are taken immediately into his presence. Those remaining alive at the Lord's coming in glory, will be caught up to meet their Lord in the air; together with the resurrected bodies of all those who have already died in Christ. Then, the bodies and souls of the resurrected saints will be reunited for ever. (2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 4:13-18)

Therefore, Jesus says

(3) *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* (ESV)

Then, in verse 4, the Lord adds:

**John 14:4**

The Lord had taught his disciples many things concerning the Father, and about the way to the Father. Among many other things, he had told them that he was the door or gate: the only means of access to his Father's kingdom. (John 10:7-9)

The Lord had told his disciples much about the kingdom of heaven, and about the necessity of entering God's eternal kingdom through repentance and faith in him. He had emphasised that—apart from himself—there was no other means of access to God's heavenly kingdom. (John 3:15-18; 6:27,40) However, the Lord Jesus infers to his disciples, 'You all know the way into that kingdom. You know the way to my Father's home on high.' (Cf. Matt. 13:10-11; John 6:68-69)

Therefore, Jesus says:

(4) *"And you know the way to where I am going."*<sup>45</sup> (ESV)

**The Way, The Truth and The Life****John 14:5-7**

<sup>45</sup> 14:4 Some manuscripts *Where I am going you know, and the way you know* [ESV footnote]

Some of the Lord's disciples, however, apparently failed to understand what Jesus had been teaching them:

### John 14:5

Thomas, it seems, was at a loss to know what the Lord was talking about. The Lord had not expressly told them where he was going, so how could they know the way?

In fact, the Lord had told his disciples on a number of occasions that he must suffer at the hands of sinful men, be rejected, put to death, and that he would rise again on the third day. (Matt. 20:19; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33) He had told them that he must finish his work, and that he must return to his Father. He had also told them that the only way of approach to the Father was through believing in the Son. (Matt. 16:21) The disciples, therefore, should have known the way. They should have understood that the Lord was even now speaking to them about returning to the Father. Jesus had just said that he was going to prepare a place for them, but still they did not understand the significance of the Lord's words. (Cf. Luke 24:25-27)

How slow we are, at times, to understand what the Lord is saying to us! How often do we miss spiritual blessings because we fail to believe the promises of God; or we fail to believe that God's promises apply to us in our present situation. Let us never doubt the Lord's ability or willingness to bestow his blessings upon us, or to help us in our time of need. God is faithful to all his promises, and he will never fail to meet us according to our needs.

### John 14:6

*(6a) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..." (ESV)*

*"I am..."* This is a solemn and emphatic expression; it is one of seven "I am" expressions in the Gospels.

*"I am the way..."* Jesus is *the way*. He is the one and only way to God and to heaven. It is impossible to enter the kingdom of heaven or to find acceptance by the Father in heaven, except through his own appointed way. That way is Jesus Christ, his one and only Son. (Matt. 11:27-30)

*"I am...the truth..."* Jesus is *the truth*. He is the one and only truth about God. Concerning salvation and godly living, no other source of truth exists. No one else in all creation is able to reveal the truth about God, except his one and only Son. Through faith in, and obedience to, this truth alone, a person finds his way to God.

*"I am...the life..."* Jesus is *the life*. He is the Source and Giver of abundant and eternal life. Eternal life can come to a person only as a result of his sins being forgiven. Jesus Christ alone provided the necessary sacrifice of atonement for a believer's sins, thereby securing his reconciliation with God.

God grants eternal life to all who believe on his Son—and there are no exceptions. However, God never grants eternal life to those who neglect or reject his Son, or who disbelieve or doubt his message. On the contrary, by their wilful unbelief and disobedience, those people remain continually under God's wrath. (John 3:36)

From this it is clear that no-one can approach the Father except by means of the one who declares:

*(6a)...“I am the way, and the truth, and the life...”*

However, to guard against any possible misunderstanding, the Lord adds:

*(6b) “...No one comes to the Father except through me.” (ESV)*

There is no other way to God in heaven. It is impossible to approach God, or to be accepted by him, except through his Son. Similarly, it is impossible to know or believe in God savingly, unless a person knows and believes on the Son. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. It is, therefore, impossible for anyone to experience God’s salvation, unless he seeks that salvation through repentance and faith in his one and only Son. (John 5:23; Acts 4:12)

Then, in verse 7, the Lord continues:

### **John 14:7**

The disciples did not fully understand or believe all that the Lord had taught them about his Father or about himself. If they had, they would have seen much more clearly the essential union between the Father and the Son. (John 1:1-2; 10:30; 14:10) Jesus had told his disciples that he had come from the Father’s presence to make known his Father’s will and to accomplish his Father’s work on earth. The Lord also told them (and the Jews) that everything he did, he did only as the Father had instructed him to do.

Jesus had taught his disciples about the intimate union existing between the Father and himself. Shortly, he would say much more to them about this. The disciples, however, barely comprehended their Lord’s teaching on these matters. At this stage, many of these things remained hidden to them. This was partly due to their misapprehensions concerning the Messiah, and partly because the Lord had not yet sent the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth. (Cf. Mark 8:17; 9:31-32)

In all the teaching that the Lord Jesus had given his disciples, he had revealed to them something of the Father. The Son had taken of the things of his Father, and had shown them to his disciples. Through many mighty miracles, Jesus had demonstrated to them, and to people more generally, something of his Father’s power and glory. (John 10:25,38; 14:11) In all these ways, the disciples of Jesus had seen the Father. In learning from him, they had been learning from the Father. Therefore, they knew the Father and had seen him. They had seen him revealed in his Son—both in his person, and by his teaching and works. (John 1:18)

## **The Father Lives in the Son**

### **John 14:8-14**

#### **John 14:8**

Philip had not fully understood the Lord’s words. Jesus had indeed revealed the Father to his disciples in a number of different ways. Philip, however, desired to look upon the Father with his own eyes. It must have escaped his memory that no one can look upon the face of God (or fullness of God’s glory), and live. (Exodus 33:20)

Jesus had revealed the Father in that he had made the Father known to his disciples. He had revealed the Father through the miracles wrought in his name. The Lord had revealed the Father to his disciples by disclosing to them the will and words of the Father. (John 10:25; 15:15)

In all these ways and more, the Son had taken of the things of the Father and shown them to his disciples. In addition, of course, Jesus had revealed something of his Father’s glory in his own person. (John 1:18)

## Expository Notes

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Philip, however, had not understood these things, nor had he appreciated the nature of his request. Therefore, unaware of the consequences, he says to the Lord Jesus:

(8)...*“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” (ESV)*

### John 14:9

Philip had been among the first of the Lord’s disciples. He had learned of him for the past three-and-a-half years. In all this time, the Lord had displayed much of his Father’s glory to his disciples through his divine teaching and miraculous works. In his own person, Jesus had revealed to them something of his heavenly Father’s power, glory and authority. (John 1:43)

Again, the Lord Jesus had demonstrated to his disciples something of the love of God, together with his grace, mercy and compassion. He had revealed to them the truth about God, together with his righteousness, holiness and justice.

In all these ways, the disciples should have seen in Jesus something of his Father’s power and glory. Yet, Jesus had to say to one of them:

(9a)...*“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?” (ESV)*

Those who look upon the Son are looking upon the Father. Essentially, they are one—for God is one. For the past few years, the disciples had been looking upon God the Son. The Son possesses identical attributes to his Father. The Son is in every respect his Father’s express imprint or image. Therefore, those who see the Son, see the Father. (John 12:45; Col. 1:15; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:3)

It was true that—while on earth—the Son veiled from human view the fullness of his divine glory. However, Jesus did not divest himself of his essential and eternal glory. Only by veiling the fullness of his glory could Jesus reveal himself to fallen and sinful mankind. No one can look upon the full glory of God, and live. Something of the Lord’s majestic power and glory, however, could be seen in his miracles. It is clear, therefore, that the Son was in the Father, and the Father in the Son. That is, they were (and are) essentially and eternally one. They are the same divine Being in three distinct Persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Cf. Matt. 28:19)

Therefore, in the latter part of verse 9, Jesus says to Philip and the other disciples:

(9b) *“...Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (ESV)*

Then, in the first part of verse 10, the Lord enlarges on what he has just said:

### John 14:10

The Lord here emphasises his essential oneness with the Father. Everything that the Lord said and did, he said and did in conjunction with his Father. (John 8:28-29; 10:30,38; 12:49)

Here we see that the Lord is not referring merely to a oneness or unity of *mind, will and purpose* with his Father—although this was certainly true. In this verse, the Lord is expressly saying that the Father is living in him; i.e., he is abiding constantly in him. This, therefore, is not a mere union of ideas or purposes, but of essential nature or being. (Col. 1:19; 2:9)

Essentially, the Father and the Son are one. Although revealed in three equally divine Persons, they are nevertheless one Being. God is one, yet God is triune. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(10b) "...The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works." (ESV)*

#### **John 14:11**

The Lord enjoins his disciples to take him at his word. When the Lord declared that everything that he said and did, he said and did in conjunction with his Father in heaven, this was exactly what he meant. When the Lord said that the Father was living in him, this too was precisely what he meant. The Father abides in the Son, and the Son abides in the Father. When the Lord Jesus said that the Father was doing his work in and through the Son, this was what the disciples were expected to believe. (John 5:36)

In addition, the disciples need only have considered the evidence provided by the miracles. These miracles were the indisputable proof that the Father had sent his Son, and that the Father was dwelling in his Son. No one but Almighty God could perform such outstanding miracles. Only God can heal the lame—instantly. Only God can restore sight to one born blind. Only God can raise the dead to life again. (Luke 7:21-22; John 10:25-26,38) These miracles were evidence of the Father's power and glory. That the Lord Jesus was able to perform such miracles, was proof that the Father was in the Son and that the Son was in the Father.

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(11) "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." (ESV)*

#### **John 14:12**

In the most solemn terms, the Lord Jesus declares to his disciples that whoever believes in the Son, and commits himself wholeheartedly to his cause, will perform the kind of works that the Lord himself had been doing. Those who had faith in the Son of God would accomplish many mighty miracles. However, they would not be performing such miracles in their own name or by their own power or authority, but in the name of the Lord Jesus and by his power and authority. (Mark 16:17-20)

On returning to his Father, the Lord would pour out the Holy Spirit in all his fullness. At Pentecost, he would impart to his church the gifts of the Spirit. God would sovereignly dispense one or more specific gifts to individual members of his church. These gifts were to be used for the instruction of the church in love. (1 Cor. 12:1-11) One of these gifts, was the gift of miracles or miraculous powers. The apostles would bring glory to God's name and to the name of his Son, through these miraculous signs. (1 Cor. 11:10; 12:28-29)

He will do even greater than these ('*things*' or '*works*' is not in the Greek text). Greater miracles than these will the Lord's servants do.

The Lord, of course, was not speaking of miracles that would be greater in *quality* than those performed by himself. Rather, Jesus was speaking of miracles that would be greater in *quantity* than those he himself performed.

Through his apostles, the risen and glorified Lord would continue to demonstrate his almighty and sovereign power. In the name of Jesus, the apostles would perform many miraculous signs throughout the then-known world. They would perform these miracles over a greatly extended period—during the greater part of their respective lifetimes. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(12) "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." (ESV)*

### **John 14:13**

Whatever we ask, of course, must accord with the will of God. Again, whatever we ask, must be in the name of Christ, our Redeemer and Lord. (1 John 5:14-15) This does not mean merely mentioning Jesus' name in our prayers to the Father. Rather, it means recognising what that name represents. When we ask in Christ's name, we are recognising the glory of his person and the merits of his work. Again, we are expressing our faith in the sufficiency of his atonement and in his intercessory ministry in heaven for us. (Cf. John 17:11-12; Acts 4:7,10,12; 5:41; Heb. 7:24-26)

In effect, when we petition the Father in Christ's name, we are recognising the power and glory of the Son, and acknowledging his rightful place in heaven and in our hearts. In heaven, the Son sits at the right hand of the Majesty on high, equal in eternity, power and glory with his Father. In our hearts, he must reign supremely over every aspect of our lives—for he is our Redeemer and Sovereign Lord. (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:15)

Provided we recognise what the name of Christ implies and represents, and provided we obey his will in our lives, then the Lord will certainly answer our prayers. Whatever we ask in his name, and according to God's will, he will do for us. (Matt. 7:7-11; John 15:7) The Lord will answer our prayers in the best possible way, consistent with his merciful and holy character. He will provide an answer—although not necessarily at the expected time, or in the anticipated manner. The Lord, however, will not disappoint us without very good cause. Rather, he will work all things together for our good. This is not necessarily for our immediate good, but for our ultimate and greater good. (Rom. 8:26-28)

Through hearing and responding to our prayers, the Son glorifies the name of his Father. Therefore, he encourages us to pray, and to keep on praying, by saying:

### **John 14:14**

This is a precious promise indeed to all those who love the Lord Jesus, who recognise the significance of his great and glorious name, and who obey his word! (John 15:16; 1 John 3:21-22)

## **Jesus Promises to Send the Holy Spirit**

### **John 14:15-31**

#### **John 14:15**

Here, the Lord encourages his disciples not to grieve over the fact that he must leave them. The Lord was leaving them for a purpose—indeed, he was leaving them to fulfil the purposes of his Father in heaven. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus would not leave his disciples desolate. Already, they had confessed their faith in him. They had claimed to love the Son of God as their Lord and Master. Therefore, since they loved him, they must do what he had commanded them. The Lord had revealed to his disciples the will of his Father, insofar as God had ordained to make known his will to his people. Thus, the Lord's followers must show their love for the Father and for the Son by obeying God's will and following his Son's teaching. By living a pure, holy and sinless life, the Lord Jesus had set before his disciples an example of holy and godly conduct. Therefore, the disciples were



to show their love for their Lord and Master by following his example, and by living as he had lived. (Matt. 11:25-27)

Therefore, Jesus says:

(15) *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* (ESV)

Then, conscious that the news of his departure had greatly distressed his disciples, the Lord adds in verses 16 and 17:

### John 14:16-17

The Lord did not intend to leave his disciples devoid of communion with himself. Jesus was returning to his Father. However, the Lord planned to send the Helper or Counsellor (or Comforter) to be with his disciples forever.

Because of the temporary nature of his work on earth, Jesus could not personally remain with his disciples. It was necessary that he continue his work in heaven. However, the Helper or Counsellor would remain with them for all time. The Helper is the *Paraclete* (Gk., παράκλητος, *parakletos*). He is the One who stands by a believer's side to intercede on the believer's behalf, or to conduct his defence before God. (Rom. 8:26-27; cf. 1 John 2:1) Again, the Counsellor is the one who seals, guides, comforts and instructs the children of God. (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30)

In verse 17, Jesus calls the Counsellor *the Spirit of truth*. This may be because he represents the God of truth, and because he guides the believer into all truth: That is, he opens the believer's mind or understanding to the truths of God's Word. By meditating on these truths, the believer feeds and nourishes his soul. (John 15:26; 16:13-15)

Unregenerate men and women possess no practical experience of the saving and sanctifying work of God's Holy Spirit. The world cannot accept the Holy Spirit because it does not see—i.e., it does not know or understand—the things of the Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14) The world is completely ignorant of the Holy Spirit's saving and sanctifying power. They would remain in this state if God did not enlighten their minds to the truth by his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates within a person's heart a spiritual hunger and thirst, and a desire to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

It is only when the Holy Spirit brings unregenerate men and women to see their need of salvation that they begin to seek the Lord. Again, it is only because of the Spirit's regenerating power, and his convicting and convincing influence upon their hearts and minds, that sinners are subsequently induced to embrace Christ as their Saviour and Lord. However, when they do so, they do so freely and willingly. (John 16:8)

Concerning unregenerate mankind, the Lord had said:

(17a) *"...even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him..."* (ESV)

Then, in the last part of verse 17, Jesus adds:

(17b) *"...You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."* (ESV)

Here, the Lord makes it plain to his disciples that—unlike the world—they had already experienced the gracious working of God's Holy Spirit.

The phrase, *he dwells with you*, is literally 'he remains with you'. It was the Spirit who had brought them to faith in Christ. It was by the Spirit that they had been born again as God's children. It was the Spirit who had sealed them unto God until the day of final redemption. However, this represented only a foretaste of the Spirit's work and power. Yes, he presently remained with the disciples. Soon, however, the disciples would receive an abundant

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then, the Holy Spirit would embolden them to speak courageously in the name of Christ. Then, the Holy Spirit would equip them to perform many miraculous signs demonstrating their authority as Christ's apostles. Then, the Spirit would use them to proclaim the name of the Lord to every nation under heaven. Then, the Holy Spirit would endow his followers with a variety of spiritual gifts—dispensed sovereignly to whom he pleased.

Therefore, the Lord says to his disciples:

(17b) *"...You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."*

### John 14:18

Here, the Lord promises not to leave his followers comfortless. Literally, the Greek is, 'I will not leave you orphans'. I will not leave you bereft of natural parents or natural relationships.

The Lord is to his people as loving and faithful parents are to their children. The Lord loves, comforts, nourishes and provides for his children. They are united to him even more closely than to their earthly parents. This is because the bond between them is a spiritual and eternal bond. Unlike human relationships, this bond can never be severed—even by death. Indeed, death is but the gateway into the Father's eternal presence. (Cf. Isa. 49:15) The Lord, therefore, assures his disciples that he will not abandon them.

Here, the Lord assures his disciples of his continued presence. Yes, shortly he must leave them to return to his Father. However, he would come to his disciples immediately afterward in the Person of his Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Jesus. The Holy Spirit would fulfil the role of the Lord Jesus in the hearts and lives of his followers. He would comfort, encourage and uphold all of God's children, not just for a temporary period, but throughout their lives. (Phil. 1:19; cf. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; 1 Pet. 1:11) Therefore, Jesus says to his perplexed and grieving disciples:

(18) *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."* (ESV)

Then, in verse 19, the Lord continues:

### John 14:19

Very soon, the world would no longer see the Lord Jesus. After his resurrection, the Scriptures indicate that he appeared only to his followers—although this amounted to very many more than the eleven disciples. (1 Cor. 15:4-8)

The Lord, however, may be referring—not to physical sight merely—but to spiritual sight. With the eye of faith, the disciples would continue to see the Lord Jesus, even after his ascension into glory. The Lord's followers would see him in the sense that they would know him, and walk in his ways. They would see him in the sense that they would believe upon him, and act in his name. Again, they would see him in the sense that they would believe everything that he taught them, and would live their lives in anticipation of seeing him again—physically and bodily—in his glory.

*"I am the resurrection and the life"*, Jesus had declared to Martha. (John 11:25)

Now, to his disciples, the Lord asserts,

(19b) *"...Because I live, you also will live."* (ESV)

Because, like his Father, the Son is endued with the power of an endless life, Jesus has the right, power and authority to impart eternal life to others (here, the disciples). Because, by his Father's authority, the Son has power to lay down his life, and to take it up again,

the Lord Jesus has the authority, right and power to raise his followers from the dead. Because, by his Father's power, the Son would rise from death to be glorified, the Lord Jesus has the authority, right and power to bring his people with him into his Father's glory. (John 6:39-40; 10:17-18; 14:2-3; Rom. 5:10; Col. 3:3-4)

Therefore,

(19b) *"...Because I live, you also will live."*

The disciples, and all of the Lord's redeemed people, would live in the fullness of joy imparted by the Holy Spirit. They would live in possession of eternal life, which, by the Father's authority, the Son grants to each of his followers.

### John 14:20

When the Lord poured out his Holy Spirit upon his disciples at Pentecost, the Spirit would guide them into all spiritual truth. He would also remind the apostles of all that the Lord Jesus had taught them. (John 14:26; 16:13)

Frequently, Jesus had taught his disciples about his oneness with the Father, but they had failed to understand the Lord's teaching. When, however, the risen and glorified Lord Jesus imparted his Holy Spirit to his disciples, they would begin to understand these truths much more clearly. Certainly, much would remain a mystery until fully revealed to them in heaven's glory. However, after Pentecost, the disciples would remember all that Jesus had told them about his union with the Father (vv.10-11; see also John 10:38; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

Similarly, the apostles would remember Jesus' teaching about the union between himself and the believer. At present, the disciples did not understand the significance of this teaching. Soon, however, the Lord would speak to them about the vine and the branches. Then, after Pentecost, the disciples would recall these teachings. By the Spirit's illumination and guidance, they would understand much more of their meaning. (John 15:1ff; 2 Cor. 13:5; Col. 1:27)

For the present, however, the Lord says to them:

(20) *"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."* (ESV)

Then, in verse 21, the Lord says:

### John 14:21

It is not sufficient merely to *become acquainted* with the Lord's teaching. A person must *obey* his teaching; i.e., he must apply the Lord's instructions to his everyday life. (Cf. Deut. 10:12-13; 11:13-15) Those who fail consistently to apply Christ's teaching to their lives do not belong to Christ, for no true disciple of Christ can disobey constantly his Lord and Master. Those, however, who put Christ's teaching into practice, show by their willing obedience that they love him.

At times, it may prove difficult to implement some of the Lord's teachings. By doing so in spite of the difficulties, however, a person shows that he desires to honour and please the one who loved him and gave himself for him. (1 John 2:5-6)

Those who honour the Son, honour the Father who sent him. Similarly, the Father will love those who love the Son, and who show their love by their obedience to his teaching. To disobey the Son, therefore—or to rebel against his teachings—is to disobey and rebel against the Father. The Lord Jesus, however, loves those who love him and do what he

says. To such humble, contrite hearts, the Lord demonstrates abundant love, mercy and compassion. (Ps. 25:9-10; John 15:9-11)

The Lord shows himself to his people by his Holy Spirit operating through his Word, and by his grace and providence in our lives. The Son takes of the things of the Father and reveals them to us. Likewise, the Spirit takes of the things of the Son and reveals them to us. In doing so, *the Holy Spirit always draws attention to Christ*—not to himself. (John 16:14)

Jesus, therefore, says:

(21b) “...*And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*” (ESV)

### John 14:22

Clearly, Judas <sup>46</sup> had misunderstood what the Lord had said. In many different ways, the Lord would reveal himself to his followers. However, these would be revelations of *spiritual* truths. Natural man cannot comprehend spiritual truths. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for the Lord to reveal himself or his teaching to the world. (1 Cor. 2:14) Many people, however, would be led by the Spirit to seek God’s salvation. To them, the Lord would reveal saving truth. The world in general, however, would not—and could not—understand spiritual truths.

Perhaps, of course, Judas and some of the other disciples still believed that Jesus had come to set up his kingdom on earth. Perhaps they thought that he was now going away to prepare for his earthly reign. If this is what they believed, the Lord would puzzle them when he said that he was going to show himself to his disciples, but not to the world. Surely, if he were about to set up an earthly kingdom, the whole world would see him and know him? Judas, and the other disciples, had much to learn about the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom. They also had much to learn about God’s eternal plans concerning Christ’s future glorious reign over the new heaven and the new earth.

The Lord Jesus did not answer Judas’ question directly. Rather, he reminded him of what he had said about love and obedience:

### John 14:23

Those who love the Lord will listen to his teaching and apply it to their lives. Heartfelt and willing obedience is the proof that we love the Saviour, and that he reigns supremely in our lives (v.21).

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<sup>46</sup> Distinct from the traitor, *Judas Iscariot*, this *Judas* was otherwise known as *Thaddeus* or *Lebbeus* (Matt. 10:3; cf. Luke 6:16). At this point, Judas Iscariot was no longer present with the disciples, having left their company to betray the Lord Jesus.

A believer shows his love for Christ by endeavouring with all his heart to do what he says. The Father loves all those who obey his Son, for to obey the Son is equivalent to obeying the Father.

Both Father and Son agree in assuring the believer that they will come and make their permanent home with that person. (In the Greek, the word here rendered *'home'* means *'dwelling'* [place], *'room'* or *'abode'* (v.2). It denotes a permanent dwelling place.) The Father and the Son, therefore, agree in assuring the believer that they will come and dwell or abide in the hearts of their obedient people. (Cf. 1 John 2:24,27)

This constitutes an unmistakably clear reference to the deity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent by the Son to dwell within his people's hearts and lives. Here, however, Jesus equates the coming of the Spirit with the coming of the Father and the Son. Here, the Lord equates the indwelling of the Holy Spirit with the indwelling of the Father and the Son (vv.15-17; Rom. 8:9-11). Clearly, then, the Lord Jesus considers the Holy Spirit to be a personal divine Being, equal in power, glory and eternity with the Father and with himself. (Cf. Matt. 28:19b)

In verse 24, the Lord continues:

#### John 14:24

This confirms what has already been said in the notes on verses 21 and 23. Those who do not genuinely believe on, and love, the Lord Jesus, will not obey his teaching. Those, however, who consistently fail to obey the Lord's words or teaching, show by their disobedience that they do not belong to Christ.

In verse 23, we noted also that, effectively, those who obey the Son are obeying the Father. Confirming this interpretation, the Lord now says in the latter part of verse 24:

*(24b) "...And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." (ESV)*

The words of the Son are, in fact, the words of the Father. The teaching of the Son is the teaching of the Father. Those, therefore, who reject Jesus' words and teaching, are rejecting God's Word and teaching. (John 3:34; 7:16; 14:10) Those who reject the Word of God are despising the living God, disregarding his truth, and treating both his Son and his Spirit with disdain and contempt. It is a serious matter, therefore, to reject Christ's words. To so treat God's Son and God's Word, is to invite the just wrath and condemnation of God. It is a fearful thing indeed to fall into the hands of the living God. (Matt. 25:41-46; cf. Heb. 10:26-31)

Jesus, therefore, issues this solemn warning:

*(24) "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." (ESV)*

Then, to reassure his true followers, the Lord adds these words:

#### John 14:25

Soon, the Lord would be leaving his followers to die on the cross, and then to return to his Father's glorious presence. Before leaving, however, the Lord desired to reassure and comfort his sorrowing disciples. Already, he had said many encouraging things to them, and he would teach them much more before his departure. The Lord desires, however, to emphasise to his faithful followers that he will not abandon them, or leave them desolate. He will return to them very soon, in the Person of his Holy Spirit.

To this end, the Lord says in verse 26:

### John 14:26

The Holy Spirit would forever indwell the believing followers of Jesus. As the Helper, Comforter, or Counsellor, the Holy Spirit would stand by their side, interceding on their behalf, and presenting their prayers and requests to God the Father. (Rom. 8:26-27)

The disciples had failed to understand many of the things that the Lord Jesus had taught them. When the Holy Spirit came, however, he would teach them all these things. He would not impart any new truths to Jesus' followers. Rather, he would take of the teachings of Christ—and of God's Word generally—and enable the disciples to understand these teachings. (John 16:12-15)

To this end, therefore, the Lord says:

*(26) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (ESV)*

By saying that the Father would send the Holy Spirit, the Lord was not implying that the disciples had not yet experienced anything of the Spirit's work and power. On the contrary, in verse 17, the Lord had already made it clear that the Holy Spirit was presently living with his disciples, and would be in them. The Holy Spirit had already regenerated the disciples (except for Judas Iscariot)—otherwise, they could not have become the children of God. The Spirit had brought the disciples to repentance and faith in Christ. Again, the disciples had witnessed something of the Holy Spirit's glory through the teaching and miracles of the Lord Jesus. Jesus taught, and performed his miracles, in the power of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 12:28 (cf. Luke 11:20) Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38)

The Lord, however, intended—immediately after his resurrection—to commission his disciples to preach his name world-wide. Firstly, though, they had to be fully equipped for this tremendous task. For this purpose, the Father would bestow an abundant measure of his Spirit's grace and power upon the apostles. Then, the Holy Spirit would instruct the apostles fully in the things of Christ and of God. Only then would the Lord's followers be equipped to teach others the essentials of the faith. Only then, would they be able to nurture and counsel God's people in the things of God, and to pastor and discipline God's church. (Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:7-13) For these and other similar reasons, therefore, it was necessary for the disciples to await the necessary gifts of God's grace. These gifts were bestowed upon the apostles at Pentecost. (Acts 2:1ff.)

### John 14:27

Here, Jesus uses the customary Jewish form of greeting for both salutations and farewells. However, the Lord applies this farewell blessing in a much fuller sense than the normal blessing of peace and goodwill.

The Lord says,

*"Peace I leave with you..." (ESV)*

Jesus is not merely *wishing* peace to his disciples; he is *giving* them peace. He is creating true and enduring peace within their hearts.

Therefore, the Lord continues by saying,

*"...My peace I give to you..." (ESV)*

The Lord was leaving his disciples a permanent legacy or bequest. He was leaving them the legacy or gift of peace—peace from the Son of God himself. Jesus granted this peace to his disciples as a gift. However, the Lord paid an immeasurable price to secure this peace. This peace was purchased at the cost of his own life, for it was the peace secured for his people through his blood shed on the cross.

This is the peace experienced by a sinner whom God has forgiven and reconciled to himself. It is the peace experienced by the justified believer because Christ's atoning death and subsequent resurrection have removed the enmity formerly existing between himself and God. It is the peace experienced by the saints of the Lord because they know that God will never again condemn them, or recall their sins to his mind. (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20-22) This is the peace and tranquillity of the person who knows that God loves him, and will never forsake him; and who experiences daily the Holy Spirit's sanctifying power. This is peace with God.

Jesus freely gives this peace to his followers. The world, of course, knows nothing of such peace or tranquillity. (Rom. 8:6)

The world cannot give spiritual or permanent peace to anyone. The peace imparted by Jesus, however, will never pass away. So long as the Holy Spirit dwells supremely within the believer's life, nothing can interrupt that person's peace with God. This peace will ultimately prevail—even amidst troubles, toils and hardships. It is the peace that comes from God above, and which is bestowed upon the believer because of Christ's redeeming and intercessory work. (John 16:33)

With such assurances of God's love, grace and peace, the believer need not fear what lies ahead. God knows all that lies ahead of his people, and he will not fail them or suffer them to fall. In all circumstances, they will experience his mercy, his grace and his everlasting peace—that peace that transcends all human understanding. (Phil. 4:7)

Therefore, reassuringly, Jesus says to his followers:

*(27b) "...Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (cf. v. 1).*

#### **John 14:28**

Had the disciples realised why Jesus had to leave them, they would have rejoiced. On many occasions, Jesus had told them that he had come from his Father's glorious presence. His disciples, therefore, should have been glad to know that the Lord was returning there to prepare a place for them. They should also have been happy to know that he would come back to them in the Person of his Holy Spirit. The disciples, however, failed to understand these things (vv.2-3,18; 16:16-18).

In this verse, the Son of God says that the Father is greater than he. Clearly, this does not refer to Jesus' divine nature, but to his human nature. Regarding his divine nature, God's Word reveals very plainly that the Son is equal in power, glory and eternity with the Father. In relation to his *Person*, therefore, the Son is equal with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. (John 1:1; 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; Col. 1:15-19; 2:9; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 1:17-18)

In relation to his *offices* or *work*, however, the Son assumes a subordinate role to his Father. For instance, he obeys his Father and carries out his Father's instructions. The Son always performs his works in the name of the Father. The Father, however, never performs his works in the name of his Son. (John 13:16; 20:21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:24-28)

Again, while on earth, and in regard to his true and perfect human nature, the Son assumed a subordinate role by taking upon himself the form of a servant, and humbling himself—even to death. (Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 2:9)

This, however, does not alter the clearly revealed teaching that—concerning his *Person and divine nature*—the Son is equal in power, glory and eternity with his Father.

In verse 29, the Lord continues:

### John 14:29

Jesus had told his disciples when and why he must return to his Father. He did this before it happened, so that they would realise that he was fully aware of all these things long before they actually occurred. This confirmed to the disciples the Lord's Messianic and Prophetic office. (Cf. John 13:19; 16:4) This, too, would stimulate the disciples' faith, and strengthen and encourage them to believe everything that the Lord had taught them while on earth. This would be especially true after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would remind them of all these things.

In verse 30, the Lord continues:

### John 14:30

Little time now remained for Jesus to speak to his disciples before going to the cross. The Lord knew that the 'prince of this world' was coming. Satan is called a 'prince' or 'ruler' because he is the chief of fallen angels. He is called *the prince of this world* because the whole world lies under his control; the whole world, that is, apart from those redeemed by Christ. (John 16:11; 1 John 5:19; Col. 1:13-14)

(Satan does not possess the title 'prince' or 'ruler' by right, but by misrepresentation or false pretences. Having forfeited all ranks and stations by his fall and expulsion from God's presence, Satan has no legitimate claims over any part of God's creation. Even so, to demonstrate the extent of his usurped dominion, the Bible refers to the evil one as the '*prince of the power of the air*' or '*the ruler of this world*' (or '*age*'), etc.)

Jesus said,

(30a) *"...for the ruler of this world is coming..." (ESV)*

The Lord knew that his remaining time was very short. Very soon, Satan's emissaries—in the form of Judas Iscariot and a crowd of misguided and evil men—would seize Jesus. The Lord viewed these evil men as servants of Satan. However, although acting under Satan's controlling influence, this did not mitigate the sin and guilt of these wicked men. What they did, they did deliberately, willingly and with evil intent. God, therefore, holds them fully responsible for their wicked actions, and judges them accordingly. (Matt. 26:24; Acts 2:23)

In the first part of verse 30, the Lord said to his disciples:

(30a) *"I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming..." (ESV)*

Then, he adds:

(30b) *"...He has no claim on me..." (ESV)*

Satan is able to exercise a controlling influence over the whole of fallen humanity. Because of their inherently sinful nature, and to a greater or lesser extent, people respond eagerly and willingly to Satan's suggestions and temptations. In many ways, Satan is able to stimulate a person's mind in the wrong direction, so that that person delights in fulfilling the desires of his sinful nature. Ever increasingly, Satan draws people further and further into the paths of unrighteousness and ungodliness. This is one of the reasons why the



whole of fallen humanity remains at enmity with God, and is abiding under God's righteous and enduring wrath. (2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2-3)

Nevertheless, the fact that the evil one is able to influence and tempt fallen mankind, does not provide anyone with any kind or degree of excuse for their sin and rebellion against God. When they yield to temptation, whether from their own fallen nature alone, or augmented by Satan's wiles and inducements, they choose of their own volition to submit to temptation. The devil has no power to compel them to sin. He can only tempt a person to sin—albeit sometimes severely. However, he cannot coerce them to sin.

Yet, because of their fallen and sinful condition, it is utterly impossible for unregenerate mankind to please God or to do anything that makes them acceptable to God. If they are to be forgiven and reconciled to God, God must take the initiative and bestow undeserved or unmerited grace and mercy upon them. God does this by bringing them to repentance and faith in his Son, through the work of his Holy Spirit. Salvation, therefore, cannot be achieved except through the grace of God and the prior operations of the Holy Spirit working on a person's mind or 'heart'. (Eph. 2:4-10)

We have seen that Satan exercises a controlling influence over the whole of fallen mankind. However, the devil is unable to exercise any kind of influence over those who do not have a fallen sinful nature. Only God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is a perfect sinless Being.

This is why Jesus says of Satan,

“...*He has no claim on me....*”

Nothing within the holy Son of God was capable of responding adversely to Satan's evil accusations or giving way to the temptations of the evil one. Although, in regard to his human nature, the Lord Jesus was tempted in every respect just as we are, yet the Lord remained utterly without sin. Therefore, Satan had no hold on the Son of God. (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26)

Very soon, now, the devil would induce Judas Iscariot and an unruly mob to lay hands on the Holy One of God. However, the *cause* of Jesus' 'arrest' would be false and unjustified. The *accusations* laid against him would be false and unjustified. His *sentence* of execution would be false and unjustified. (Matt. 26:47)

Satan had no hold on God's holy and sinless Son. Jesus, however, had to accomplish his Father's will by laying down his life voluntarily for us. By that same sacrifice, the Lord would triumph over Satan, destroying the full extent of his power over mankind. (Matt. 12:29; John 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:15)

Then, in verse 31, the Lord continues:

### **John 14:31**

As a fallen, finite and created being, Satan had absolutely no power or authority over Jesus. On the contrary, he who is sinless, infinite and uncreated—the holy Son of God—held total control over the evil one, and could have destroyed him by a mere word of command. However, it was necessary for Jesus to accomplish his Father's will and finish the work of Redemption that the Father had given him to do. (Cf. Jas. 2:19; John 4:34; 5:36)

Not even Satan, however, could have been instrumental in causing Jesus' arrest and subsequent death if this had not accorded with God's express plan and purposes for his Son. Death is the wages or penalty of sin. Jesus, however, remained totally sinless. As true God, he *could not* sin. As true Man, he *did not* sin. In this respect, too, Satan had no hold on him. (John 10:18; 12:27)

## Expository Notes

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Jesus did not die for any personal misdemeanour or wrongdoing. Rather, he died to atone for other people's misdemeanours and wrongdoings—even of the greatest and vilest kind and degree. The holy sinless Lord Jesus died for *our* sins. By obeying his Father and going to the cross, however, Jesus demonstrated to the world how profoundly he loved his Father; and indeed how intensely he loved those for whom he died. (John 3:16; 1 John 3:5)

Now, the time had arrived for Jesus and his disciples to leave their present location. Now, the time had come for Jesus to make his way to the place of his most intense suffering—beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane. Before arriving there, however, the Lord had yet many things to teach his disciples.

## John Chapter 15

### The True Vine and the Branches

#### **John 15:1-17**

The vine ranks as one of the most fruitful of plants. It produces fruit—both grapes and wine—to provide nourishment and refreshment. Again, its overhanging branches provide shade from the burning heat of the sun. (Jonah 4:6)

The Old Testament Scriptures liken God's people Israel to a vine. God planted this vine in his vineyard. He fed, watered and watched over it, waiting for it to produce an abundance of fruit. Israel, however, proved to be an unfruitful vine; or, at least, she brought forth only bad fruit. Therefore, God dealt in judgment with this unfruitful or corrupt vine. (Isa. 5:1-7; Hosea 10:1; see also Ps. 80:7-19; Jer. 2:21)

Speaking, therefore, of the spiritual vine, the Lord Jesus says:

#### **John 15:1**

(Originally, the Lord Jesus addressed these words concerning the vine and the branches to his eleven disciples. However, the teaching is relevant and applicable to all those who belong to the Lord Jesus by regeneration and adoption.)

In Christ, nothing false, insincere or unproductive exists. On the contrary, he is the genuine vine of God's planting. The fruit that he produces cannot fail to please and honour his heavenly Father. As the true vine, Jesus has life in himself. He is self-existent, self-sustaining, and the source of life. He lives in inseparable union and communion with his Father in heaven. No one can experience living and vital communion with God the Father unless the Spirit of God unites that person intimately with Christ, the true vine. (John 5:26)

Under the Old Testament arrangement, the LORD God Almighty planted and cared for the vine. Similarly, during this present (New Testament) arrangement, the Father cares for the vine. He is the vinedresser or husbandman. In the Old Testament, the vine represented Israel—the professing people of God. Now, during this present arrangement, Christ is the vine. The branches represent the individual members of God's church worldwide; i.e., all those professing faith in Christ.

God the Father takes care of the true vine. He closely examines every individual branch to ensure healthy and productive growth. He removes diseased and unproductive branches from the vine. Thus, in verse 2, the Lord says:

#### **John 15:2**

God the Father minutely inspects the hearts and lives of all those within the church who profess faith in Christ. Among those professing faith in Christ are a number who do not bear fruit. These branches claim to believe on Christ. However, they do not obey Christ's teachings. They claim to believe on Christ, but they do not love him and honour him in their lives. (Matt. 3:10; 7:21-23; Luke 6:46)

Alternatively, these branches claim to be united with the true vine. In fact, however, they have never experienced the regenerating, cleansing and sanctifying power of God's Holy Spirit, or of his Word. (Matt. 15:13; John 17:12)

When, therefore, the Father scrutinises these branches, he discovers the reason for their barren lives. They produce no fruit, or, even worse, they produce corrupt or bad fruit. This is because—contrary to their profession—they have never been intimately united with Christ, the true and living vine. They are dead wood. They are worthless branches producing worthless fruit—the fruit of a sinful nature and of a still unregenerate heart and life.

Left within the church, of course, these diseased branches would ultimately infect and destroy the healthy branches. Therefore, to preserve the fruit-bearing branches, the Father cuts off the dead wood from the vine. Eventually, he identifies, removes and casts away false professors from among the fellowship of his own people.

As the vinedresser, the Father not only examines and casts away unhealthy and unfruitful branches from the vine, but also he carefully examines the healthy and fruitful branches. The healthy and fruitful branches, of course, are those who are intimately united to the true and living vine. These are the people who love the Lord Jesus, and who obey his commands. These are the people who seek to live by the teachings of their Lord and Master, and to follow his will for their lives. These are the people who bring forth an abundant harvest of good fruit for God.

Primarily—although not exclusively—this is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit includes:

- (22) ...*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*
- (23) *gentleness, self-control...* (Gal. 5:22-23 ESV)

These, however, were the very fruits that were lacking in the lives of the unfruitful branches. This is why the Father cuts off such false professors from the true and living vine.

However, even in the case of the good and fruitful branches, it is still necessary for the Father to carry out regular pruning. In the believer's life, there are still things that hinder their fruitfulness for God, which the Lord needs to remove. Sometimes, this pruning—or purifying—process can prove painful. This is because it may involve cutting deep into infected areas of the believer's life. However, like discipline, such pruning is essential to the believer's spiritual wellbeing, growth and productivity. (Heb. 12:10-11)

Our loving heavenly Father cuts out of our lives those things that offend or displease him. In this way, he purifies or cleanses our lives. He is making us living, flourishing branches that are better fitted to serve him and produce abundant fruit, or spiritual graces. The more we yield to his pruning or purifying work in our lives, the more we show our love and obedience to him and for him. (Rev. 3:19-20) This pruning and cleansing process, of course, is the same as that produced in our lives by the Holy Spirit and the Word in sanctification. It leads to practical holiness of life, and godly conduct.

Then, in verse 3, Jesus says:

### John 15:3

In John's Gospel chapter 13, verse 10b, the Lord had said:

- (10b) "...*And you are clean, but not every one of you.*"

At the time Jesus said this, the betrayer was still in their midst. The Lord Jesus knew that Judas had never experienced regeneration, cleansing, justification or sanctification by the Holy Spirit and by the Lord Jesus' words or teaching. Now, however, Judas had deserted

the company of Jesus and his disciples. Therefore, Jesus is able to say to the eleven remaining disciples,

(3) *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”*  
(ESV)

Like the disciples, we too receive cleansing for our souls as the Holy Spirit takes God’s Word and applies its teaching to our hearts and lives. This, essentially, is sanctification; and it is a life-long process. The fruit of sanctification is holiness and righteousness—or godliness.

To this end, Jesus prayed for his followers:

(17) *“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”* (John 17:17 ESV)

In his letter to the Ephesian church, the apostle Paul wrote:

(25) *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, (26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.* (Eph. 5:25-26 ESV)

Therefore, Jesus says to his disciples:

(3) *“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”*

(Incidentally, this verse refutes the view of those who claim that—at this time—the disciples had not yet experienced the Holy Spirit’s saving and sanctifying power. Apart from regeneration, the disciples could not have *begun to understand* Jesus’ words—for the Lord’s words are spiritually discerned. Granted, at this time, the disciples failed to grasp everything that the Lord Jesus had been teaching them. However, they understood and believed the basic truths relating to salvation—and these truths are spiritually discerned. Again, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, the disciples could not have been *cleansed* by Jesus’ words. Jesus, however, asserts that they have been so cleansed. We must remember that Jesus’ words mirror the words of his Father. God’s Word, however, is invariably applied to a person’s soul by the Holy Spirit.)

Continuing the thought of the vine and the branches, the Lord says in verse 4:

#### **John 15:4**

It is essential that the branches remain united to the vine. Branches that are broken off from the vine lose their source of life and vitality. Inevitably, they wither and die (v.6).

Christ exhorts his followers to remain in him; i.e., to abide in his love and in his teaching. Provided his followers remain in close fellowship with him, then they prove to be his disciples (vv.8-10; John 8:31-32; 13:35). As such, the Lord promises to remain in them; i.e., he will never abandon or reject those who are truly his. On the contrary, he will unfailingly provide them with spiritual life and vitality. (Cf. John 7:37-39; 10:9,27-30)

As they continue to feed on the true vine, these living branches will grow and produce fruit. They will bring forth the fruit of the Spirit, exhibited in a humble, caring, compassionate and godly life. They will also bear much fruit by pointing many others to Christ. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Dead branches cannot produce living fruit. Similarly, a person who is not united to Christ through spiritual regeneration and sanctification cannot produce the fruit of the Spirit. Apart from close fellowship with the Lord Jesus, it is impossible to live a life pleasing to God—a life of love, faithfulness, righteousness and holiness. (Phil. 1:11; 1 John 2:6) However, by remaining in Christ—i.e., by adhering to, and applying, his teachings—the

believer brings forth an abundance of fruit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies him, cleansing him from impurities of heart and life.

The Spirit also leads the believer into an ever-deeper appreciation of God's truth and an ever-deeper relationship with the Father and with his Son. (Col. 1:10) This represents progressive sanctification, and real spiritual growth. The more a person grows spiritually, the more fruit he will produce—and the more God will bless this fruit.

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(4) "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." (ESV)*

Unless we are inseparably united to Christ, we can accomplish nothing of a spiritual nature in our lives. Therefore, in verse 5, the Lord says:

### John 15:5

Here, Jesus declares that he is the root and source of our life—spiritual and eternal life. We are the branches. Each branch occupies a different place in the vine, but each is a necessary part of the vine. (Rom. 12:5ff; 1 Cor. 12:12,27) So long as the branches remain united to the vine, the vine will continue to feed and nourish these branches. Hence, it is essential that the believer remain united to Christ—i.e., to his word and teaching. Those who abide in Christ find Christ abiding in them—i.e., his Holy Spirit supplies them with everything necessary for life, godliness and spiritual vitality. (John 14:23-24; 2 Pet. 1:3)

Again, by remaining in Christ, the believer produces an abundance of fruit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies his life, producing faith, hope, love and many other spiritual graces or qualities. In addition, the spiritual quality of his life attracts others to Christ. In this way too, the faithful believer bears fruit for God. (Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 13:13; Col. 1:5,10; Prov. 11:30)

As believers, it is essential that we remain united to Christ in faith, love, trust and obedience. If, however, we were to become separated from the vine, it would only be because we were not producing these and other spiritual qualities in our lives. Without the graces and power of the Spirit, however, a person can accomplish nothing of value for God, and nothing of spiritual benefit to his fellow man.

On the other hand, by remaining united to Christ, these spiritual qualities grow and flourish in ever-increasing measure. In this way, we honour and glorify God's holy name. In this way, too, others are blessed and benefited by our spiritual—yet, practical—love, kindness, patience, compassion, etc. This is why it is essential to abide in Christ, and to apply his teaching faithfully to our lives—through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. This, too, is why the Lord said to his followers:

*(5) "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 6, the Lord says:

### John 15:6

If a branch does not remain united to the vine, it will lose its source of nourishment and life. Consequently, that branch will wither and die.

So it is with the false professor. A person who does not remain in Christ, or who does not obey Christ's teaching, is like the useless branch. Without nourishment from the vine—the source of life—he cannot possess spiritual life. Moreover, if found to be void of spiritual

life, he is cast away and withers. In this way, the vinedresser, i.e., the Father—separates unhealthy or dead branches from the healthy, living vine.

Branches that are not *united to* the vine, are not *parts of* the vine. Those who profess faith in Christ, but who do not obey Christ's teachings, are not Christ's followers. This is demonstrated by the fact that they have been separated from the only source of spiritual life and nourishment; viz., Christ, the true vine. (1 John 2:19)

These people can be found within the (visible) church. They have been separated from the vine, however, only because they have not produced fruit. Thereby, they have proved to be dead and worthless branches, or false professors. Consequently, the Father cuts them off from the true vine—i.e., he identifies them as false professors, and separates them from any legitimate claim to union with Christ.

To this end, God's Word says:

*(10) "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matt. 3:10 ESV)*

And:

*(13) He answered, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. (Matt. 15:13 ESV)*

Jesus addressed these solemn remarks—not to the general population or even to the ordinary worshippers at the synagogue or temple—but to the religious leadership. It was the scribes, Pharisees, and theologically-liberal Sadducees that the Son of God warned most severely. Although, to the ordinary Jewish people, these leaders appeared as righteous and holy men of God, yet, with few exceptions, these religious leaders possessed nothing more than an intellectual knowledge of God. They professed to be part of the vine of God's planting; but they stood in grave danger of being cut off and cast into the fire—for the fruit they produced was not the fruit of a regenerated, sanctified and godly life. On the contrary, they were intent only on burdening the people with their man-made traditions and misinterpretations of God's law, and at the same time determining how they might entice and trap the holy Son of God, and put him to death.

Again, in chapter 7 of Matthew's Gospel, the Lord Jesus says:

*(18) "A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. (19) Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*

*(21) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

*(22) On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"*

*(Matt. 7:18-23 ESV)*

This passage was addressed more generally to all those who heard Jesus speaking on the mount. It is a solemn warning against professing faith in Christ, and yet failing to bring forth the fruit of a regenerated and godly life. A profession of faith in Christ must be matched by the consistent production of the fruit of the Spirit, emanating from a life renewed by the Spirit of holiness.

However, where no such fruit is evident, the Father cuts off the barren branches from the vine. In this way, the heavenly vinedresser protects the living and healthy branches from spiritual disease and corruption. Ultimately, the Lord will throw these barren and rotting

branches into the fire for burning; i.e., into the lake of fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matt. 3:10; 13:41-42; Heb. 6:7-8; Jude 1:12-13; Rev. 20:15)

In verse 7, Jesus says:

### John 15:7

This verse explains the apparently unqualified assurances of answers to prayer given in other parts of God's Word. The Lord will certainly answer his disciple's prayers, providing they meet the following conditions:

1. They are abiding in Christ; i.e., they are living in close fellowship with their Lord and Master, and they are honouring him in their daily lives and conduct. (Ps. 37:4-8; 1 John 3:22-24)
2. Christ's words—i.e., his teaching—is abiding in them. In other words, the Lord's disciples must not only listen to his words, but they must also do what he says—willingly and consistently. (Col. 3:16)

These represent the conditions that we, as the Lord's people, must meet to be assured of answers to our prayers. Of course, it follows from this, that—when we are honouring God and living in line with his will for our lives—then we will not (knowingly) ask the Lord for anything that is contrary to God's will. In all our prayers and petitions, we will learn to say, '*Not my will, but yours be done.*' (Luke 22:42; 1 John 5:14-15)

So long as the Lord's people follow these principles, then the Lord will certainly answer the prayer of faith. In one way or another, the believer will receive an answer from the Lord. (John 14:13-15; Jas. 5:15) Therefore, the Lord gives his disciples this blessed assurance:

*(7) "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 8, Jesus adds:

### John 15:8

God's name is praised, honoured and glorified through his people's loving and faithful obedience to his Son and to his Word. By remaining united to the vine, the believer is fed and nourished on the life-giving sap—i.e., the life-imparting truth of God's Word.

The Holy Spirit interprets the truths of God's Word to the believer's mind and conscience. Consequently—and in obedience to Christ's teaching and the Spirit's leading—the believer regulates his life and conduct with the standard set by God's Word. This is the standard of love, true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:24) God's name, therefore, is glorified as—in co-operation with the Holy Spirit—the believer conforms his life more and more to the likeness of God's Son. The more Christ-like the believer becomes, the greater the influence that believer's life will exert on the unbeliever and on an unbelieving and ungodly world. (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18)

Through the testimony of his loving, holy and godly conduct, others will be drawn toward the Saviour of lost men and women. In this way, too, the faithful and obedient believer bears fruit for God. In this way too, God's name is glorified, praised and honoured. (Matt. 5:16; cf. 1 Pet. 2:12) All this is a work of the Holy Spirit, and a demonstration of the Spirit's limitless grace and power.

All who produce such fruit prove to be Christ's disciples. These good branches remain united to the vine. They draw their spiritual life and sustenance from Christ the living vine.



These are the productive branches that the vinedresser prunes (or trains, or disciplines). The Father prunes these branches so that they will produce even more fruit for his glory (vv.1,2). Therefore, the Lord Jesus says:

(8) *“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 9, the Lord says:

### John 15:9

The Father loves his Son with a perfect and everlasting love. It is a love that knows neither measure nor end. It is an absolute and unconditional love, far surpassing the abilities of the human mind to scan or comprehend. This, however, is the manner in which Christ loves his people. He loved them from eternity, and he loves them with an everlasting love. Christ's love for his people knows neither measure nor end. It remains forever, boundless and free. (Eph. 3:18)

Yet, the Lord Jesus could not have imparted this love to his own, had he not suffered willingly on our account. Only by removing the enmity existing between the Father and ourselves because of our sin, could we experience the love of God or the love of his Son. This Christ did, however, when he died on the tree. By his atoning death and resurrection, he effected our forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and our restoration to his love, mercy and favour. (Rev. 1:5)

These few brief remarks, then, sketch—albeit, very faintly and inadequately—the degree and extent of Christ's love for his people. Now, the Lord tells his disciples to abide in that love. In the original, the word translated ‘*abide*’ is in the imperative mood; i.e., it is not merely an exhortation, but an *absolute command* to abide unfailingly in Christ's love. This, of course, also involves abiding in his teaching. The disciples were to love the Father and the Son with all the intensity of their being. They were also to love one another as Christ had loved them. (v.12)

In verse 10, Jesus says:

### John 15:10

Obedying Christ's teaching is the proof of our love for Christ. When we humbly apply the Lord's teaching to our lives, we show that we are abiding—or remaining—in Christ's love. This is what loving God or loving his Son means: doing what his Word says. (John 14:15,21; 1 John 2:5-7; cf. Jas. 1:22-27) We see this principle perfectly exemplified in the life of the Lord Jesus. Although he was the Son of God, yet—in every respect—he obeyed his Father. The Scriptures attest to this truth repeatedly, that Jesus obeyed his Father's commands. In this way, he remained in constant and inseparable love and communion with his heavenly Father.

Therefore, Jesus says:

(10) *“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 11, the Lord adds:

### John 15:11

How does a believer come to experience true spiritual joy? He does so only by obeying God's Word. Joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was about to send the pleni-

tude of his Spirit upon his believing disciples. Among other things, the Spirit of God would fill their souls with a sense of God's love, and with an awareness of his immediate and abiding presence. The Spirit would assure them of peace with God through the forgiveness of their sins and reconciliation with the Father. (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:1-5,11; Col. 1:20-23)

(In anticipation of Christ's atoning work at Calvary, the disciples' sins had already been forgiven. However, until they received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they would lack the full assurance of sins forgiven.)

Again, after the resurrection—and especially after Pentecost—the disciples would experience real joy in the Lord; i.e., they would rejoice in the Lord. The Holy Spirit would lift them out of their present depressed and despondent state, causing them to rejoice in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Phil. 4:4) The disciples would come to see in a new way and in a new light what great things the Lord had done for them, and could do for others. Therefore, they would exult in the name of the Lord, praising and glorifying his holy name for all his works of love, grace and mercy. (Ps. 126:3) In these, and many other ways, the disciples' joy in Christ would become complete. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(11) "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 12, the Lord says:

### John 15:12

The Lord Jesus required that his followers believe in him, and that they obey all his teachings. This was the only way in which a person could prove his love for Christ. Salvation is by grace alone; but the believer is saved through God-given faith unto a life of good deeds—deeds that God has already prepared for him from eternity. (Eph. 2:4-10)

In this verse, Jesus gives a specific command to his disciples:

*(12) "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (ESV)*

Christ loved his own with an extraordinary and eternal love. He loved them so intensely, that—in obedience to his Father's will—he was willingly to lay down his life to secure their redemption. Therefore, his redeemed people were to exhibit a kindred love for one another. (John 10:11,14,27-30; 1 John 3:16)

Granted, God's children could not love to the extent that Christ loved. His was (and is) a perfect and perpetual love. However, as far as the capacities of their spiritually renewed natures allowed, they were to love one another. In obedience to Christ and his teaching, they were to minister to one another's needs. They were to provide help and support for one another—physically, morally and spiritually. They were to encourage, exhort and rebuke one another—in a spirit of love, patience and understanding. (1 John 3:17-18; see also Deut. 15:7-8; Prov. 19:17; Matt. 25:34-40)

No limits were to be placed on their love for one another. Whatever was required for a fellow-believer's welfare or encouragement, was to be provided in the name of Christ and in obedience to his commands. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(12) "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

Then, in verse 13, the Lord adds:

### John 15:13

Real love—self-sacrificing and self-giving love—knows no limit to how far or how deeply it will express itself. The ultimate test of a person's love is whether he is willing—if need be—to forfeit his life for the one he loves. Even in ordinary human relationships, this principle has been clearly exemplified. When threatened with extreme danger or hazard, mothers have been known to sacrifice their lives for their children; so great was their love for them. On many occasions, people have been known to give up their lives to save the lives of those in danger or distress.

Wonderful as these expressions of human self-sacrifice may be, however, they pale into relative insignificance in the light of a far greater sacrifice and love. Shortly, the Lord would be going to the cross to lay down his life for his sheep. Like the disciples, these were his friends. These were the ones he had come to redeem. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. Now, God's only Son was about to lay down his life for his friends. (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8)

This demonstrates the fullness of God's love. And, if God so loved us, we ought to love one another. Therefore, Jesus says:

(13) *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 14, the Lord explains what it means to be his friend:

### John 15:14

How do we become a friend of Jesus? By doing what he commands. To be his friend, we must obey his Word, putting his teachings into practice in our everyday lives. Whatever he says, we must do. Whatever changes his Word requires of our conduct or lifestyle, we must implement. In all respects, we must not only listen to his Word, but we must also do what it says.

In this way, Abraham became known as the *friend of God*. In faith, Abraham obeyed God's voice and did what God commanded him. He followed the will of God for his life. Because of his faith and obedience, he was known as the friend of God. (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23)

So it is with us. So long as we walk with the Lord in faith and obedience, we will be known as his friends. Therefore, Jesus says:

(14) *“You are my friends if you do what I command you.” (ESV)*

Then, in verse 15, the Lord expands on what he has just said:

### John 15:15

The word used here for servant, is the word *‘doulos’*—a servant, bondservant or slave. The followers of the Lord Jesus were indeed considered as their Master's servants. However, as the Lord points out, a master does not reveal to his servants matters of private or personal concern.

Although the disciples are Jesus' servants, the Lord does not look upon them as slaves or servants, but as friends or companions. Indeed, they are God's children. They are fellow-heirs with God's Son. They are brothers of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. Gal. 4:6-7; Heb. 2:11-12) Here, however, the Lord speaks of them as friends—in contrast to servants—

thus emphasising the inseparable bond existing between Jesus and his disciples. Just as the branch is united to the vine, so were the disciples united to Christ.

As a rule, the servant or slave does not learn intimate details about family relationships. However, Jesus revealed to his disciples everything that his Father made known to him in heaven. Indeed, no one can come to know the Father—or the things of the Father—unless the Son reveals these things to him.

Thus, in Matthew chapter 11, it is written:

*(25) At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; (26) yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*

*(27) "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*

*(Matt. 11:25-27 ESV)*

Again, in Matthew chapter 13, God's Word says:

*(11) And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. (Matt. 13:11 ESV)*

And, in Luke chapter 10:

*(23) Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! (24) For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."*

*(Luke 10:23-24 ESV)*

Again, in John's Gospel chapter 17, the Lord says:

*(6) "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (7) Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. (8) For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me..."*

*(26) "I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

*(John 17:6-8,26 ESV)*

Therefore, in John 15 verse 15, Jesus says to his disciples:

*(15) "No longer do I call you servants,<sup>47</sup> for the servant<sup>47</sup> does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 16, the Lord says:

### **John 15:16**

In John chapter 13, verse 18, the Lord had said:

*(18a) "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen..." (ESV; cf. John 6:70)*

Now, in chapter 15 verse 16, the Lord says:

*(16a) "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (ESV)*

The disciples did not choose to believe on Christ until after Christ had chosen them. They did not choose to follow Christ until after Christ had called them. They did not choose to serve Christ until after Christ had appointed them (v.19; Eph. 1:4-5,11; Isa. 49:1-3; Jer. 1:5-7; Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Gal. 1:15). In every case, the Lord took the initiative. He chose, he called, he appointed. In every case relative to the Eleven—and by the sovereign grace of God—the disciples responded favourably to the Lord's invitation or commissioning.

Concerning salvation, the disciples—and all of the Lord's people—were chosen from eternity. However, concerning their office, the Lord chose these particular men to become his apostles.

(When the Lord chooses sinners to follow him, they find themselves enabled to accept him freely and willingly. By his illuminating and regenerating power, the Holy Spirit enables them to apprehend their sense of need, and to call upon the Lord for salvation. In his mercy, God grants them the grace of repentance and faith. Thereafter, the repentant and believing sinner accepts Christ—freely and willingly—as his Saviour and Lord.)

Jesus, then, said to his disciples:

*(16a) "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." (ESV)*

The Lord is telling his disciples that, soon, he will send them forth into all the world to preach the Gospel. Through the preaching of the Word, souls would be saved and brought into God's everlasting kingdom. Therefore, the disciples would see fruit for their labours—fruit that would last, fruit that would endure for eternity (v.8).

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<sup>47</sup> **15:15** Greek *bondservants* [ESV footnote]

As long as the disciples continued to bear fruit for their Lord and Master, they could remain assured that the Father would answer their prayers. Such prayers, of course, would accord always with God's will and purposes. (John 14:12-14; 16:23-24)

Again, the fruit that the disciples would be bearing would not be related exclusively or even predominately to soul-winning. More importantly, they would bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23) As long as the disciples produced such fruit in their lives, then the Father would certainly hear and answer their prayers.

Then, in verse 17, the Lord adds:

### **John 15:17**

Again, Jesus emphasises the importance of pure spiritual and practical love between fellow-believers (cf. v.12). As we noted above, the first fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is of paramount importance in a Christian's life. Without love, all the gifts or graces of the Spirit are of no avail. Without love, we can achieve nothing of value for Christ. Without love, the church cannot grow or flourish. (1 Cor. 13:1-13)

Love, of course, must be united with truth. Under no circumstances can we compromise the eternal and unchanging truths of God's Word under the pretext of showing love toward someone who disagrees with God's truth. (John 14:15,23-24; 2 John 10-11) However, within the confines of God's eternal truth, love must predominate. Love must rule supremely—firstly, in our relationship to God, and secondly in our relationships with one another. (1 Pet. 2:17; 1 John 3:14-18)

## **Jesus Warns of Persecution**

### **John 15:18-27**

#### **John 15:18**

Those who followed the Lord Jesus followed a way of life that was totally different from—and diametrically opposed to—the way of the world. Men and women without the Spirit of God set their aims and purposes on the things of this world or this age. They seek to live by this world's standards—standards that fall very far short of God's standards of holiness and righteousness. The unregenerate man or woman seeks to attain to this world's goals. They find their pleasures in the things of this world, or in the things of their fallen sinful nature. (Cf. Jas. 4:4) Christians, on the other hand, endeavour to set their sights on the world or age to come, and to rule their lives in accordance with God's standards of behaviour. They aim to live for their Lord and Master, and to please him in everything that they do. (Heb. 11:10,16; 13:14)

Unlike the unregenerate people of the world, the Holy Spirit indwells every person who belongs to God through regeneration or the new birth. God's Spirit sanctifies the believer's mind, creating within him the desire to pursue a life of godliness, holiness and righteousness. Again, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the believer aims to live to God's glory, and with the ever-present prospect of great glory awaiting him in heaven. The Christian, therefore, does not live to please himself, but lives to please and honour his God.

Because of the marked distinction between the believer's lifestyle and aims, and the unbeliever's lifestyle and aims, many unbelievers hate or detest the Christian. Sometimes, unbelievers see Christians as those whom God has specially favoured; and in many ways, they misunderstand the Christian's beliefs and godly lifestyle. Out of their gross spiritual

darkness, they may malign God's people and scorn the Christian's faith. (Cf. Matt. 5:10-12,44)

Unregenerate mankind, however, hated not only the Lord's people, but also the Lord of glory himself. Jesus had brought to them the truth from God; but they utterly rejected God's truth, and all who represented or spoke about that truth. This is because God's word of truth exposed their unbelief and evil deeds. Being children of darkness, they hated the light: therefore, they despised and rejected the One who is the Light of the world (vv.22-25; John 3:20; Isa. 53:3).

Jesus warns his followers:

*(18) "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."*  
(ESV)

Then, by way of explanation, the Lord adds in verse 19a:

### John 15:19

Christians, of course, do not belong to this world. They are neither citizens of this world, nor participants of the spirit of this age. (This does not infer, however, that the Lord's people should not engage, where appropriate, in this world's affairs. It infers only that the believer is the citizen of another world.) The believer's true citizenship lies beyond this world. He is registered as a citizen of heaven. He is a child of God and a joint-heir with the King of kings. (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:10; 12:22)

The world realises something of what the Christian believes. Therefore, at times, unbelievers despise God's children, because they—the unbelievers—feel themselves excluded from God's favours. Yet, at the same time, the unbeliever has no desire to accept God's ways or to be conformed to God's rules. On the contrary, he desires only to pursue his own ungodly ways. Were Christians like himself, he would accept them and love them as one of his own. However, in the presence of the Lord's people, unregenerate men and women feel distinctly uncomfortable. They must guard their every thought, word and deed, lest they should betray the true measure of their impiety and ungodliness. This may be one of the reasons why Jesus says:

*(19a) "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own..."*

The world hates the Lord's people because they do not conform to their ungodly and sinful way of life.

However, the Lord tells us of another reason why unregenerate men and woman hate the believer: The world knows that the Lord specifically chose certain people for himself. Unregenerate men and women do not understand how or why the Lord chooses his followers; but they detest the fact that he does so. In their hearts, they rail against God for exercising his right of sovereign dominion. What unbelievers are not prepared to concede, however, is that they *do not wish* to belong to the Lord. In the past, they have hardened their hearts wilfully and repeatedly against God and against the Gospel of his Son. Ultimately, therefore, God hardens their hearts and minds to the Gospel. (Ezek. 3:7; Matt. 13:13-15; Rom. 11:7-11)

Unbelieving mankind wilfully refused to accept or listen to Christ. Yet, in their perversity, they find fault with Christ for choosing others, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure. This was a primary reason for the world's hatred of the Lord's people. In much the same way, pagan nations of former generations hated and despised God's chosen people, Israel. Thus, the Lord says to his disciples:

(19) *"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."* (ESV)

Then, in verse 20, the Lord adds:

### John 15:20

{Cf. John 13:16}

Above all others, Jesus was the Chosen One of God. Repeatedly, he had told the Jews that the Father had sent him into the world to accomplish his work—the work of redemption. Jesus was God's Servant above all others. Yet, although he was the Servant of Yahweh (Jehovah), most of the people despised and rejected him, in fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures. Although Jesus was the holy Son of God, most of the people maligned and persecuted him—in fulfilment of the prophetic Scriptures. (Isa. 52:13 - 53:12; Zech. 13:6-7)

If, therefore, they thus persecuted the *Son* of God, they would similarly persecute the *children* of God. If they despised and rejected God's one and only Son, they would certainly despise and reject God's redeemed and adopted children.

The world, of course, did not listen to the words of Jesus, for these words reflected all too clearly the words of the Father in heaven.

Those, however, who *did* obey the Lord's teaching, would listen to—and obey—the apostles' doctrine. They would recognise that doctrine as being the teaching—not of man—but of God. (Acts 2:42) Unregenerate men and women, however, had no desire to submit to Christ's teaching, or to yield to his authority over their lives. Therefore, they would not accept the apostles' teaching. Rather, they wanted to remain free from all spiritual and moral restraint, so that they could pursue their own lifestyle without regard to God or to the teaching of his Son. Little did they realise that their liberty from God guaranteed their continuing captivity to Satan. Their ungodly lifestyles led them toward ever-increasing spiritual misery and slavery to sin. (John 8:34)

Once more, however, this situation created an impassable divide between Christians and non-Christians, between those who desired to obey God and those who did not. In spiritual and moral terms, the two parties possessed no common ground. They belonged—quite literally—to different realms or different kingdoms. The believer belonged to the kingdom of light; the unbeliever, to the kingdom of darkness. (Col. 1:12-13; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14 - 7:1) Therefore, Satan's children—the children of darkness—sought remorselessly to persecute God's children, or the children of light.

Jesus thus says to his disciples:

(20) *"Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' {John 13:16} If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."* (ESV)

In verse 21, the Lord continues:

### John 15:21

Jesus forewarns his disciples that the world of unbelieving mankind will persecute his followers. Because the world hated Christ, they would also hate those who belonged to Christ. Because Christ had chosen his own people out of the world, the world would despise and malign them. Those who persecuted the *Master* would certainly persecute the *Master's servants*. (Matt. 24:9; Luke 6:22-23)



Jesus says,

(21a) *“But all these things they will do to you on account of my name...”*  
(ESV)

That is, because of me. The Lord continues,

(21b) *“...because they do not know him who sent me.”*

The Scripture tells us that no one is ignorant of God’s existence. God has revealed his power and glory to all mankind through the natural creation. A person, therefore, cannot say he does not know God as the Creator—although many attempt to do so. (Rom. 1:18-20)

What, however, Jesus is saying in this verse, is that a person may refuse to *acknowledge* God. He may wilfully and stubbornly refuse to acknowledge God as Creator and Sovereign of the universe. His denial, however, cannot alter the fact of God’s existence, or of God’s power and sovereign control. To deny the revelation of God in the natural creation amounts to inexcusable unbelief. For that unbelief, every person—from the least esteemed to the most highly-educated unbeliever—will stand one day before the throne of Almighty God to hear their sentence of condemnation. Then, of course, they will acknowledge the truth concerning God and concerning his Son; but then it will be too late for them to repent. (2 Thess. 1:8-10)

Therefore, in verse 22, the Lord Jesus says:

#### **John 15:22**

The Lord is here referring to one specific sin—the sin of wilful unbelief. This is the most serious sin of which a person can be guilty, for it refuses to accept as true, the word of the living Sovereign God. Wilful unbelief ultimately leads to the sin of final impenitence, and final impenitence results in eternal condemnation. (John 3:18; 12:48; cf. Matt. 10:14-15)

On very many occasions, Jesus had spoken to the Jews about the things of God, and about his mission in the world. For the most part, however, the Jews had refused persistently and stubbornly to believe Jesus. Therefore, they were guilty of refusing to believe the word of the living God. Light had shone into the spiritual darkness of their lives, but those in darkness had shunned the light because it exposed their sinful thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. Having seen and rejected the light of life in Christ, however, the Jews remained inexcusable. (John 3:19-21)

Therefore, Jesus says:

(22) *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin,<sup>48</sup> but now they have no excuse for their sin.”* (ESV)

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<sup>48</sup> **15:22** Greek *they would not have sin*; also verse 24 [ESV footnote]

**John 15:23**

As in verse 18, the word translated *'hates'* here is a word meaning *'to detest.'* The Jews claimed to know God. They claimed that God was their Father and that they were his children—as was Abraham. However, these Jews hated—or detested—God's Son. They despised the Holy One of God, and utterly refused to believe that Jesus was God's Son. (John 8:39-47) Those, however, who reject the Son, also reject the Father. Those who despise the Son, despise the Father likewise.

The Father himself testified from heaven that Jesus was his only Son; and he commanded the people to listen to him. The Jews, however, rejected the testimony of the Son and the testimony of the Father. (1 John 2:23; Matt. 3:17; Mark 9:7; cf. John 12:28-30) Consequently, Jesus pronounces these solemn words:

*(23) "Whoever hates me hates my Father also." (ESV)*

It is impossible for anyone to be a true child of God the Father so long as he rejects God's Son. In rejecting the Son, a person makes himself God's enemy and remains under God's abiding and all-consuming wrath and indignation. Although they may assert otherwise, such people remain alienated from God and strangers to God's grace and covenants. (John 3:36)

The Jews could not claim ignorance of Jesus' teaching or works. They had heard his teaching and seen his works. Thus, in verse 24, the Lord says:

**John 15:24**

In verse 22, the Lord had inferred that his teaching had left the unbelieving Jews without excuse. They knew the way but they refused to accept the way. They utterly refused to believe the message of salvation that God's Son had brought to them.

Verse 24a, however, tells us that Jesus' testimony was not confined to his teaching. The Lord bore witness of his mission through mighty miracles, wonders and signs. (Acts 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4) Every miraculous sign that Jesus performed proved him to have come from God. These works of miraculous power demonstrated something of God's glory. In addition, they attested to the fact that God had granted power, glory and authority to his Son to act in his name. (John 10:25,38; 14:11) This, therefore, left the Jews inexcusable.

By and large, the Jews heard Jesus' words—and they refused to believe. They saw his works—and they refused to believe. God had borne witness to the Messiahship of his Son, but the Jews had rejected God's clear testimony, thereby expressing their inward hatred of both the Father and the Son. With their mouths, the Jews professed to love God. In their hearts, however, they loathed him (cf. Ezek. 33:31). Then, in verse 25, the Lord adds:

**John 15:25**

{Cf. Ps. 35:19; 69:4}

Here, the term *'Law'* does not refer specifically to the Law of Moses but to the Old Testament Scriptures taken as a whole. The Lord is probably alluding to Psalm 35, and possibly also to Psalm 69.

In Psalm 35 verse 19, David wrote:

*(19) Let not those rejoice over me who are wrongfully my foes, and let not those wink the eye who hate me without cause. (ESV)*

Again, in Psalm 69, David says:

*(4a) More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies... (ESV)*

Using the thoughts of these inspired Psalms, Jesus says to his disciples in John 15 verse 25:

*(25) "But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause'." (ESV)*

The Jewish religious leaders had no justification, cause or reason for their rejection of God's Son. They set him aside, despising his person and works, because it did not suit them to respond to his demands. These Jews wanted to maintain their own cherished religious traditions, and to uphold their misinterpretations of God's Law and God's ways, rather than submit to the truth. Submitting to the truth, as revealed through the Son of God, would involve the Jews in admitting that their own views about God had been mistaken. This, many of them were not prepared to do. In order to preserve their misguided views and way of life, they sought to dispose of Jesus and to persecute and discredit all who held to his teaching. The unbelieving Jews, therefore, persecuted Jesus—unjustly. They would also persecute his followers—unjustly.

Jesus knew what effect such persecution was likely to have on his disciples—especially, as he himself would no longer be there to protect and comfort them. Therefore, the Lord intends to teach his disciples much more about himself, revealing to them more of his power, glory and authority over all mankind.

Thus, in verse 26, the Lord says:

### **John 15:26**

Jesus was leaving his disciples, but he would not leave them to face persecution alone. Jesus would soon send the Holy Spirit—the Helper, Comforter or Counsellor—to equip them for his service. The Spirit of Almighty God would so embolden the disciples that they would be able to stand before kings, rulers and other authorities, testifying to the name of Christ. None would dare to make them afraid, because none would be able to withstand the power by which they spoke. (Luke 12:11-12) In addition to this, the Holy Spirit would teach the disciples many things about the Lord Jesus Christ. He would remind them of Christ's teaching and works, enabling them to understand, believe and fully appreciate all that Jesus had taught them while on earth. (John 14:26)

We must remember, of course, that—when Jesus was on earth—the New Testament was still to be written. Therefore, the disciples were wholly dependent on the Spirit of God to remind them of Jesus' teaching and to guide them into all truth. Similarly, they needed the Holy Spirit to help them come to a right understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. (John 16:13-14)

The apostles and other close disciples of Jesus needed the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. In days to come, the Holy Spirit would use these disciples of Jesus to teach and discipline God's church. Also, the Spirit of God would use these men to set down the words and works of the Lord Jesus in written form. (Eventually, the written forms—Gospels and Epistles—would constitute the New Testament Scriptures. Then, together with the Old Testament Scriptures, these would constitute the inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word of God (cf. John 21:24)).

None of this could be accomplished without the aid of the divine Holy Spirit, sent from both the Father and the Son. Now, Jesus' disciples were extremely despondent because

the Lord had told them that he was going away. However, when the Holy Spirit came, he would transform these despairing disciples, filling them with renewed hope and joy in the Lord. With this hope and joy came the responsibility to bear witness to the One who was the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Therefore, in verse 27, Jesus says:

### **John 15:27**

The disciples were to tell others about Jesus. These eleven disciples—and perhaps a number of others—had been with Jesus from the beginning of his public ministry (cf. Acts 1:21-26). These disciples had been eyewitnesses of all the Lord had said and done. Now, when the Holy Spirit came, these disciples were to tell the world about all these things. They were to proclaim to lost mankind the way of salvation and eternal life. This was not an option. Rather, Christ required his followers to act as his witnesses. (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8) Therefore, Jesus declares:

*(27) “And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.” (ESV)*

In the first instance, the Lord Jesus addressed this remark to his disciples or apostles. However, this same truth applies in principle to all of the Lord’s followers. The longer we have known Jesus, the greater the responsibility upon us to make him known to other people.

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## John Chapter 16

### Disciples Warned of Persecution

#### **John 16:1-4**

##### **John 16:1**

Jesus forewarned his disciples of coming persecution. For the most part, a sinful and ungodly world would reject the Lord's followers, and would despise their testimony to their Lord and Master. Nevertheless, it was God's intention that the Gospel of his Son should be preached to all nations. The Gospel declared Christ's triumphant victory over Satan, sin, death and hell. Neither sinful men nor fallen angels could prevent the proclamation of this Gospel to a lost world.

Whatever the level of persecution, therefore, Christ's followers must proclaim faithfully the everlasting Gospel concerning the one and only way of salvation for sinful mankind. Therefore, Jesus says:

(1) *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."* (ESV)

The verb, *'falling away'*, is derived from a word meaning to 'create a scandal'; i.e., to place a stumbling block in someone's path. In this case, the stumbling block was the message of Christ and the cross. This message would be a rock of offence and a stone of stumbling to many. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:8-9) However, by warning his disciples beforehand of the persecutions that awaited them, the Lord was ensuring that these persecutions for the sake of his name would not become a stumbling block to his followers. (Matt. 24:9-14) Therefore, the Lord says:

(1) *"I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away."*

##### **John 16:2**

Because of their faith in Christ and his teaching, the disciples would be excommunicated from their local place of worship; i.e., the Jewish synagogue. However, when God causes men to expel his people from one place of worship, it is so that they may meet with him at another. (Cf. John 9:22,34) Very soon, the Christian church would be instituted formally. In course of time, those who presently worshipped in the synagogue or other places, would assemble to worship the Lord in various local churches.

The Jews, however, would not stop short of expelling Christians from their synagogues. Some of these Christians would face intense persecution for their faith. Some would be stoned. Some would be beaten. Some would be put to death. (Acts 7:55 - 8:1) Those who thus persecuted the Lord's people would imagine that they were rendering service to God. In their misguided and misplaced zeal for the Law, the temple, and their own traditions, these Jewish authorities would imagine that—by expelling and killing the Christians—they were dealing with heretics in their midst. They were prepared to apply the Mosaic Law against others, while they themselves disregarded and disobeyed God's Law. (Acts 6:13-14; Gal. 1:13-14)

Therefore, Jesus says:

*“They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” (ESV)*

### John 16:3

Many of the Jews prided themselves on being the chosen people of God. They considered that God had specially selected them—out of all peoples on the earth—and had entrusted his Word to them alone. (Cf. Deut. 7:6-8; Rom. 3:2) However, not all belong to Israel who call themselves Israel. The *true* people of God are those who, like Abraham, listen to God and believe and obey his word. The Jews laid great store by Moses and the Law delivered by Moses. However, most of them had lost sight of the One from whom Moses had received that Law—the Holy One of Israel.

These Jews held fast to the outward form of the Mosaic Law; to which their religious leaders had added many of their own rules, regulations and traditions. Consequently, their worship of God had become sterile and materialistic. For the majority, and especially for the Jewish religious leadership, the faith of their fathers had lost all spiritual power and vitality. No longer were these Jews living in communion with the Father in heaven. No longer did they know or obey the ways of the living Sovereign God—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Because of their unspiritual and ungodly lifestyle, these Jews sought to persecute those whose interpretation of God and his ways differed from theirs. Therefore, the Lord and his followers were prime targets for their persecution; and they intended to persecute them mercilessly. Their misplaced zeal for God’s Law would soon be witnessed in the behaviour of one of their number—the fervent Pharisee and persecutor of the church, Saul of Tarsus. (Acts 9:1-2; 1 Tim. 1:13)

Therefore, Jesus forewarns his disciples with these words:

*(3) “And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.” (ESV)*

The Jews claimed to know the Father, but by their actions, they proved that they possessed no saving knowledge of God or of his ways.

The Lord Jesus continues:

### John 16:4

Being God the Son, Jesus knew everything that would happen in the future. (John 13:19) The Lord knew that the Jews would persecute his disciples for their faith. However, Jesus did not reveal this to them earlier, because they would not have understood his words, nor would they have been able to bear this kind of teaching. Now, however, Jesus was about to leave them. Very soon, he would send the Holy Spirit to strengthen, guide and uphold his followers. Now, therefore, the time had come for the Lord to warn his disciples of all the difficulties, trials and dangers that lay ahead of them.

## The Work of The Holy Spirit

### **John 16:5-16**

In verse 5, the Lord Jesus says:

#### **John 16:5**

Once again, Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving them to return to his Father. After his sufferings and death on the cross, and triumphant resurrection on the third day, Jesus will have completed his work on earth. Then, he must return to his Father in order to impart the Holy Spirit, and to continue his mediating and intercessory work in heaven.

Jesus' disciples, however, still did not realise that their Lord was leaving this world altogether. Perhaps, like many other Jews, they believed that he would be travelling to some other part of the land, or even beyond the borders of Israel; i.e., to the Gentiles. (Cf. John 7:33-35) Yet, although they were uncertain, none of them dared to ask their Master precisely where he was going. Perhaps they could not believe what Jesus was telling them so plainly—but were afraid to ask. (Cf. John 13:36; 14:4-5) The disciples' anxiety, however, must have been intense; for, in verse 6, the Lord says:

#### **John 16:6**

The disciples knew that Jesus would be leaving them very soon. They did not understand, however, what the Lord meant about returning to the Father. Knowing, though, that they would soon be separated from their beloved Lord and Master, their hearts had become filled with sorrow and grief. The disciples were so overwhelmed with grief, that they could not appreciate or comprehend Jesus' solemn promise to come to them in the person of his Holy Spirit. At present, their chief concern was how they were going to manage from day to day without the personal presence of their Lord and Master—especially, in a world openly hostile to the Lord and to his people. As yet, the disciples did not realise that the Holy Spirit would take the place of the Lord's presence in their lives, until such time as they would be reunited with their Lord in glory.

Seeing their deep concern over his departure, the Lord says:

#### **John 16:7**

Once again, the Lord reminds his followers that he would be sending them the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the Old Testament prophets. The full blessings of the Holy Spirit could not be imparted to the Lord's people until atonement had been made for sin, and the work of redemption had been completed on the cross. Only after the Lord's death and victorious resurrection would the Father bestow the full blessings of the Holy Spirit upon his redeemed and forgiven people. (John 7:39)

As verses 8 through 11 make clear, however, God would not only send the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide and equip his people, but also to convict the world of sin, unrighteousness and judgment. Thus, the Lord adds:

#### **John 16:8**

The coming of the Holy Spirit would prove to be a comfort and blessing to all those who believe on Jesus. To those, however, who did not believe, the same Holy Spirit would act upon their conscience as the Spirit of fire and of judgment.

The word translated *convict* is a word meaning not only 'to convict' or 'to convince', but also 'to reprove' or 'to rebuke'. At his coming, the Holy Spirit would reprove or rebuke mankind for their rejection of the Saviour, and would convict them of their very great sin. (Zech. 12:10) Thus, in verse 9, the Lord says:

### John 16:9

In the past, of course, God convicted mankind of their sin through his word and by his prophets; applying his message to the people's hearts and consciences by the operations of his Holy Spirit. However, in verse 9 above, the Lord appears to be speaking of one particular sin—the sin of refusing to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

In God's eyes, unbelief is a most serious sin. This is because it involves a wilful and deliberate rejection of his Son, and of the testimony that God himself gives concerning his Son. Unbelief also involves a repudiation of the one and only means of atonement and reconciliation with God. Further, it involves a despising of the Spirit of grace who testifies to the truth about Jesus, and who convicts a person of his sin and need of redemption. (Mark 16:16; Heb. 10:28-29)

Those, therefore, who reject God's Son and despise his Spirit, find themselves rebuked and convicted of their unbelief and impenitence by that same Holy Spirit. Then, their only recourse is to harden themselves even further against the Gospel of Christ. If, however, they continue in this course indefinitely, they will leave themselves without remedy and without hope of salvation.

Thus, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit on unbelieving men and women, the Lord says:

*(8) "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: (9) concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;" (ESV)*

Then, in verse 10, the Lord continues:

### John 16:10

The Holy Spirit who convicts mankind of their sin of unbelief also convicts and convinces them of God's only way of righteousness and justification through faith in Christ. Therefore, those who have heard and rejected the Gospel are wholly without excuse. Though they do not believe on Christ, the Holy Spirit shows them unmistakably that Christ was himself perfectly righteous. He also shows him that no one can ever be accepted as righteous before God, except through repentance and faith in Christ—the very one whom they have rejected. Therefore, by rejecting Christ in unbelief, they are rejecting the only way of righteousness and justification with God. They are making a deliberate choice to remain in sin and unrighteousness, and to pursue an ungodly way of life—contrary to better knowledge. (Rom. 1:17-21)

Because of this sin, the Holy Spirit continues to rebuke and convict them for rejecting God's gift of righteousness. In addition, he shows to them the true nature of their sin, and the reason for their greater condemnation and more severe judgment at the last day.

Then, in verse 11, the Lord says:

### John 16:11

The Holy Spirit reproves and convicts mankind of their sin (specifically, the sin of unbelief). He convicts them of righteousness (through faith in Christ alone), and he convicts them of judgment. Here, the Lord is not speaking of the coming judgment on mankind, but



of imminent judgment on Satan—the prince of this world. (Luke 10:18; John 12:31) The one who exercised a powerful controlling influence over fallen mankind was *judged* and *condemned* by Christ when he died on the cross—thereby bringing in everlasting righteousness. (Dan. 9:24)

However, the Lord also *destroyed the power* of Satan. Because of his work on the cross and triumphant resurrection, the Lord stripped Satan of his hold over mankind. He freed those who, all their lifetime, were subject to bondage. (Col. 2:15)

Satan knows that Christ has defeated him. He knows, too, that he has no power over those who belong to Christ. However, as the ‘father of lies’, the evil one attempts to convince the believer that he is still able to exercise a controlling influence over his life, or that he can force the believer to yield to temptation. This, of course, is plainly a lie of the devil—for this is the very power that Christ destroyed at the cross. Even so, many of the Lord’s people are deceived by Satan’s lies, and give in to temptation. God’s Word tells us, of course, that no believer is ever tempted beyond his ability to endure it. God always provides a way of escape. (1 Cor. 10:13)

The prince of this world now stands condemned. The Holy Spirit convicts and *convinces the ungodly world* of this great truth. How much more should *the Lord’s people be convinced* of this great truth? Christ reigns victorious over sin, Satan, death and the grave!

The Lord continues:

#### John 16:12

Although the Lord’s time was short, he had still many things to teach his disciples. He would tell them about some of these things before he went to the cross. The Lord, however, knew that—in their present distressed condition—his disciples were not fully able to concentrate on his teaching. (Cf. also Mark 4:33; 1 Cor. 3:1-2) Therefore, Jesus says to them:

(12) *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”*  
(ESV)

After the Lord had returned to his Father, the Holy Spirit would teach the disciples further about everything Jesus had said to them. Therefore, in verse 13, Jesus says:

#### John 16:13

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth because he is the One who reveals the truth about God, about his Son and about his Word. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth because he can never mislead or deceive the believer. Rather, he makes known to the believer the full truth of God’s Word. (John 15:26; 1 John 4:6)

The Spirit reveals God’s truth through his written Word, the Bible. He never reveals spiritual truths apart from God’s Word, or by supposed additions to God’s Word. (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit guides the believer into a correct understanding and appreciation of what the Bible teaches. The believer, however, must yield to the Spirit’s teaching ministry. He must not misapply God’s Word, or attempt to interpret any part of that Word out of its original and proper context.

Jesus said:

(13a) *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...”*  
(ESV)

The Holy Spirit never teaches anything that is not completely in agreement with God’s Word, or that does not derive its source or origin in God. The Spirit’s teaching is the

teaching of the Father and of his Son, Jesus Christ. It is never his own teaching. When, therefore, the Holy Spirit guides the believer into all truth, he is guiding him into a knowledge of every truth revealed by God in the Bible. (1 Cor. 2:10-16)

In its immediate context, Jesus is addressing his disciples and applying these instructions to them personally. In the Old Testament, God's messengers—the prophets—spoke the very words of God. This is because the LORD by his Holy Spirit had inspired them, officially and infallibly, to make known his word. Similarly, in the New Testament, God's messengers—the apostles—would soon be speaking the very words of God. The Lord would inspire his apostles, officially and infallibly, to preach his Gospel.

Again, by his Holy Spirit, the Lord would inspire his disciples, officially and infallibly, to write down his words permanently. These sacred records and epistles would then form the New Testament Scriptures. Everything, therefore, that the apostles preached or wrote—when inspired authoritatively by the Holy Spirit—was the very words of God. (1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)

In saying that the Holy Spirit would reveal things yet to come, the Lord may have been thinking about the office to which his disciples were soon to be appointed. These early leaders of Christ's church would require the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit to establish local churches and to order their affairs. They would require the direct guidance of God's Spirit to lead and govern the church. They would require the Spirit's direct guidance to write authoritatively and infallibly to the churches of Christ, and to prophesy inerrantly of things yet to come. (Cf. Acts 11:27-28)

These things could be done only by men directly and plenary inspired by the Spirit of God. Once, however, the canon of New Testament Scripture was completed, the gift of plenary and direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit would no longer be necessary.

Jesus continues:

### John 16:14

*(14) "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*  
(ESV)

Here, the Spirit's work is closely delineated. The Holy Spirit does not act independently either of the Father or of the Son. He does not seek his own glory. Rather, he seeks to promote the glory of Christ. In everything he does, he acts in complete harmony with the Father and the Son.

Similarly, the Holy Spirit does not teach us anything that originates from himself. On the contrary, he teaches us those things that originate from the Father and the Son. The Spirit interprets or explains these teachings, but he never gives any additional or supplementary truths. He takes of the things of Christ, and reveals the things of Christ to us. (John 15:26)

Therefore, we see that the work of the Holy Spirit is to make clear the teachings of the Lord Jesus—not to add to them. By interpreting the Lord's teachings and work, the Holy Spirit magnifies and glorifies Christ's majestic name.

Then, in verse 15, the Lord adds:

### John 16:15

Here we see the close relationship between the three Persons of the Godhead. Everything that belongs to the Father belongs also to the Son. Therefore, when the Spirit reveals to us the things of Christ, he is in fact revealing to us the truths of God. (Matt. 11:27; John 3:35; 13:3) Again, when the Holy Spirit reveals to us truths from the Bible, he is re-

vealing what the living God has said, and what he is presently saying to us now. The teaching of the Spirit, therefore, is the teaching of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ, the Father's Son. When the Holy Spirit makes known these truths to us, he intends us to apply them to our hearts and lives. In this way, the Spirit of God cleanses and sanctifies us on a daily basis.

In verse 16, Jesus concludes:

### **John 16:16**

Again, Jesus reminds his disciples that the time of his departure is drawing very near. However, the Lord comforts his grieving disciples by assuring them that they would see him again a short time later. Indeed, they did see their Lord again, following his glorious resurrection. Having triumphantly finished the work of redemption on the cross, death could not hold the eternal Son of God. By the power of Almighty God, exercised through his Holy Spirit, Jesus arose from the dead. Now, he must return to the glory of his Father. Before doing so, however, he would meet with his disciples again.

Later, when their Lord had ascended to glory and had sent his Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the disciples would understand why Jesus had to return to heaven. By then, of course, the Holy Spirit would have convinced the disciples of the truth of everything that Jesus had told them. By this time, they would be proclaiming the joyful message that Jesus lives; that God exalted him to his own right hand, and that—one day—he must return in glory to gather his people home. However, at the time Jesus was speaking to them about his imminent departure, the disciples did not understand these things.

## **The Disciples Begin to Understand Jesus' Teaching**

### **John 16:17-33**

#### **John 16:17**

Still, the disciples did not understand that Jesus was speaking to them about leaving this world and returning to the Father. Nor did they understand Jesus' apparently puzzling remarks about their not seeing him again—but yet seeing him again at a later time. Yes, the disciples would see Jesus again; but the Jesus they would see would be the risen and triumphant Lord Jesus—not the Man of Sorrows who presently walked with them on earth. Yes, the disciples would experience the Lord Jesus with them again. They would not do so, however, in his present human body, but in his resurrection body and later in the Person of his Holy Spirit. At this stage, however, the disciples failed to understand any of these things. (John 12:16)

Thus, it says of them in verse 18:

#### **John 16:18**

This verse simply confirms what has already been said about the Lord's perplexed and grieving disciples. Jesus, however, was aware of everything that was going through the hearts and minds of his disciples. Therefore, verse 19 says:

#### **John 16:19**

The disciples had been too afraid to ask Jesus what he meant by these enigmatic expressions. The Lord, however, knew every thought that had been passing through their minds, and every word that they had spoken to one another in secret. Truly, nothing remains hid-

den from the Lord. All things lie open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Heb. 4:13)

In verse 20, the Lord continues:

### **John 16:20**

In the most solemn terms, Jesus tells his disciples that they will weep and mourn over his departure. They will be grief-stricken and inconsolable at the loss of their beloved Master and Lord.

At the same time, the world of ungodly men and women would rejoice greatly. They would imagine (vainly, of course) that they had done away with the Son of God and the Servant of Righteousness. No longer would God's Servant challenge them with their sins, or command them to repent and believe the Gospel. Little did they know that—very soon—the Son of Righteousness would rise again and shine upon them with all his glorious and majestic power! For their sins and misdeeds, there would be no hiding place.

In the midst of their distress and despair, the Lord Jesus is very careful to comfort his disciples and to leave them with a message of real hope for the future. Yes, the world would rejoice and the disciples would mourn when Christ departed. Nevertheless, very soon, their mourning would turn to joy when they learned of their Lord's glorious return from the dead. Then, they would meet him again as he had promised. Then, the disciples would realise that—whether Jesus was present with them or absent from them—his Spirit would remain with them for ever. In addition, the Spirit was the guarantee to all God's people that—one day—they would be with their Lord for all the ages of eternity.

In verse 21, Jesus uses an analogy from everyday life:

### **John 16:21**

For a temporary period, a woman suffers considerable distress and pain when her child is being born. So, for a time, the Lord's disciples would endure distress and suffer great pain in their lives. However, when a woman's baby is born, she no longer considers her former anguish because of the intense joy that the newly born child brings to her heart and soul. So, too, with the Lord's disciples. In a short time, they would forget their present distress and anguish because of the deep joy that their risen Lord would bring to their hearts and souls.

Then, in verse 22, Jesus says:

### **John 16:22**

These remarks confirm the explanation given above. However, the joy that the disciples would experience when they became convinced of their Lord's resurrection, would be a permanent, everlasting joy. No power in heaven or on earth would be able to deprive the disciples of their joy in the Lord. (Luke 24:41,45,51-53; Acts 13:52)

Then, in verse 23, the Lord adds:

### **John 16:23**

When Christ imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples would no longer need to ask about things they did not understand. Understanding of spiritual matters would be given to them through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would instruct them in all things necessary to life and godliness. He would recall to their minds everything that the Lord Jesus had taught them during his ministry on earth.

Very soon, however, these same disciples would be entrusted with great responsibility. They would be commanded to preach the Gospel to all nations. (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)

Again, the apostles would be responsible for establishing, building up, and exercising leadership and discipline in many local churches. These things, however, they could not accomplish in their own strength, or by their own wisdom or ability. The church was founded on the solid Rock of Jesus Christ. In order to build wisely upon this only sure Foundation, the apostles would need to depend entirely on God and on the power of his Holy Spirit. Therefore, it was essential that they walked closely with Lord and sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit in everything they did.

So long as the apostles proved faithful to the task that the Lord Jesus had assigned to them, then they could ask for anything in his name, and the Father would grant their requests. Anything that helped them to fulfil their appointed commission, further the preaching of the Gospel, or otherwise build up the church to the glory of Jesus' name, would be granted to them by the Father. (John 15:16)

In verse 24, Jesus continues:

#### **John 16:24**

Now, the time had come for the disciples to learn more about prayer. Until this time, they had been praying to their Father in heaven. Now, however, they needed to learn that all prayer must be addressed to the Father *through his Son*; i.e., in the name and by the merits of his Son. (John 14:13-14; cf. Gen. 32:9; Matt. 6:9ff)

Up to this point, the disciples had not asked for anything in this manner. Now, however, Jesus tells them to present all their requests, praises and prayers to God in the name of his Son. Then, the Father would hear and honour their requests. Then, God would answer their prayers, and their joy in the Lord would be made complete. (Cf. Eph. 1:15-21)

#### **John 16:25**

Now, the Lord concedes that many of the things of which he had spoken to his disciples must have proved difficult for them to understand. On a number of occasions, they had failed to grasp the significance of his teaching. Soon, however, the Lord would reveal everything to them plainly. (Cf. vv. 16-19; Luke 9:44-45)

Again, when Jesus imparted his Holy Spirit to his disciples, the Spirit would illumine their minds, enabling them to understand the Lord's words. The Spirit would bring the light of the truth to their minds, and then they would understand everything Jesus had told them about his Father (vv. 12-15).

The Lord continues:

#### **John 16:26-27**

Again, Jesus reminds his disciples of the importance and power of prayer. When the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in all his power, the disciples would pray to the Father in the name of Jesus. The Father would hear and answer their prayers. No longer would it be necessary for the Lord to pray on behalf of his disciples. So long as they prayed to God through his Son, the Father would hear and respond their prayers (vv. 23-24). The Father loved the disciples because they loved his only Son, and because they believed that God had sent his Son into the world. (John 14:21,23)

## Expository Notes

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Although it would not be necessary for Jesus to pray on behalf of his disciples, yet he does intercede constantly for all his saints at the right hand of his Father in glory. (Rom. 8:34)

In verse 28, the Lord continues:

### John 16:28

Until now, the disciples could not understand what Jesus meant when he spoke of going to the Father. (John 16:5) Now, however, Jesus states plainly that he came into the world from the Father, and that he was about to leave this world to return to the Father. At this point, the disciples begin to understand the true significance of these words. Therefore, in verses 29 and 30, it is written of them:

### John 16:29-30

The Lord was able to reveal many future events to his disciples. Therefore, this convinced them that he knew everything, and that he must have come from God. (John 2:24-25) Jesus, of course, had predicted many things before this—especially, concerning his sufferings, death and resurrection. Very soon, the disciples would witness at first hand the fulfilment of these predictions. Again, this would help to convince them that Jesus was indeed the One whom God had sent.

Slowly, the Lord's disciples were beginning to see and understand the truth about Jesus. As yet, however, their faith remained weak and subject to many fluctuations. Therefore, in verses 31 and 32, it is written:

### John 16:31-32

The disciples had begun to believe the truth. Even so, at this stage, they did not have the courage or perseverance to endure persecution for the sake of their Lord and Master. Soon, they would be scattered—denying their Lord in the process. Unwilling to stand by their Lord when the world falsely accused him, the disciples would seek to hide from the world in shelter of their own homes. (Matt. 26:56; cf. John 20:10)

Even although deserted by his followers, however, the Lord Jesus would not stand alone. His Father would remain with him when all others forsook him and fled. His Father would continue to sustain his Son in his sorrows, until that dreadful moment on the tree when Jesus endured his Father's wrath against our sin. (Matt. 27:46) Once Jesus had made atonement for sin, however, the crucified, risen and glorified Son of God would enjoy his Father's presence for ever.

Then, in verse 33, the Lord says:

### John 16:33

There is no peace for anyone outside of Christ Jesus. Apart from the knowledge and assurance of sins forgiven and peace with God, it is impossible to experience true peace with oneself. (Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:20)

Therefore, Jesus says:

*(33a) "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace..."*  
(ESV)

‘Yes, the world will persecute you—but in me, you will have peace. Yes, the devil will accuse you—but in me, you will have peace. Yes, even your own family and friends will cause you distress and grief—but in me you will have peace.’ (John 14:27)

The Lord said:

*(33) “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”*  
(ESV)

The verb translated, *have overcome*, is a verb meaning ‘have overcome [once-for-all]’ Like the work of redemption on the cross, Christ’s work of victory over the world is finished once-and-for-all. Christ is Victor. So are we when we abide in him, and walk in his ways. (Rom. 8:35-37)





## John Chapter 17

### Jesus Prays to His Father

#### **John 17:1-5**

#### **John 17:1**

Jesus had just finished speaking to, and reassuring, his grieving disciples. Now the time had come for the Lord to present his high-priestly prayer to his Father in heaven. The Lord knew, of course, that he was not only acting as *High Priest* on behalf of his disciples, but he was also about to perform this ministry on behalf of all his people and to offer himself as the *sacrifice of atonement* for their sins. (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 7:27)

Looking, therefore, toward his Father's dwelling place in heaven, Jesus prayed:

*(1b)...“Father, the hour has come...” (ESV)*

The Lord knew that his appointed hour had arrived. He knew in himself that the time set for him by the Father to accomplish the work of redemption by his sufferings on the cross had now come. (John 12:23-24,27-28) Therefore, the Lord adds:

*(1c) “...glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.” (ESV)*

From before the creation of the world, the Almighty and Sovereign God had planned the work of redemption. From eternity, he had intended to reconcile fallen and sinful men and women to himself, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This plan of redemption was entirely of God's unmerited grace and mercy. It was completely independent of any supposed or imagined merit in fallen and sinful humanity. For the praise of his own glory, God determined to redeem a people for himself. God would achieve this redemption for sinners through the sacrifice of his one and only Son. (Eph. 1:4-6,11)

When, therefore, the Lord Jesus fulfilled God's eternal plan by dying on the cross for sinners, God's name would be glorified by showing such undeserved mercy to fallen humanity. Similarly, the name of the Lord Jesus would be glorified, because he took upon himself voluntarily the sin of the world, and endured God's wrath in the sinner's stead. Again, when Jesus arose from the dead on the third day, the name of the Father and the Son would be praised, honoured and glorified—ultimately, to the ends of the earth. Why? Because—out of his sovereign grace and mercy, and according to his own good will and purposes—God had made salvation freely available to people of every nation. Therefore, all nations now had hope of redemption and reconciliation with God through repentance and faith in his risen, glorified and returning Son.

These few remarks present but a very faint outline of what Jesus must have meant when he prayed:

*(1b,c)...“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.”*

However, that this constitutes the theme of Jesus' opening remarks to his Father is confirmed by verse 2:

### John 17:2

To Jesus, the Son of God, the Father granted power, right and authority over all mankind. As the One who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, God's Son exercises supremacy over the entire creation, including all mankind. (Matt. 28:18; John 3:35; Phil. 2:9-11)

As the one who exercises absolute sovereignty over all mankind, the Lord Jesus alone is able to give eternal life to men and women of every nation under heaven. Jesus has received this authority, right and privilege from his Father, and by this authority the Son of God has the right to bestow eternal life upon all those whom the Father has given him. Those the Father has given him are his sheep, or the elect of God. (Matt. 11:27; John 5:21-27)

However, what is involved in receiving eternal life. In verse 3, the Lord says:

### John 17:3

It is impossible to receive the gift of eternal life apart from a knowledge of God the Father. A person comes to know the Father through believing what Jesus teaches about him, or what is revealed about him in his Word, the Bible. However, the knowledge of God spoken of in this verse, is not merely or principally an intellectual knowledge. Rather, it is a spiritual knowledge—an knowledge or true awareness of spiritual things. It is the kind of knowledge that—by the illumination of the Holy Spirit—anyone can attain to. The Holy Spirit imparts this knowledge of God through the teachings of the Lord Jesus and through the entire written Word of God. (2 Cor. 4:6; see also 1 Chron. 28:9)

This knowledge, then, is a knowledge whereby a person confesses his belief in God as the only true God. It is that knowledge of spiritual things whereby a person comes to believe that the Father sent his Son into the world to be their Saviour. In short, it is a knowledge leading to saving faith, and resulting in eternal salvation. Therefore, Jesus says:

*(3) "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (ESV)*

All this, of course, is by the grace of God alone, and by the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

In verse 4, the Lord continues:

### John 17:4

The Father had sent his Son into the world to magnify his name by making atonement for sinners, and by reconciling repentant and believing men and women to himself. God had decreed this plan of redemption from eternity, and now—through his Son—he had put it into effect. Very soon, Jesus would complete his work on earth. He would die on the cross. On the third day after, his Father would raise his Son from the dead. By restoring his Son to life, the Father would be demonstrating his complete satisfaction with his Son's finished work. Because of that redeeming work, God would now be able to justify—freely and forever—all those who believed in Jesus. Therefore, Jesus prays:

*(4) "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do." (ESV)*

In verse 5, the Lord continues:

**John 17:5**

Jesus had almost completed his Father's work on earth. The work of redemption secured on Calvary's cross would cause repentant and believing sinners throughout the world to praise, extol and magnify the name of God and to bless the name of his Son who loved them and gave himself for them.

In order to secure redemption for fallen men and women, however, the Lord Jesus had veiled his majestic, heavenly glory—the glory of the only begotten of the Father. The eternal Word, or Logos, had concealed his celestial glory to descend to this world and to become like one of us (sin apart). (John 1:14,18; Phil. 2:6-8; Col. 1:15-17)

While he was accomplishing his Father's work on earth, the Lord Jesus lived a life of lowliness and humility. Now that his work on earth was almost completed, however, the Lord asks his Father to manifest once again in his Person that celestial glory that he had originally with his Father from before the creation of the world.

**Jesus Intercedes for His Disciples****John 17:6-12**

At this point, the Lord Jesus ends the personal part of his prayer, and begins to intercede for all his true followers. Therefore, in verse 5, the Lord prays:

**John 17:6**

In fulfilment of his Father's eternal plan and purposes regarding salvation, the Lord Jesus had made known to his disciples many things about God. He had revealed to them something of the Father's love, grace, mercy and compassion, as well as his holiness, justice, righteousness and truth (v.26; John 1:18). Because of what Jesus had taught them, the disciples now had a much clearer idea of why the Father had sent his Son into the world. They were beginning also to understand that the Lord Jesus must now leave them to finish the work that his Father had given him to do.

Therefore, Jesus prays:

*(6a) "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world..." (ESV)*

The Lord did not reveal detailed spiritual truths about the Father to the world in general, but only to those whom the Father had given him.

In the latter part of verse 6, the Lord adds:

*(6b) "...Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."*

*"...Yours they were..."*

From eternity, God had set his love upon these individuals and had determined—in his sovereign grace and mercy—to redeem them for himself. To this end, the Father set apart each one of these individuals from the world of mankind, and gave them to his Son. (Eph. 1:4-5) Having been taught of God and having their minds illumined by the Holy Spirit, these individuals were led to repentance and faith in Christ. They committed themselves wholly to the Son of God, and to the teaching that he imparted to them from the Father. (John 6:45) Therefore, in verses 7 and 8a, the Lord adds:

### John 17:7-8

By this time, the disciples knew that his Father had sent Jesus into the world. They were beginning to understand that he must very soon leave them to return to his Father. (John 16:27-29) The disciples also believed that everything originated from God in heaven, and that every good and perfect gift—including the gift of salvation and eternal life—comes down from the Father above. Everything, in fact, that Jesus had taught them about the Father, they had accepted and believed. (Jas. 1:17-18) Granted, the disciples still found some matters difficult to comprehend—especially, when Jesus spoke of his sufferings and death. Ultimately, however, they would understand fully when they saw their risen Lord, and when the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost.

The disciples fully accepted that Jesus was the Son of God, and the One whom God had sent in fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies. They believed with all their hearts that God had sent his Son into the world to accomplish his work. At this stage, however, the disciples failed to realise that the culmination of Jesus' work on earth involved his atoning and substitutionary sacrifice on the cross.

Knowing, therefore, that his disciples would be greatly shaken and shocked by the events soon to unfold, the Lord Jesus says to his Father in verse 9:

### John 17:9

Jesus prays to his Father that his disciples may be kept safe and secure in their faith; especially, after the Lord has left them to die on the cross. On this occasion, Jesus is praying exclusively for his own disciples, that God might uphold and preserve them in their trials and distresses. Nevertheless, the principle holds true that the Lord intercedes for all his own people.

The Lord is not interceding for the world in general, but only for his own. His own are those whom the Father has given him, and who—essentially—belong to his Father as much as to himself. Therefore, Jesus prays to his Father for their protection and safe-keeping—even under the most adverse circumstances.

Then, in verse 10, the Lord adds:

### John 17:10

Here we see that both the Father and the Son share all things in common. It would be blasphemous for any man—however highly exalted—to claim anything in common with Almighty God. Therefore, when Jesus says,

*“All mine are yours, and yours are mine...” (ESV)*

he is asserting his equality of essence or nature with the Father. (John 10:30; 16:14-15)

In the second part of verse 10, the Lord adds:

*(10b) “...and I am glorified in them.”*

The name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be exalted and magnified throughout the earth because of his redeeming work, and because of the preaching of the Gospel by the apostles.

In verse 11, the Lord prays:

**John 17:11**

Jesus continues to intercede with his Father on behalf of his disciples. The Lord knows the nature and severity of the temptations to which soon they will be exposed. Therefore, he prays that his Father may protect them by his almighty power. This power is represented in the name of the Sovereign God of all creation. By the power—or authority—of his command, God spoke the created universe into existence. Now, Jesus is praying that—by that same powerful word and authority—God will sustain and protect his people from ultimate harm. Jesus himself possessed the same power to protect his disciples, as did his Father. However, the Lord was about to leave them to finish his Father's work on the cross.

In the latter part of verse 11, the Lord prays for unity among his disciples. He prays that a similar unity might exist between his followers as exists between himself and the Father. This, however, does not imply a unity of essence. This is one of the divine attributes, and as such, it is peculiar to the Godhead. The kind of unity for which Jesus prays among his followers is a unity of mind, will and purpose in the things of God. It is a unity whereby all share together in the things of Christ, and where all participate—according to their abilities—in making known the Gospel of Christ, and building up the body of Christ; i.e., his church.

In verse 12a, the Lord adds:

**John 17:12**

Until now, the Lord Jesus had protected his disciples from all harm and danger, and had sustained and delivered them from all their trials and temptations. The Lord did this by exercising his divine power as the eternal Son of God, and by virtue of the authority invested in him by his Father. This was the authority of the Anointed One of God—or the Messiah. The name that the Lord Jesus bore represented the power and authority of Almighty God.

Not one of those given to Christ by the Father had been lost. Every one whom the Father had set apart from eternity, and had given to his Son, had come to accept his Son and was being kept eternally secure by the Son. (John 6:37,39-40)

Judas Iscariot, however, has not been included among this number. Although called to follow Christ, and to perform many works in his name, Judas was not one of Christ's sheep. Rather, he was one of those who knew nothing of the Holy Spirit's regenerating grace or of his sanctifying power. (John 13:18) As the above verse says, Judas Iscariot was one doomed to destruction. The NT uses this phrase elsewhere only of the Antichrist or man of sin. (2 Thess. 2:3)

From this, we can observe that occupying church office, or serving within the church, does not necessarily mean that a person is a child of God. Many serve in various positions within the church—but they do not serve Christ. Many occupy positions of responsibility and 'authority' among the people of God (as did the Pharisees) but this does not guarantee that they belong to the Lord Jesus.

Like Judas, however, such people may succeed in convincing the Lord's people that they too belong to Christ—as did Iscariot with the other disciples. Again, like Judas, some of these people may serve for monetary gain, others for power, others for esteem in the eyes of the world; but they do not serve the Lord Jesus or his church. They are false professors. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. Ultimately, the Lord will separate and judge them as their deeds deserve.

## Jesus Continues to Pray for His Followers

### **John 17:13-26**

In verse 13, the Lord continues:

#### **John 17:13**

The Lord prays for his disciples before leaving them to return to his Father. It is not, however, the Lord's intention that his disciples should grieve over his departure. Rather, he desires that they rejoice. The Lord Jesus wants his followers to rejoice in the assurance that he will return to them, and will remain with them forever in the person of his Holy Spirit. He wants them to rejoice in the teaching he has given them from the Father, and which the Holy Spirit will interpret to them more fully. He wants them to rejoice in all the blessings of their salvation, and in the assured promise of an inheritance laid upon for them in glory. (John 15:11; 16:22-24; (cf. Neh. 8:10); Acts 13:52)

Therefore, Jesus prays to his Father:

*(13) "But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." (ESV)*

Then, in verse 14, the Lord prays:

#### **John 17:14**

The Lord Jesus had specifically chosen his followers and had revealed God's word to them. They had believed that word, and had accepted it as the Word of the Father. They had committed themselves to obeying that word, and to aligning their lives to the Lord's teaching. (John 15:18-21)

The teachings set forth by the Lord Jesus, however, stood diametrically opposed to the principles and practices of the world. Therefore, when unregenerate men and women saw the Lord's disciples endeavouring to live holy and righteous lives, they resented it. (1 Pet. 4:4-5) They resented it because such visible godly behaviour in others produces an accusing conscience and a sense of shame and guilt in themselves. Ungodly men and women become more aware of their own sin, and of God's judgment upon sinners. Therefore, they vent their anger against God and against those who live godly lives by hating, despising or ignoring the people of God. (Prov. 29:27)

In fact, the believer and the unbeliever belong to two different worlds. Together with the Lord Jesus, the believer belongs to the world (or realm) that is above. The unbeliever belongs to the world (or realm) that is below; i.e., this present evil world or age. (1 John 3:13-14) Now, however, it is not the Lord Jesus' intention to remove his followers from the world. While they remain in this world, the Lord's people have a task to perform in his name and for his sake.

Therefore, in verse 15, Jesus prays:

#### **John 17:15**

Yes, the world of unregenerate mankind hate or at least disregard the children of God. God's children are the children of light, whereas the children of this world are the children of darkness and of the evil one. (1 John 5:19; cf. Eph. 5:8)

Even so, God is not about to abandon fallen mankind and leave them to face a lost eternity—at least, not yet. In his grace and mercy, God would offer salvation to all who called upon his name. All those whom the Spirit convicted of their sin, regenerated, and led to

repentance and faith in Christ, would experience forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Those who once were God's enemies, and who hated God's people, could yet be converted and renewed in Christ Jesus.

Even so, how were they to repent and call upon the name of the Lord, if not by hearing the Gospel? And how were they to hear the Gospel, if someone did not preach the Gospel? And who would preach the Gospel to the world of sinful mankind, if not those whom the world hated and despised?

Truly, God's wisdom far exceeds the wisdom of men. God's power overcomes the wilful resistance of men. The Spirit of God subdues the stubborn rebellious heart, inducing men and women to call upon the Lord for mercy. Moreover, the Holy Spirit enables them to do this *freely and willingly*.

This, then, was why the Lord Jesus did not ask his Father to take his followers out of the world. His followers, firstly, had to evangelise the world, that they too might experience God's love and mercy.

Even so, the Lord prays that God would protect his followers from the evil one. This is the real enemy—not the hostility of the world. It is against Satan and the demons that the Lord's people must be prepared to stand. The people of God, however, cannot stand in their own strength. However, they shall certainly stand in the strength of the Lord their God: For Christ defeated Satan and the powers of darkness at Calvary's cross.

Christ, then, reigns victorious over every foe; and so will those who walk with him! (Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:15)

Again, in verse 16, the Lord says of his disciples:

#### **John 17:16**

Here, the Lord repeats what he has already said in verse 14b above. The followers of the Lord Jesus do not belong to this world. They are pilgrims and strangers in this world. Their true citizenship lies in heaven, where the Lord has gone to prepare a permanent home for them (John 14:2-3; Phil. 3:20; Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11)

Then, in verse 17, Jesus prays:

#### **John 17:17**

The Lord had set apart—consecrated or sanctified—his followers as his own. He would cleanse them by his blood, and sanctify them by his Spirit. The Spirit, however, effects sanctification or inward cleansing in the believer's life through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit takes the truths of God's Word, reveals them to the believer, and shows the believer the changes that he must make in his daily life. (John 15:3; Eph. 5:25-27; Jas. 1:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:22) Thus, by living according to the revealed truth of God's Word, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer's heart and life.

## Expository Notes

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We should note, however, that as a rule the Holy Spirit does not effect sanctification apart from the application of the truths contained in the written Word of God, the Bible. (Ps. 119:9-11; 2 Thess. 2:13) Therefore, Jesus prays:

(17) *“Sanctify them<sup>49</sup> in the truth; your word is truth.” (ESV)*

God’s Word, of course, includes the teachings of the Lord Jesus—for Jesus taught only what his Father had shown to him.

In verse 18, the Lord continues:

### John 17:18

Now, Jesus reveals why he had not asked the Father to take his disciples out of the world, but rather to protect them from the evil one. Just as the Father had sent his Son into the world to *accomplish the work* of redemption, so the Son was about to send his disciples into the world to *proclaim the message* of redemption.

The Lord Jesus would soon give to his disciples the great commission. By that commission, Jesus would command and authorise his disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations. The Lord would also command and authorise his followers to baptise all those who believed on him, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Then, in verse 19, the Lord adds:

### John 17:19

The word translated ‘consecrate’ here is literally ‘sanctify’ (myself). However, there is no allusion in this verse to the Lord Jesus making himself clean in any sense. The Lord was, and is, perfectly sinless. Since he does not possess an inherently sinful nature, the Lord Jesus remains free from all possibility of moral or spiritual defilement.

In saying, therefore, that he consecrated (or sanctified) himself, the Lord is saying that he set himself apart—or dedicated himself—for the service of God, and as a voluntary and substitutionary sacrifice for sin. Only through Christ’s act of perfect obedience and atoning sacrifice, could his followers be cleansed of their sin and sanctified to God. (Heb. 10:5-14)

Therefore, Jesus says:

(19) *“And for their sake I consecrate myself,<sup>50</sup> that they also may be sanctified<sup>51</sup> in truth.” (ESV)*

In verse 20, the Lord continues:

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<sup>49</sup> 17:17 Greek *Set them apart* (for holy service to God) [ESV footnote]

<sup>50</sup> 17:19 Greek *I set myself apart* (for holy service to God); or *I sanctify myself* [ESV footnote]

<sup>51</sup> 17:19 Greek *may be set apart* (for holy service to God) [ESV footnote]



**John 17:20-21**

The Lord Jesus, of course, did not intend to intercede with his Father only on behalf of his eleven disciples or other existing followers. Indeed, the holy Son of God now begins to pray for all those in all ages whom the Holy Spirit would bring to repentance and faith in himself through the Gospel. This Gospel was preached originally by the Lord Jesus, and then by his apostles.

In his prayer, the Lord expresses his desire that all believers in all parts of the world might be united in him. As far as all true believers were concerned, this union would be an inseparable *spiritual* union. Each truly regenerated believer would become a member of Christ's mystical body—the church. Thus, they would become inseparable from Christ, and from other members of that same body. (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12,27)

Just as the Father is in the Son, so the Son would be in his people—in the Person of his Holy Spirit. Again, just as the Son is in the Father, so the believer would be in the Son—and the Father (spiritually and mystically). Thus, when the world observed the believer's conduct, they would realise that they were the children of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelt within them. When the world witnessed the effects of the believer's faith in Christ, they would understand that God had sent his Son into the world to redeem sinful men and women to himself.

Then, in verses 22 and 23a, the Lord adds:

**John 17:22-23**

The glory of which the Lord speaks here, and which he gave to his disciples, must in some way be related to what he has just been saying about the unity between the Father, the Son and all his redeemed people.

Believers are united to Christ by a common bond. They are fellow-believers in Christ. However, they have become fellow-believers through the convicting and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they share the same Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ is known also as the Spirit of grace and the Spirit of glory. He is God manifest in the Spirit. As such, he indwells the hearts and lives of all God's people. Therefore, those who receive God's Spirit are marked as belonging to God. And those who belong to God are united—by the Holy Spirit—to both the Father and the Son. (Heb. 10:29; 1 Pet. 4:14; Eph. 1:13)

Therefore, Jesus prays:

(22) *"The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one: (23) I in them and you in me..." (ESV)*

Christ, of course, indwells us in the Person of his Holy Spirit.

It was the earnest desire of the Lord Jesus that all his followers should be inseparably united in him. The Lord had already commanded his followers to love one another as he had loved them. He had also commanded them to obey his teachings. From this, therefore, it is clear that this unity in Christ must be a unity of *love and obedience*, as well as *faith and trust*.

There is no place for disunity, disharmony or unjustified division in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That church comprises one single body of which Christ alone is Head. All truly regenerated believers are members of Christ's mystical body, the church. Therefore, we ought to do all in our power to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Only let us be careful to love the Lord, to obey his Word, and to love one another as Christ has loved us.

In certain matters of interpretation, it may not prove possible for us to agree with another brother or sister in Christ. Provided, however, that this matter is not of a *fundamental* nature (and therefore essential to the faith), we must receive one another, without disputing, as Christ has received us.

Let us pray for, and with, one another. Let us pray that the Spirit of God may unite our hearts in the Word of God and in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 24, the Lord continues:

### John 17:24

Here, the Lord Jesus prays that his followers will one day be with him in glory. The Lord is not praying merely for his immediate disciples, but also for all those whom the Father had given him, and who would become his followers in the future.

In effect, the Lord is praying for the eternal safekeeping of all his elect. He is praying that the Father will keep them safe until the day when they are united with their Lord in his glory. Then, they will see the Lord Jesus in all his splendour of his majesty, and perfect holiness. Then, they will see the Son of God as he really is. Then, finally—in their new spiritual bodies—the Lord will transform them into his likeness. (John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:17; 1 John 3:2)

In this verse, too, we see the Father's love for his Son reaches back to before the creation of the world.

In verse 25, the Lord prays:

### John 17:25

Here, the Lord Jesus addresses his Father as *Righteous Father*. Thus, the Lord emphasises the absolute righteousness, justice and equity of God as he is in himself, and as he is in all his dealings with mankind. (Cf. John 17:11) Everything that God does—including everything that he does in relation to salvation—is done in accordance with his righteous, holy, wise and loving nature. There is never any hint of unfairness or injustice in God. He is perfect in all his ways, and perfectly upright in all his dealings both with his own people and with fallen sinful mankind. (Rom. 3:25-26)

The world at large, however, does not know God. Sinful humanity refuses to acknowledge God's rightful claims over them. Likewise, fallen mankind refuses to seek for the righteousness that comes from God through repentance and faith in his one and only Son. Therefore, in righteousness and justice, the world remains under God's condemnation and wrath. (Rom. 1:18-22,28; 3:11-12; 2 Thess. 1:8-10)

The Son, however, has revealed his Father to all whom the Father has given him. Therefore, they have come to know God, and to accept his Son as the One sent by God. (Luke 10:21-24)

In verse 26, the Lord Jesus continues:

### John 17:26

This confirms what has just been said above. The Lord's followers come to know God and to accept the One whom he sent because Jesus reveals the Father to them. He taught them about the Father, and opened their understanding to certain essential spiritual truths. Now, the disciples were beginning to believe and understand more fully what Jesus had been saying to them. Now, they understood that he came from the Father, and would be returning to the Father (vv. 6-8).

Truths such as these, however, cannot be discerned naturally; that is, with the unregenerate and unspiritual mind or reason. Rather, the unspiritual mind must be spiritually awakened by God, and then spiritual truths must be spiritually revealed to this renewed mind. These truths, however, are disclosed to a person's mind only through the work of God's Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14)

For this reason, unregenerate men and women—no matter how intelligent or well-educated—cannot comprehend spiritual truths. They remain in spiritual darkness unless and until their minds are illuminated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in their unregenerate condition, they are spiritually dead—dead in trespasses and sins, and totally unable (and unwilling even if they were able) to respond to spiritual truths or to the message of the Gospel.

The Lord Jesus, however, continued to reveal these truths to those who had believed on him—i.e., his disciples—that they might come to know and love the Father and the Son, and that they might experience something of God's eternal love for them. God's love for his people bears a strong resemblance to the unfathomable nature of his love for his one and only Son (although, of course, the Father's love for his Son is in a sense absolutely unique).

Again, Jesus prayed that he might be in his disciples. This became a reality when the Lord imparted the full measure of his Holy Spirit to them at Pentecost. From then on, Christ did indeed dwell in the hearts and lives of his people—in the Person of his Spirit.

Of course, this 'coming' of Christ to indwell the hearts of his people, is not to be confused with the Second Coming of Christ in his glory. That event, which is yet future, will be a personal, bodily, visible, and glorious appearance. (Gal. 2:20)



## John Chapter 18

### Jesus' Betrayal and Arrest

#### **John 18:1-11**

##### **John 18:1**

Jesus' intercessory prayer to his Father was over. Now came the time for the Lord of glory to make his way to the cross of shame. It was now time for him to complete his mission in this world, and to accomplish his Father's eternal purposes for the salvation of lost men and women.

Jesus knew what awaited him; but this was why he had come into the world. Now he must offer himself a perfect sacrifice of atonement for sin. Only in this way could he bring in the kingdom of everlasting peace and righteousness spoken of by the prophet, Daniel:

*(24) "Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place." (Daniel 9:24 ESV)*

As Jesus and his eleven disciples crossed over the dark and deep Kidron Valley, they came to a garden.

Jesus and his disciples had visited the Garden of Gethsemane often to meet quietly with the Father in heaven. On this occasion, Jesus would plead with his Father to deliver him from the agonising suffering that lay ahead. The Lord Jesus, however, would submit to his heavenly Father's will. Here, in this garden, Jesus would be betrayed into the hands of evil men. (Matt. 26:36-46) All these things, however, happened in accordance with God's eternal decree (or plan and purposes). God controls all events—not man.

Then, in verses 2 and 3, the Scripture continues:

##### **John 18:2-3**

While Jesus and his disciples made their way to the garden, Judas the betrayer had already arranged with the Jews to lead them to Jesus. Judas knew that Jesus would go to the garden to pray, for the Lord had gone there many times before with his disciples. (Luke 21:37)

Judas, therefore, led a detachment of Roman soldiers to the garden, accompanied by representatives of the chief priests and Pharisees. Although they knew Jesus would be unarmed, yet they approached the garden with a variety of weapons. Such is the fear in the hearts and minds of those who know they are acting wrongfully and with evil intent. Such, too, is the treachery of those who profess to know and love the Lord, and yet who betray him by their actions. (Matt. 26:47,55)

It staggers the imagination to realise that the betrayer once met regularly in this special garden to pray with the Lord and with the other disciples. How close to the hallowed presence of God can one come—and yet still be a son of perdition, and a child of hell!

## Expository Notes

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Jesus, of course, knew what was about to happen. Therefore, verse 4 tells us:

### John 18:4

All events are in the hands of Almighty God. From eternity, God planned that his only Son should be slain for the sins of his people, throughout all the ages, and to the ends of the earth. The Father determined the exact time and place that this should happen. He decreed that no one could lay a hand on his beloved Son until his appointed time. (Rev. 5:9; 13:8; John 7:30; 8:20)

At his appointed time, the Father permitted his Son to be taken by the hands of sinful men—but only in accordance with God's eternal plan and purposes. Nevertheless, this does not absolve these evil men of their sin and guilt in taking and crucifying the holy Son of God. (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

Jesus knew that his Father had planned all these things to the minutest detail, and he knew what would happen to him now. Leaving his disciples, therefore, the Son of God stepped forward to meet the mob of armed men, declaring:

(4b) ...*“Whom do you seek?”* (ESV)

### John 18:5

‘We have come to arrest the man known as Jesus, from the Galilean town of Nazareth.’ (Matt. 2:23)

With full divine authority and power, the Son of God declares, *“I am”*<sup>52</sup> [he]. ‘I am the one you are seeking.’

While the Lord was speaking these words, John tells us that the betrayer had come with the mob to identify the Son of God. He had come to betray his former Master with a kiss. However, none of this treachery proved necessary. In all the majesty and dignity of his glorious person and office, Jesus voluntarily yielded himself up to those who sought him. (Luke 22:47-48)

Clearly, Jesus' declaration profoundly affected those who had come to arrest him. Verse 6 tells us:

### John 18:6

What caused this reaction from these toughened and sin-hardened men?

Many times during his ministry, Jesus had used the expression *“I am”* to assert his claim to be the Son of God. The Lord had declared, *“I am the bread of life”*—the source and sustainer of life. (John 6:33,35) He had said, *“I am the door”*—the only way of access to

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<sup>52</sup> 18:5 Greek *I am*; also verses 6, 8 [ESV footnote]

the Father's kingdom. (John 10:1-10) He had asserted categorically, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6)

These represent just few of the occasions when Jesus employed the phrase *"I am"* to claim direct association and equality with Almighty God. For none but God could fulfil these statements. When, therefore, Jesus said to these men, *"I am [he]"*, they would understand this to be more than Jesus identifying himself as the person they had come to apprehend. From his authoritative and dignified use of the expression, they would understand it as a further assertion of his divine power and glory. (John 8:58; Rev. 1:7-8,17-18)

The Jews, of course, knew the full significance of the expression, *"I am"* when used by Almighty God. They knew it was the Name by which God had revealed himself to Moses—the personal Name by which he was to be known. (Exodus 3:13-15; 6:3)

The Jews considered this Name too sacred to pronounce, so they substituted the expression *YHWH* or *Yahweh* (transliterated, *Jehovah*) for the expression, *"I AM."* When, therefore, Jesus used the expression *"I am"* concerning his claims to be the Son of God, the Jews accused him of blasphemy. Now, when Jesus again uses this solemn expression, the Jews are reminded of its most holy connotations. Therefore, John tells us:

*(6) When Jesus<sup>53</sup> said, "I am [he]," they drew back and fell to the ground.*  
(ESV)

The pronoun *'he'* is not in the Greek text.

#### **John 18:7**

Overawed by Jesus' solemn and majestic person, these men apparently had not fully comprehended what Jesus had already said. His power and authority had so overcome them that they had fallen face down on the ground. They had not realised that—in saying, *"I am [he]"*—the Lord was declaring himself to be the Son of God, and therefore the one whom they sought.

Jesus, therefore, asks them again whom they seek, and once again they reply, *"Jesus of Nazareth."*

Verse 8 says:

#### **John 18:8**

Once more Jesus identifies himself as the one for whom they are seeking. With perfect composure of heart and mind, the holy Son of God steps forth to be taken by the hands of sinful men, and to bring his work on earth to a conclusion. At the same time, the Lord ensures that only he will be taken to trial and subsequent crucifixion. His disciples will not be called upon to suffer on this occasion. Nor could the Lord's disciples assume any part in

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<sup>53</sup> **18:6** Greek *he* [ESV footnote]

the work of atonement or redemption. Their task was to preach the message of the cross, and to endure persecution for the sake of Christ's name.

That none of Jesus' disciples would suffer on this occasion is confirmed by verse 9:

### **John 18:9**

{Cf. John 6:39}

It is impossible for anyone whom the Father has given to his Son to be lost. During the earlier period of his ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus had declared this truth to the Jews and to his followers. (John 6:39) Those whom the Father gives to the Son remain the Son's forever. They are his eternal possession, and therefore cannot be lost or apostatise from the faith. (John 10:29-30)

Clearly, then, the Father had never given Judas Iscariot to his Son. In accordance with God's sovereign and eternal purposes, Jesus had chosen Judas for service—knowing, however, that Judas never truly believed on him, as was revealed by his pilfering and hypocritical lifestyle. Although this individual had been chosen for service and to further the purposes of God concerning his Son, Judas had not been chosen for salvation and eternal life. (John 17:12)

Then, in verse 10, John writes:

### **John 18:10**

Realising that his Lord and Master was about to be arrested, Peter intervened. Failing to perceive that this was part of God's plan and purpose for his Son, Peter tried to prevent Jesus' arrest.

Once more, Peter acted rashly and hastily—although with good intentions. Yet, the apostle failed to understand all that Jesus had said to him about the necessity and certainty of his arrest, sufferings and death. (Luke 18:31-34) Attempting, therefore, to protect his Master, Peter lunges at the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear with the sword.

Someone may ask where Peter obtained his sword. However, from Luke chapter 22 verse 38, we learn that the disciples possessed two swords. (See also Luke 22:36)

Returning to John chapter 18, we find Jesus immediately rebuking Peter for his rash action. In verse 11 John writes:

### **John 18:11**

'This is neither the time nor the place to use the sword! Put it away!'

In chapter 26 of his Gospel, Matthew records this incident more fully:

*(52) Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. (53) Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? (54) But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"*

*(Matt. 26:52-54 ESV)*

Very forcibly, Jesus pointed out to his well-meaning disciple that he was not furthering the purposes of God by his action, but rather attempting to hinder them. Therefore, Jesus declared:

*(11b)... "shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?" (ESV)*



Jesus was pointing out to Peter that the Father had allotted to his Son a full measure of suffering—represented by the 'cup.' Now, the time had come for Jesus to drink the cup; i.e., to endure at his Father's hands the righteous and holy wrath of God against sin, and to make atonement for the sins of lost men and women. (Cf. John 12:27)

John does not tell us what became of the high priest's servant, Malchus. However, at the time John wrote his Gospel, Luke had already recorded this information. Therefore, in chapter 22 of Luke's Gospel, he writes:

*(51) But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. (Luke 22:51 ESV)*

## **Jesus Before Annas**

### **John 18:12-14**

Returning to verses 12 and 13 of John's Gospel, the apostle continues:

#### **John 18:12-13**

The Jewish officials and Roman soldiers had come armed to seize the Lord Jesus. However, it was not they who commanded the situation, but the Lord.

Upon their arrival at the garden, Jesus had stepped forward to ask whom they sought. Then, openly identifying himself as that one, the mob had drawn back and fallen to the ground in surprise and awe (v.6). Yes, they had come to take Jesus; but no one could lay a hand on the Son of God before his appointed time. This was his appointed time. Now, therefore, the Lord of glory stood forward and permitted the soldiers to arrest and bind him. Now, he was about to fulfil his Father's will and complete his work of redemption on earth.

The Roman soldiers and Jewish officials then led the Lord Jesus away. They brought him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas—the high priest that year. Annas had been high priest himself, until deposed by Valerius Gratus, the procurator of Judea.

It remains uncertain why the soldiers took Jesus to a *former* high priest. However, it appears that Annas still exercised considerable influence in the Sanhedrin. Indeed, he may have been an advisor to Caiaphas, the current high priest. In any event, the high priest would carry out a preliminary examination of the accused person. Later, he would call for a full trial before the Sanhedrin or Jewish religious court.

The apostle John tells us that Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current high priest. Then, in verse 14, the apostle continues:

#### **John 18:14**

At an earlier meeting of the Sanhedrin, the chief priests and the Pharisees had been discussing what action they might take against Jesus in order to put a stop to his teaching. Fearful that the Romans might intervene and take away their temple and nation, the Jewish authorities were trying to decide how to handle the situation.

At this point, Caiaphas the high priest had declared:

*(49b) ... "You know nothing at all. (50) Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."*

*(51) He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, (52) and not for the nation*

*only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.*

*(John 11:49b-52 ESV)*

Caiaphas, of course, had not been speaking of Jesus dying as a substitute for sinners. He meant merely that it would be better to dispose of Jesus than to risk the perceived wrath of the Roman authorities, and their subsequent loss of semi-autonomy as a nation.

The high priest, however, spoke wiser than he knew. Jesus did indeed die for the people. The Holy Spirit used Caiaphas' words prophetically. The Spirit applied these words in a way that the high priest had not anticipated or intended, but which was more in keeping with God's plans and purposes, and with the truth.

### **Peter Denies Jesus**

#### **John 18:15-18**

As the soldiers led Jesus away, two of his disciples followed at a distance. In verses 15 and 16, John writes:

#### **John 18:15-16**

Upon Jesus' arrest, all his disciples had deserted him and fled. Later, however, two of these disciples returned to see what would become of their Lord and Master. (Matt. 26:56,58) Verse 15 above informs us that one of these disciples was Simon Peter. The other disciple is not named, but it is generally assumed that he was the apostle John—the writer of this Gospel. John was known personally to the high priest, therefore he was able to gain access into the courtyard of the high priest's palace where Jesus had been taken. The servant girl on duty at the gate, however, would not permit Peter to enter the courtyard. Only when John returned and spoke to the girl on Peter's behalf was this apostle allowed access to the palace courtyard.

We are not told in Scripture how John was known to the high priest, or how, as a disciple, he was not arrested. Perhaps the authorities considered the disciples of Jesus to be of little interest to them, now that they had apprehended their Leader and Master.

Apparently, Peter had not been recognised by the servant girl on duty at the gate. However, when John returned to speak on Peter's behalf, the girl must have realised that Peter too was a disciple of Jesus.

In verse 17, therefore, John records these words of the servant girl to Peter:

#### **John 18:17**

The girl, of course, must have realised by this time that Peter was a disciple of Jesus, and she asks this question either rhetorically or with a tinge of irony. Peter, however, was completely taken aback by her sudden and direct question. Under the circumstances, he had not intended to reveal his identity to anyone.

Granted, the high priest knew that John was a disciple of Jesus—and nothing untoward had happened to John. John, however, was not so prominent a member of the Twelve as Peter. He, Peter, had been the spokesman for the Twelve. Was it not likely that they, who had arrested Jesus as the Leader, would also arrest Peter as the spokesman of the Leader's disciples? Would they not then make an example of him? Whatever the reason, Peter tried desperately to conceal his connection with the Lord Jesus. As soon as the servant girl put her question to him, the apostle denied all knowledge of the Son of God.

(17) *"The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." (ESV)*

Clearly, this was an emphatic denial of his Master—and of the truth.

In verse 18, John records:

### **John 18:18**

Greatly alarmed by his unexpected encounter with the girl at the door, Peter now attempted to make himself less noticeable. If he stood alone within the grounds of the high priest's palace, it would be difficult to remain unnoticed—especially amidst the increased security surrounding the arrest of the Lord Jesus.

Peter, however, determined to make the best of this situation. Much of the activity was taking place in the inner area of the palace where the Lord Jesus was being held. Peter noted a quieter spot in the courtyard, beside an open fire. Granted, a few people had already gathered around this fire, but perhaps they would take no notice of another person in their midst.

Peter, therefore, joined the others around the fire, warming himself in the cold night air. Perhaps the apostle was unaware that the others who stood with him around the fire were servants and officials of the high priest and the Roman authorities.

## **Jesus Interrogated by Annas**

### **John 18:19-24**

The apostle John now turns his attention to the events currently unfolding in the high priest's palace, where Jesus was being interrogated.

Therefore, in verse 19, the evangelist writes:

### **John 18:19**

It is highly questionable whether the high priest and his associates were acting legally on this occasion. They had convened this meeting *at night*, and *on the eve of a feast day*—both of which were contrary to the law. Again, this was a *preliminary hearing*—not a trial. The accused should not have been cross-examined until after independent witnesses had given their testimony. No such witnesses could have been summonsed at this time of night. Nor should they have been brought before an unconstitutional and unlawful pre-trial hearing such as this.

Clearly, Annas was attempting to get Jesus to incriminate himself in order to bring formal charges against him. (Cf. Luke 11:53-54; 20:20; see also Matt. 26:59ff) The former high priest, however, ought to have known everything relating to Jesus' teaching and his disciples. Indeed, Annas had already heard much about Jesus' teaching. He knew, therefore, that he could not hope to bring charges against Jesus, unless he could distort something that the Lord had said or accuse him of blasphemy. To this end, the former high priest probably hoped that he might hear Jesus claiming to be the Son of God. If he made this claim in the presence of the officials, Annas would then be able to advise Caiaphas—the *servant* high priest—of the nature of the charges to bring against Jesus.

In verses 20 and 21, John tells us of Jesus' response to Annas' interrogation:

### John 18:20-21

This confirms what has been said above; i.e., Annas should have been well acquainted already with Jesus' teaching.

Unlike many of the false teachers who drew away disciples after themselves, Jesus brought his teaching and his disciples to the Jewish places of worship. Regularly and openly, the Lord Jesus taught the people both in the synagogues and in the temple. (Matt. 4:23-25; John 7:26ff; 8:2) The whole country knew where Jesus taught, and what he taught. Even when the Lord taught his disciples in private, this was to equip them to take his teachings to the people.

Therefore, contends Jesus in verse 21:

*(21) "Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said." (ESV)*

This forthright reply to Annas proved too much for one of the high priest's officials. Therefore, in verse 22, John records:

### John 18:22

Once more, the high priest's office acted illegally. In striking the Lord Jesus, this official became guilty of assault. Jesus had attested to the truth—which the high priest knew very well. If the truth proved offensive to another's ears, they had no right to take matters into their own hands, and presume to execute their own brand of justice. (Cf. Acts 23:2-3)

Jesus was being questioned at a preliminary hearing—a hearing that had been convened unlawfully. As yet, no charges had been preferred—nor could any just charges be preferred against the sinless and guiltless Son of God. Illegally convened courts, however, have a habit of carrying forward illegally conceived actions.

This petty official characterised the type of people who had gathered together against the LORD and against his Anointed, and it characterised the type of people who would send the Lord Jesus to the Cross. All these things happened, however, in fulfilment of God's eternal plan and purposes for his Son. (Ps. 2:2)

In verse 23, the apostle John tells us of the response Jesus gave to the arrogant question posed by the high priest's official:

### John 18:23

Probably, this official knew that his master, Annas, was well aware of Jesus' teaching, and did not need to question the Lord about it. However, the official resented the manner in which the Lord Jesus replied to the former high priest, and therefore struck Jesus in the face with his hand. Jesus, however, challenges this action on the part of this official:

*(23) "Jesus answered him, "If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?" (ESV)*

The official had acted rashly and unlawfully. Jesus had spoken nothing but the truth. He had said and done nothing wrong. No fault could be found in the sinless One. Yet, because he was displeased with the Lord's reply to Annas, this official had taken the law into his own hands and struck the One who kept the law and who alone fulfilled the Law. (1 Pet. 2:21-23; Matt. 5:17-18)

Perceiving the potential dangers inherent in prolonging the present hearing, Annas decided to close the proceedings and send the Lord Jesus to Caiaphas. Caiaphas was the serving high priest for that year.

In verse 24, therefore, John writes:

**John 18:24**

Though untried, and totally without fault, Annas ensured that the Lord Jesus was securely bound before being sent to Caiaphas. Considering that the Lord had offered no resistance and posed no threat to the authorities, it is astonishing that they could maltreat him in this manner. Yet, much worse was to follow at the hands of wicked men.

**Peter Denies Jesus Twice More****John 18:25-27**

John now turns his attention to the events unfolding in the courtyard of the high priest. In verse 25, he writes:

**John 18:25**

Once again, someone puts Peter on the spot by challenging him to confess himself a follower of Jesus. Once more, however, this normally outspoken and courageous disciple denies his Lord and Master.

'I do not know him. I have no connection with him. I certainly am not a follower of Jesus!'

No matter how we construe his responses, *Peter lied*. When he needed him most, he failed to stand by his Master. He failed himself as a man of courage, honour and integrity. In addition, he failed the other disciples of Jesus.

Although they were not present at this time (except for John), the other disciples would soon learn of Peter's denials. They would learn that he—like them—was subject to sin and failure. They would learn that Peter—like them—could deny his Master at a critical moment. Later, they would learn that God could forgive and restore such individuals, and still use them in his service and for his glory. For the moment, however, Peter had again denied his Lord—but even more was to follow.

In verse 26, the apostle John records:

**John 18:26**

Now, Peter's sin was being compounded. An eyewitness had seen him in the Garden of Gethsemane with the Lord Jesus. Even worse, this witness had seen Peter strike Malchus (the witness's relative) with a sword. The eyewitness, therefore, was able to testify that Peter had lied about not being associated with Jesus.

How great is the shame and guilt we bring upon ourselves when the world sees us associating with Jesus, but when we later deny any such association by what we say or do. Therefore, the unbeliever perceives the Christian as one who is able to live a double life, or who at least is able to sin like any unconverted person.

*(26) One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (ESV)*

What is Peter's response to this latest challenge? (v.27)

**John 18:27**

(Cf. Matt. 26:73-75)

All this happened in fulfillment of the Lord's words to Peter recorded in John chapter 13:

(36) *Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward."*

(37) *Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."*

(38) *Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."*

*(John 13:36-38 ESV)*

John does not tell us what happened immediately after Peter's third denial. In Luke chapter 22, however, these details are recorded for us:

(61) *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times."*

(62) *And he went out and wept bitterly.*

*(Luke 22:61-62 ESV)*

## Jesus Taken to Pilate

### **John 18:28-32**

#### **John 18:28**

John does not provide details of Jesus' trial before Caiaphas and the members of the Sanhedrin. The evangelist relates only the preliminary hearing before Annas, concluding that Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas. (v.24) (See Matt. 27:1-2; Mark 15:1) Now, in verse 28—and without providing any further information—John tells us that the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor or procurator.

Clearly, then, Jesus' pre-trial hearing before Annas, and his subsequent trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, took place during the night or in the early hours of the morning. Now, Jesus is taken to Pilate, still in the early hours of the morning.

However, on arriving at the governor's headquarters (Gk., *the praetorium*), the Jews refused to enter the building. They considered it inappropriate to enter a Gentile residence where they might become contaminated by touching something ceremonially unclean. Evidently, these Jews thought that the law relating to rituals and ceremonies was more important than the law relating to justice and equity. They thought nothing of condemning the innocent, so long as they kept themselves ceremonially pure to observe the Feast of Passover. Little did they know that the One they were about to slay was the Passover Lamb par excellence! (1 Cor. 5:7; cf. Rev. 5:6)

John says that these Jews did not enter the Roman governor's palace because they wanted to eat the Passover. This need not necessarily be understood of the Passover meal proper. The Jews did not restrict the term 'Passover' to just one day, but had extended it to cover the full eight day period of the two feasts (*the Feast of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread*). Therefore, their reference to 'eating the Passover' could have been a reference to the paschal lamb or a reference to the later meals, properly belonging to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Deut. 16:2-8)

At any event, the Jews absolutely refused to enter the praetorium, but remained outside the building. Thus, in verse 29, John says:

**John 18:29**

In the trial before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Jesus had already been pronounced guilty and sentenced to death. However, as yet, the Jews had not advised Pilate of this sentence. Possibly, they thought that Pilate would overturn their sentence and dismiss the case when he realised that they had considered Jesus deserving of death on religious—not criminal—grounds.

The Jews, therefore, had to find another way of persuading Pilate to confirm the death sentence against Jesus. Since they could not do so directly, they would try to convince Pilate that Jesus was indeed a criminal—a criminal worthy of death. To this end, they attempted to induce Pilate into believing that Jesus had been guilty of political crimes or crimes against the state, viz., subversion and treason. John does not record these details for us, but in Luke chapter 23 it is written:

*(1) Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.  
(2) And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."*

*(Luke 23:1-2 ESV; see Luke 20:19-26; 23:4)*

Returning to John's Gospel chapter 18—in verse 30, John writes:

**John 18:30**

'Surely, Pilate, you must realise that we of the Sanhedrin constitute the highest and most esteemed religious court of the land. If, therefore, the Sanhedrin remits a prisoner to you as a criminal, then you can be assured that he is indeed a criminal. And, if a criminal, then he ought to be condemned as such by the civil authority. You, Pilate, represent that authority.'

Pilate, however, remained dissatisfied with the Jews' evasive answer. In the Roman governor's estimation, Jesus did not have a valid case to answer. Although potentially serious, the governor was not yet convinced of the political allegations levelled against Jesus by the Jews. Therefore, in verse 31a, John records:

**John 18:31**

Suspecting that the Jews had handed Jesus over to him out of malice and envy, and without any just cause, Pilate endeavours to return Jesus to the jurisdiction of the religious court or Sanhedrin. (Mark 15:10) This move however compels the Jews to disclose their true intentions:

*(31b)...The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."  
(ESV)*

The Jewish Sanhedrin could *pronounce* the death sentence, but they were prevented from carrying out that sentence themselves. Capital sentences had to be ratified by the Roman courts, and only the Roman courts could implement the death penalty. On a later occasion, the enraged Jews were to kill Stephen. This, however, was an unlawful execution, tantamount to homicide or murder. (Acts 7:57-60; cf. Acts 22:20)

Again, had Jesus died at the hands of the Jews, they would have stoned him to death in accordance with the Mosaic Law. However, in order to fulfil the Scriptures—including Jesus' own words—it was necessary that the Lord be executed by being hung on a tree. (Mark 10:33-34; cf. Luke 24:7; Deut. 21:22-23 with Gal. 3:13)

Thus, in verse 32, John writes:

### **John 18:32**

As it was written of him, and as he himself prophesied, Jesus would not die by stoning, but by crucifixion. Crucifixion or hanging were Roman methods of execution. (Matt. 26:1-2; John 3:14; 12:32-33; cf. Ps. 22:16-18)

## **Christ The King**

### **John 18:33-40**

Unable to persuade the Jews to deal with Jesus themselves, the Roman procurator returned once more inside the judgment hall to question Jesus.

In verse 33, John writes:

### **John 18:33**

Knowing that Pilate would not entertain any charges of a purely religious nature, the Jews had accused Jesus of crimes against the state. They claimed he was stirring up the people, and thereby threatening to usurp the Roman peace. (*Pax Romana*).

In addition, they alleged that Jesus was guilty of treason. According to the Jews, Jesus had set himself up as a king. The Jews, however, claimed to recognise no king but Caesar (!) If, therefore, Jesus was claiming to be a king, they reasoned, then he must be setting himself up in opposition to the Roman Emperor. Such an action was treasonable.

Thus, Pilate said to Jesus,

(33b)...*“Are you the King of the Jews?”* (ESV)

Pilate knew that the Jews were making false accusations against Jesus. Now, however, he was trying to determine whether in fact Jesus considered himself a king—and therefore a potential threat to the Roman Emperor. Jesus, of course, was indeed *the* King whom God had promised through the prophets. However, as we will see shortly, Jesus’ kingship was very different from the popular conception of it.

The Jews thought of their promised Messiah not only or even principally as a spiritual deliverer, but primarily as a secular and political deliverer. They believed the Messiah would occupy the throne of David in Jerusalem. They also believed that this Messiah would overthrow their Roman overlords and drive them from the land. (Cf. John 1:49; 12:13)

Pilate, therefore, must have been greatly concerned to hear that Jesus was allegedly the king of the Jews. Had the Jewish Messiah arrived? If the Jewish authorities had accused Jesus merely of religious matters, then Pilate could have remitted the case to the Sanhedrin for them to resolve. However, if Jesus was claiming to be a king, then this was a civil and political matter. Such matters fell within Pilate’s jurisdiction. (Cf. Acts 18:14-16)

Therefore, Pilate asked Jesus,

(33b)...*“Are you the King of the Jews?”*

In verse 34, John gives us Jesus’ reply:

### **John 18:34**

Jesus was aware of Pilate’s motives in asking whether he was the king of the Jews. He knew the Roman procurator had been influenced by what other people—especially the



rulers of the Sanhedrin—had said to him. Jesus knew that Pilate was weak and afraid of offending either the Emperor at Rome or the Jewish chief priests. Unable, therefore, to reach a definite decision about Jesus, the Roman governor asked him to explain his actions more fully.

### John 18:35

In asking, “*Am I a Jew?*” Pilate is exclaiming disdainfully his inability to comprehend the Jews’ complaints, or to come to a conclusion about Jesus—except by listening to what they had to say about him. Pilate, of course, should have examined Jesus himself, in accordance with the rules of justice. He should not have been influenced by hearsay, or even by the opinions of the Jewish religious court—the Sanhedrin.

Pilate was no Jew! He knew little about Jesus except what had been told him from time to time by the Jewish authorities or by his own Roman representatives throughout the land. Therefore, in the present circumstances, Pilate is guided by what the Jewish Council have told him concerning Jesus.

*(35) “Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” (ESV)*

It is highly unlikely that Pilate accepted the Jews’ allegations that Jesus was claiming to be their king. Essentially, therefore, what Pilate was asking Jesus was, ‘Why have the Jews made this ridiculous—but most serious—charge against you? What offence have you committed that has given them cause to make such a charge? What have you done?’

Jesus, however, is more intent in replying to Pilate’s first question about whether he is a king. Therefore, in verse 36, John writes:

### John 18:36

The Lord Jesus does not deny that he is a king. Indeed, unknown to Pilate, the One who was presently standing before him was the *King of kings*. Jesus emphasises, however, that his kingdom does not belong to this world. (Ps. 45:3-7; Isa. 9:6-7; Zech. 9:9) Since it is not of this world, Jesus’ kingdom could not be construed of as an earthly kingdom; i.e., a kingdom set up alongside, or in opposition to, any other earthly realm or ruler. Therefore, Jesus’ kingdom poses no threat to Pilate or to his administration, or to any other element of the Roman State or Empire.

The Lord Jesus illustrates this principle by pointing out to Pilate that—if he were ruler over an earthly kingdom—then his followers would have risen up against the Jews to prevent his arrest. This, however, had not happened—as Pilate well knew. Therefore, Jesus’ kingship was not of a political or secular nature, as was being alleged by the Jews. It could not therefore threaten the stability of the Roman government, or pose any threat to the Roman Emperor.

At the end of verse 36, Jesus says:

*(36c) “...But my kingdom is not from the world.” (ESV)*

Although Jesus made no claims to any earthly kingship, the Lord certainly—and rightfully—inferred that he ruled as King elsewhere—in another and immeasurably superior realm. (Cf. Luke 17:20-21)

### John 18:37

*(37a) “Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king... (ESV)*

With some degree of surprise, Pilate suddenly realised that there was a sense in which Jesus was indeed claiming kingship; i.e., sovereign rule and authority. The Lord had just said to Pilate that his kingdom was from another place (v.36). Where, then, could that other place be? Pilate must have become even more perplexed concerning the truth, and about the claims and counter-claims regarding Jesus.

However, in verse 37b, Jesus replies to Pilate:

*(37b,c) ...“Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” (ESV)*

The Lord pointed out to Pilate that he had been born a king. (Matt. 2:2; 26:64; 27:11) The Lord also told the Roman governor that he had come into this world to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom—the kingdom of heaven and of God. Part of God’s plan involved Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion and subsequent resurrection to glory in order to open the way for redeemed men and women to enter the kingdom of God. (Col. 1:12-14)

Since his return to glory, the Lord Jesus has been reigning in his Father’s presence. In addition, the Lord of glory reigns in the hearts and lives of his redeemed people. One day, however, he will return in all his kingly glory. One day, he will reign supreme over the renewed creation—King of kings, and Lord of lords. (2 Thess. 1:8-10; Rev. 17:14; 19:16) Pilate, however, could have understood little—and believed less—of these spiritual and eternal truths.

At the end of verse 37, Jesus had said:

*(37c) “...Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”*

### John 18:38

Did Pilate have so little regard for the importance of truth when he asked, “*What is truth?*”—or was he asking Jesus what really constituted truth in the midst of a world filled with error, deceit and political intrigue? It is uncertain how Pilate’s question should be understood. At any rate—and before he could receive an answer—Pilate had already left Jesus’ presence and had returned to the assembled Jewish leaders.

‘You have brought this man before me alleging that he has been disturbing the people, and ought therefore to be considered as an insurrectionist. You want me to consider him as one who incites people to rebel against the Roman State. (Luke 23:4-5,13-15) Again, you have alleged that this man opposes payment of taxes to Caesar, and that he claims to be a king (Luke 23:2). Because of this alleged opposition to the Roman government and emperor, you want me to consider him guilty of treason. (John 19:15) Having considered the evidence, therefore, and having examined this man for myself, I find your alleged charges unfounded. I formally declare to you, therefore, that,

*(38c) “I find no guilt in him...” (ESV)*

Since he believed that the Jews were accusing Jesus falsely, Pilate did not want to assume any further responsibility for the Lord, and therefore determined to release him. (Matt. 27:18,24) In verse 39, therefore, the Roman governor says to the Jewish leaders:

### John 18:39

Having just declared that he could find no basis in law for a charge against Jesus, Pilate was legally obliged to release the Lord unconditionally. (The only occasion whereby he might legally have kept Jesus in custody would have been for Jesus’ own protection (!) Pilate, however, had no desire to detain Jesus further, and sought only the means to release him. (Luke 23:20-23))

Instead of acting justly, and in accordance with the law, however, Pilate attempted to appease the Jewish leaders. In accordance with his usual practice of releasing to the Jews one convicted prisoner at each annual Passover celebration, Pilate attempts to persuade the Jews to accept Jesus. It should be noted, however, that since he was not a convicted prisoner, the Lord Jesus should not have been used in this immoral and unlawful bargaining process. At any event, the Jewish leaders would not entertain this proposal:

**John 18:40**

The Jews knew that Pilate would release only one prisoner for them at the Passover. Determined, therefore, to ensure that Jesus remained in custody, they insisted on the release of a man called Barabbas. Barabbas—a tried and convicted prisoner—had been imprisoned for insurrection or rebellion against the Roman authorities. In addition, he had been found guilty of murder committed during the insurrection. (Mark 15:7; Luke 19:23). Presumably, this man was now awaiting execution. Yet, instead of seeking the release of the holy, spotless Son of God, the Jewish religious leadership demanded the release of Barabbas—an insurrectionist and murderer!

Here was an example—still found today—of professing religious leaders rejecting righteousness and truth, and approving of the very things that God’s Word condemns. Yet, the truths of God’s Word stand unchanging and sure. No matter how much man may attempt to silence or stifle the living Word of the living sovereign God, God’s truth will ultimately prevail—to the glory of his majestic and holy Name! Those who do not teach the Word of God faithfully and according to truth, will one day be judged by the One who spoke that Word.

By their refusal to listen to the prophets of God, and to the OT Scriptures as a whole, the Jews rejected both the Word of God and the God of the Word. The OT Scriptures spoke of their Messiah—but, when he came, they rejected God’s Sent One. (Acts 3:13-15) By their rejection, these same OT Scriptures were being fulfilled before their very eyes, but—because of their hardness of heart—they could not see this truth. They rejected the holy Son of God, thereby bringing about their own spiritual downfall—at least until God’s purposes for the Gentiles had been accomplished.

The Jewish rejection of God’s Son, however, is not final, total or absolute. Even today, a minority of Jews call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, and thus experience eternal salvation through faith in him. Nor has God rejected his people permanently. This is clearly taught in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Yet, because of their crime in rejecting God’s Son, the Jews as a people have suffered spiritual alienation from God for the past 2,000 years. (Rom. 11:1ff)



## John Chapter 19

### Pilate Judges the Son of God

#### **John 19:1-16**

##### **John 19:1**

{Matt. 27:26-30}

Before executing convicted criminals, it was Roman practice to flog the condemned individuals. Often, this would speed up their death by crucifixion. In some instances, however, prisoners would die as a result of the flogging, and before being led out for crucifixion.

In Jesus' case, of course, Pilate had ordered the flogging of an innocent man. The Roman governor apparently hoped that, if he punished Jesus by flogging him, the Jews might then accept his release. (Luke 23:16) Jesus' unjust and unjustified punishment, however, fulfilled the Scriptures. Both the OT prophets and the Lord Jesus himself foretold the sufferings, death and resurrection of God's Messiah. (Isa. 50:6; 53:5; Mark 10:33-34)

Having scourged the Son of God, the soldiers then began to make mockery of the assertion that Jesus was a king:

##### **John 19:2-3**

After they had whipped him, the Roman soldiers cruelly taunted the holy One of God. Weaving together a crown of thorns or briars, they placed it on his head and offered mock homage to the One who rules high over all. Clothing him with a purple robe—the colours of royalty—they fell down before him in mock homage. (Mark 15:19)

Matthew tells us that they placed a reed or staff in his hand, in mockery of the royal sceptre. (Matt. 27:26)

Having adorned him as a king, the soldiers then approached the Lord Jesus. As they drew near to him, they called out with utter contempt and derision, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" Then, they struck his face with their hands. (Matt. 27:29-30)

In all this cruelty and humiliation, the Lord Jesus did not utter a word, nor did he seek to retaliate in any way. Thus was fulfilled the Scripture which said of him:

*(7) He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

*(Isa. 53:7 ESV; see also 1 Pet. 2:22-23)*

##### **John 19:4-5**

Once more, Pilate returns to the waiting Jews to tell them that he cannot find any reason for condemning Jesus to death. Indeed, the Roman procurator considered Jesus innocent—even although the Roman governor had just ordered the Lord Jesus to be flogged!

After this, Pilate brings Jesus back outside the judgment hall to stand before the assembled crowd of Jews. Upon his head, the Lord Jesus still wears the agonisingly painful crown of thorns, and he is still clothed with the remnants of the purple robe. Probably, this robe was the only covering the Lord had for the open sores on his back caused by the Roman scourge. Probably, too, the Lord would feel these wounds even more intensely as the garment continually rubbed against the open stripes on his back. Yet, as the Scripture says:

*(5) But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.*

*(6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*(Isa. 53:5-6 ESV)*

On seeing Jesus again standing before them, the response of the Jewish leadership was immediate:

### John 19:6

The Jews were infuriated when they realised that Pilate was still attempting to release the Lord Jesus. Perhaps even more galling to the religious leaders was to see Jesus clothed with a crown and a purple robe—albeit, in mockery of his kingship. To the Jews, this would remind them forcefully of their assertion that Jesus had claimed to be a king, and therefore the true ruler of the Jewish people. Little did the Jews realise that Jesus' kingship was not political, national and temporal, but spiritual, universal and eternal. (Matt. 21:5; Luke 1:32-33; 22:29; 23:42; John 1:49; Rev. 11:15)

Mercilessly, therefore, the Jewish religious leadership clamoured for Jesus' crucifixion. Those priests who presented sacrifices to God on behalf of a sinful people, now demanded the sacrifice of an innocent Victim—Jesus, the Lamb of God. (John 1:29)

*(6b) ...Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." (ESV)*

Pilate, of course, knew that the Jews could not crucify Jesus. In order to put anyone to death, the Jewish religious leaders required the Roman governor's consent and authorisation. In addition, the Jews carried out the death sentence by stoning—not by crucifixion. (Cf. John 10:31) According to the Scriptures, however—including the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself—he had to die on a cross; i.e., by crucifixion. (John 3:14; 18:31-32)

The Jewish authorities remained adamant:

### John 19:7

The Jews now realised that Pilate was not going to accept the charges originally put forward by them against the Lord Jesus. They had tried to persuade Pilate that Jesus was guilty of inciting the people, of refusing payment of taxes to Caesar, and of claiming kingship in opposition to the Roman Emperor. Pilate, however, had not been convinced by these allegations against the Lord Jesus. In desperation, therefore, the chief priests and their officials resorted to their principal charge against Jesus; viz., that he had claimed to be the Son of God. Thus, they must consider Jesus guilty of blasphemy.

According to OT law, a person found guilty of blasphemy against the Name—i.e., the Name of Yahweh, the LORD God Almighty—was to be put to death. (Lev. 24:16) At the earlier trial before the chief priests, the Jewish religious leaders had already invoked this law against Jesus and had pronounced the death sentence upon him. (Matt. 26:62-66)

Until now, however, the Jews had avoided bringing this charge before Pilate, probably fearing that he would dismiss it as a religious offence and therefore not punishable by death under Roman law.

The Jewish leaders had failed to secure the death sentence on other grounds. Thus, they now reverted to the charge of blasphemy. They did this in a last desperate attempt at securing Jesus' death on this ground. (Cf. John 5:17-18; 8:58-59)

However, the fact that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, greatly alarmed Pilate:

### John 19:8-9

Pilate had already accepted that Jesus was some kind of 'king'—but that his kingship pertained to some other place, and therefore posed no threat to the peace and security of the Roman government or Empire.

Pilate, however, had not considered that Jesus had been speaking of a spiritual kingdom, nor that he had come from the realms of heaven—the very presence of the Almighty God and the Ruler of the Universe. When, therefore, Pilate now heard that Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, this claim must have greatly alarmed the Roman procurator. From his own interrogation of Jesus, Pilate knew that this was no ordinary man. Therefore, he must have suspected that there was some truth in this claim to divinity. However, if this was so, Pilate now found himself in an even more impossible situation as to what to do with Jesus. Somehow or other, he must wash his hands of the One who claimed not only to be a king, but also the Son of the Almighty Sovereign God.

Therefore, verses 8 and 9 tell us:

*(8) When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. (9) He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. (ESV)*

In his desperation, Pilate sought to elicit an answer, but the holy Son of God refused to answer the Roman governor. The one who ruled this Roman province, now found himself standing with considerable apprehension before the One who ruled the entire universe. (Cf. Matt. 27:12-14)

### John 19:10

When Pilate had asked Jesus where he had come from, the Lord Jesus had remained silent. Probably, Pilate took this response as a deliberate snub to his authority as a Roman procurator. Yet, from the Lord's previous answers and from his general demeanour throughout these proceedings, Pilate must have sensed that Jesus himself was a man of authority and great dignity. He must have sensed, too, that Jesus' authority was greater by far than that invested in the Roman procurator by virtue of his office. Endeavouring, therefore, to exert his own authority and to maintain some semblance of control in the midst of a rapidly deteriorating situation, Pilate asks Jesus:

*(10) ..."You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" (ESV)*

### John 19:11

Pilate had suggested to Jesus that he was the appointed representative of the Roman government. As such, he had been empowered by the state to exercise judgment and discretion in matters of law. This included the power or authority either to free an accused prisoner if the charges against them proved unfounded, or to order his crucifixion after

due process of law. (In this case, it would seem that—for expediency—Pilate overlooked the due process of law.)

Pilate *derived* his authority from the Roman Emperor. At any moment, therefore, the Roman Emperor could remove this authority from Pilate by dismissing him from office. Jesus' authority, however, was an *inherent* and *permanent* authority. It belonged to him eternally as of right, and it was possessed wholly by himself and by each Person of the Godhead.

Jesus therefore says to Pilate:

*(11a)...“You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above...” (ESV)*

Pilate had received his authority from the Roman Emperor. The Roman Emperor, however, was not the source of this authority. He was acting as God's vice regent, and in accordance with God's overall purposes. And so was Pilate. God sets up rulers and governors. He grants them power from above to carry out his will among mankind. Nevertheless, God may at any time remove that authority, and depose these rulers—as he sees fit, and in accordance with his purposes. (Jer. 27:5; Dan. 4:17)

Perhaps this was the Lord Jesus was inferring, when he said to Pilate:

*(11a)... “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above...”*

Jesus had just made plain to Pilate that God in heaven was actively controlling all events.

Pilate must now have found himself in an even greater dilemma—realising, as he now did—that God above was working out his purposes through his very actions toward Jesus. The Jews were crying out for his crucifixion. At the same time, however, Pilate realised that God would hold him responsible for his actions in this case.

One day, Pilate would account to God for his evil actions. However, he was a civil ruler, not a religious ruler. As such, Pilate could not be expected to know as much about religious affairs as did the high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin, or Jewish Council. The high priest, Caiaphas, should have known better. However, he deliberately called for Jesus' condemnation and crucifixion. (Matt. 27:1-2)

Therefore, says Jesus to Pilate:

*(11b)...“Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” (ESV; cf. Mark 14:44-46).*

This remark greatly alarmed the Roman governor. Therefore, in verse 12, John writes:

### **John 19:12**

Pilate did not want to become involved in the evil plots of the chief priests and members of the Sanhedrin. If they and Judas had been guilty of great sin in handing Jesus over to Pilate, he did not wish to be embroiled in that sin.

The Jews, however, remained adamant. Realising that Pilate wanted to release Jesus, they attempted to blackmail him. Twisting Jesus' words, the Jews asserted that Jesus had claimed to be a king. If, therefore, Pilate released Jesus from such a treasonable indictment, it could only be assumed that the Roman procurator was turning a blind eye to treason, if not actively encouraging it. (Luke 23:1-3; John 18:33-37)

Therefore, in verse 13, John writes:



**John 19:13-14a**

Pilate could see no way out of his dilemma. If he did not do what the Jews demanded, they would report him to Caesar. Therefore, taking his seat once more on the judgment bench, he brought Jesus before them. John observes that all this took place on the Preparation of Passover: i.e., the Friday of Passover Week.

**John 19:14b-15**

Clearly, Pilate did not believe that Jesus was claiming earthly kingship in opposition to Caesar. However, the Roman governor must have considered Jesus to be a king in some other sense—possibly, a spiritual or religious sense. Little did Pilate know that the One who now stood bound in his presence was no-one less than the King of kings and Lord of the universe.

*(14b)...“ He [Pilate] said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” (ESV)*

However, the Jews would not have this man to reign over them.

*(15a)...They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!”... (ESV)*

Enraged that Pilate should think of Jesus as their king, the chief priests shout out for the Roman procurator to dispose of Jesus. ‘Kill him! Crucify him! We do not want this man, and we do not recognise any of his claims. He has opposed Caesar. He has blasphemed God. Take him away and crucify him!’

*(15b) ...Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” (ESV)*

The Jews detested Caesar—but they would rather be ruled by a militaristic Roman emperor (*Tiberius*) than by the holy Son of God.

Unable, therefore, to gain Jesus’ release, Pilate gives in to their demands. He hands the Lord Jesus over to be crucified, little knowing that—by doing so—he is fulfilling the sovereign plan and purposes of Almighty God. Nevertheless, this does not excuse either Pilate or the Jewish authorities for their wicked actions in murdering God’s Son. (John 18:31-32; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28)

**John 19:16**

(Cf. Mark 15:15-20)

Jesus, of course, allowed himself to be led away by sinful men, in order to fulfil the will and purposes of his Father in heaven.

**Jesus Crucified****John 19:17-27****John 19:17-18**

After securing a heavy wooden crossbeam to Jesus’ shoulders, the Roman soldiers led him away to the place of crucifixion. Here, the Lord Jesus endures the punishment due to us. Very soon now, the holy, sinless, spotless Lamb of God will bear upon himself the full responsibility for his people’s sin.

The Roman soldiers led Jesus to the place of the Skull (Aramaic, *Golgotha*; Latin, *Calvary*). There, on that hillside, the soldiers crucified Jesus. Driving large iron nails into his

hands and feet, they secured his body to the wooden cross. Then, raising the cross upright, they plunged its base into the ground. The physical agony endured by the Lord Jesus at this point does not bear thinking about.

The Roman soldiers crucified two other men alongside Jesus. Unlike the holy Son of God, however, these men were being executed justly for crimes of which they had been guilty. Thus, the Lord Jesus was being numbered with the transgressors—in exact fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy concerning him. (Isa. 53:9,12)

Initially, both criminals mocked the sinless Son of God, calling upon him to save himself and them. Later, however, one of these men repented of his sin and sought Jesus’ forgiveness. Even in his dying hour, this malefactor found forgiveness of sin and peace with God. Even at this last moment of his life, this repentant criminal found himself transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Instead of spending a lost eternity in the torments of hell, the Lord Jesus promised this repentant sinner immediate entry into paradise—and into the very presence of the Lord himself. Thus, we learn that, by God’s grace, it need never be too late for even the vilest of offenders to repent and seek God’s mercy. (Luke 23:39-43)

In verse 19, John returns to Pilate to tell us of his reactions at this point:

### **John 19:19**

Roman custom dictated that a notice be placed above a condemned criminal indicating the nature of his crimes, and therefore the reason for his execution. However, as Pilate himself had declared repeatedly, Jesus had never been found guilty of any crime. Instead, therefore, of placing an accusation above the Lord Jesus, Pilate chose to declare Jesus as *the King of the Jews*.

The Roman procurator knew that this declaration would enrage the Jews. In his eyes, however, they had demanded the death of an innocent man, and the now disgusted Pilate was in no mood to worry about offending the Jewish religious leadership.

Pilate had failed to secure Jesus’ release—even although it had been in his power to disregard Jewish demands and set him free. Now, however, the Roman procurator would not fail to declare what he had come to believe about Jesus. In some sense or another, Jesus was a king. That is what Pilate had come to accept, and that is what he declared about him on the cross when he wrote:

*(19b) ... Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. (ESV)*

*[Lat. abbreviation: INRI]*

### **John 19:20**

Many Jewish pilgrims had come to Jerusalem at this time to celebrate the annual Feast of Passover. Arriving, as they did, from various parts of the Roman Empire and beyond, these pilgrims spoke a variety of different languages and dialects. In addition to their local languages, however, many of these Jewish worshippers would be familiar with Aramaic or Greek. Ambassadorial, and many other officials and scholars from the Roman provinces would be familiar with Latin. When, therefore, these visiting pilgrims and foreigners read the notice above Jesus, they understood fully what Pilate had written—much to the displeasure of the Jewish religious authorities.

Therefore, in verse 21, John writes:

**John 19:21**

The Jewish leaders resented the implication that Jesus was their king in any sense whatever. Moreover, they objected vehemently to Pilate about the inscription that he had placed so prominently above the cross. Possibly, the Jews also feared Caesar's reaction. If the Roman Emperor were to learn that the Jews considered Jesus to be their king, then Caesar would immediately suspect that the Jews had been plotting to overthrow the Roman government.

Bitterly resenting therefore the implied kingship of Christ over them, and fearing repercussions from the Romans, the Jewish leaders called on Pilate to alter the wording of the placard (cf. John 11:48). The Roman procurator, however, was in no mood to debate with the Jews over words. Therefore, in verse 22, John records:

**John 19:22**

'You have had your say concerning this man. Now, I will have mine. I do not intend to alter the wording on this placard merely to suit your capricious whims and fancies.'

John now tells us about the events of the crucifixion itself:

**John 19:23-24**

{Cf. v.24 with Psalm 22:18}

Even in these grasping and materialistic events, God was fulfilling the words that he spoke through the OT prophets. The Roman soldiers could not have been aware of the significance of their actions, but—centuries before—the psalmist had predicted this very event. Once more, God was fulfilling his word in every detail.

John now turns his attention to those few close followers of Jesus who stood beneath the cross. In verse 25, the apostle writes:

**John 19:25**

Mary the wife of Clopas<sup>54</sup> is not mentioned anywhere else in the NT.

Mary Magdalene (or Mary of Magdala) was the person from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. Subsequently, she had become a follower of the Lord Jesus. Mary Magdalene was also one of those women who supported Jesus out of her own means. (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2-3) Apart from this, and her appearances at the cross and at the tomb, we know nothing else about Mary Magdalene.

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<sup>54</sup> *Clopas* or *Cleophas*: possibly, an alternative rendering of, or pronunciation for, *Alpheus* or *Alphaeus*. (Cf. Gill)

We should note also, that—apart from the apostle John—the only close followers of Jesus who stood with him at the cross were these faithful and courageous women, including, of course, Jesus' mother. As far as can be ascertained, the remaining disciples were still in hiding for fear of arrest by the Jews (cf. Matt. 27:55-56).

In verse 26, John writes:

### **John 19:26-27**

Even during his hours of intense agony on the cross, and while enduring the wrath of God against sin, Jesus found time to think about the needs of others. By this time apparently, Joseph the husband of Mary had died. Jesus therefore commits his widowed mother to the care of the apostle John. At the same time, Mary would become like a mother to John and would be tremendous source of help and encouragement to him in the arduous years that lay ahead.

## **Jesus Completes the Work of Redemption**

### **John 19:28-30**

Jesus' death on the cross was by no stretch of the imagination an unnecessary death. Nor were these events unplanned by God and simply the result of sinful man's malice. The cross was central to God's whole scheme of redemption. Apart from Christ's death on the cross, there could be no once-for-all sacrifice of atonement for sin; no forgiveness for sinners; no reconciliation and peace with God, and no escape from the just torments of eternal punishment.

All these things were made possible through the cross—and *only* through the cross. Christ died as God planned, and every element of his suffering and death was in fulfillment of the Scriptures. Therefore, in verse 28, John writes:

### **John 19:28-29**

Jesus knew that he had fully accomplished his work on earth. During his hours of indescribable agony on the cross, he had endured the terrible wrath of God for the sins of all his people. The Lord carried on himself the punishment due to them from the creation of the world to the end of this present world. On Calvary's cross, Jesus shed the blood that made atonement for sin.

(Three days later, by Jesus' triumphant and glorious resurrection from death, God would demonstrate his acceptance of that sacrifice for sin and for sinners worldwide. Never again would God require a sacrifice of atonement; for that once-for-all sacrifice of the holy, spotless, perfect Lamb of God need not—and cannot—be repeated. It remains effectual forever. (Rom. 3:25-26; Heb. 10:1-14))

Knowing therefore that he had completed his work on earth,

*(28b)...[Jesus] said (to fulfil the Scripture), "I thirst." (ESV)*

Physically exhausted by the excruciating pain, the Son of God asks for a drink. (Once again, of course, Jesus was fulfilling the Scriptures. Cf. Ps. 69:21; 22:15)

Near the three crosses, the soldiers had placed a jar of vine vinegar (or sour wine) in order to quench their thirst. Taking a sponge, someone soaked it in the vinegar, then raised it up to Jesus' lips on the stalk of a hyssop plant. (Mark 15:36)

In verse 30, John writes:

**John 19:30**

Christ satisfied God's righteous justice by dying in the place of sinners. Sinners who have been redeemed and justified through Christ's atoning blood, can never be punished for the offences they have committed, and for which Christ died. That would violate God's justice and righteousness. Sin can be punished only *once*, either by imposing that punishment on the sinner, or on a sinless substitute—but not both. In this case, Christ endured God's punishment as the sinner's Substitute.

Although Jesus must have been mentally and physically exhausted by his experiences on the cross, yet he was not so weakened that he died from physical exhaustion or from any other physical causes. On the contrary, throughout all his sufferings, the Lord Jesus remained fully in control of his own death. He had power to lay down his life. He also had power to take it up again.

The Lord would not lay down his life until the very moment that he had accomplished everything relating to redemption and until he himself was ready to yield up his spirit to God. (John 10:18) That moment had now arrived. Therefore, Jesus declared triumphantly—and with a loud voice—

*"It is finished!" (v.30)*

Only then did he bow his head and voluntarily give up his spirit. (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46)

**The Jews Seek Removal of Bodies****John 19:31-37****John 19:31**

Jesus was crucified on the day most nearly equivalent to our Friday. Friday was the day of preparation for the Sabbath, which began at sunset. On this occasion, however, this was the preparation for a special or high Sabbath, since it fell during Passover week.

Because of the approach of evening, and of this special Sabbath, the Jews wanted Pilate to remove the bodies from the crosses, as they were defiling the land. The Jews therefore asked Pilate to finish off the dying men by breaking their legs. Then, the Romans would be able to remove the bodies from the crosses for disposal. (Deut. 21:22-23)

**John 19:32-34**

The soldiers duly broke the legs of the two condemned criminals. However, when they saw that Jesus was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, they pierced his side with a spear, releasing a flow of blood and water. (Cf. Heb. 9:13-14)

The apostle John now personally testifies to the truth of these events, as he himself witnessed them:

**John 19:35**

John attests to the truthfulness of everything that he has written concerning Jesus. It is a sufficiently complete and wholly accurate record of significant events surrounding the Lord's life, death and resurrection (although the resurrection has yet to be mentioned). (John 21:24-25) John also states that his purpose in writing these things was so that his readers may believe—and consequently become followers of the Lord Jesus Christ themselves.

Still speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John has added his word of testimony to these momentous events. Since they are speaking by God's Spirit, the words of the apostles and evangelists must be considered as the words of God himself. This is God's testimony concerning his Son. It is his word that was being fulfilled, and his solemn testimony that was being verified by these unfolding events.

To show how God's prophetic word—spoken many centuries before—had been fulfilled, John writes in verses 36-37:

### **John 19:36-37**

{Cf. v.36 with Exodus 12:46; Num. 9:12; Psalm 34:20}

{Cf. v.37 with Zech. 12:10}

Once again this demonstrates that the cross was part of God's eternal plan for the redemption of sinners. In addition, it demonstrates that (from eternity) God planned every detail of Christ's life, sufferings, death, resurrection and subsequent glory. Of course, this does not mitigate in any way the evil actions of sinful men in plotting the death of God's Son. However, it shows very clearly that—no matter what sinful mankind may have planned or intended—God's plan and purposes cannot be hindered or thwarted. On the contrary, and in spite of the malice of men, God's plan for his Son—and indeed for all his people—must be fulfilled in every detail.

Such is the power and the nature of the Lord God Most High—the Sovereign Ruler over all creation. To him, and to his will and purposes, all creation must give way. To God alone—and to his Son—be the glory for ever and ever. Amen!

## **Jesus Buried by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus**

### **John 19:38-42**

#### **John 19:38-39**

Here, the Scriptures introduce us to two formerly undeclared disciples of Jesus—Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. Up until this point, these two men had remained secret disciples for fear of the Jews (v.38). Both men belonged to the Jewish ruling Council or Sanhedrin. (Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50-51; John 3:1,10) Now, however, these men decide to make public their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, they are determined to ensure that the one who was wrongly treated in life, will not be wrongly treated in death.

(It was, of course, usual practice for those put to death by crucifixion to be buried in a common criminal's grave. These two disciples would ensure that no such indignity would befall the Lord Jesus in his death.)

Joseph was a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. This is evident from the considerable amount of expensive myrrh and aloes he brought with him. It is also evident from the fact that he was about to make use of his own rock-hewn tomb for the body of the Lord Jesus. (Matt. 27:59-60)

Thus, Joseph boldly approached Pilate to request the Saviour's body. Having ascertained that Jesus was indeed dead, Pilate granted Joseph permission to remove the body. This he did, with the assistance of Nicodemus. Nicodemus, of course, had first approached Jesus by night. Later, in the Sanhedrin, he had spoken up for Jesus and for the cause of justice. (John 7:50-52) Now, however, Nicodemus was openly avowing himself to be a disciple of Jesus.

It is certain that—because of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus' association with Jesus in this manner—the members of the Sanhedrin would expel both of these men from their ranks. They would forfeit their earthly standing with men, however, only to gain a far greater standing with God and with his Son.

Having secured Jesus' body from Pilate, these two disciples now prepare it for burial, using the very costly myrrh and aloes. Thus, in verse 40, John writes:

**John 19:40-42**

Verse 40 tells us that these two disciples prepared Jesus body for burial *according to Jewish burial customs*. Apart from Joseph and Nicodemus' intervention, Jesus would have been buried in a common grave, in accordance with Roman and Gentile burial customs. However, in order to fulfil the Scripture, the Lord God arranged for his Son to be buried with the rich in his death. (Isa. 53:9; Acts 13:29)

Verse 41 tells us that there was a garden near to the place where the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, and in that garden was a new unused tomb. In fact, Matthew tells us that this was Joseph of Arimathea's own burial chamber. (Matt. 27:60) In that tomb, Joseph and Nicodemus laid the body of the Lord Jesus.

Although John does not tell us, the Jewish authorities had requested Pilate to seal the tomb and to place a 24-hour guard on it, lest any of the disciples of Jesus should come by night and remove the body. Pilate did this. A guard was placed on the tomb, after the entrance had been closed with a heavy stone and the stone sealed against intruders. (Matt. 27:62-66)

We should perhaps observe that the guard or watch were not merely temple police officers. At this time especially, all the temple police officers would be required to be at the temple itself. Rather, the reference is to a corps or detachment of Roman soldiers which had been made available to the Jewish authorities, although remaining under Roman command. Thus, the guard at the tomb was a Roman military guard, scheduled to operate in watches by day and by night until formally and specifically relieved of this duty.

Jesus had been laid in the tomb on the day of Preparation for the Sabbath: i.e., Friday evening, before sunset. He remained there throughout the following day (the Sabbath)—his body still guarded by these Roman soldiers.





## John Chapter 20

### The Empty Tomb

#### **John 20:1-9**

John then takes up the narrative again on the third day after the Lord's crucifixion. In chapter 20, verse 1, the apostle writes:

#### **John 20:1**

Ever faithful to their beloved Lord, the woman who stood by the cross noted where the body of their Saviour had been laid. One of these women was Mary Magdalene. Even before the early morning sun had begun to rise in the sky, Mary and some others made their way to the tomb.

The women must have wondered how they would manage to remove the very heavy stone, which rested securely across the tomb entrance. However, upon arriving at the tomb, Mary Magdalene and the other women discover that this large stone had been removed already—and the intrepid Roman guard had inexplicably fled the scene! (Cf. Matt. 28:1-8)

Mary stooped to look into the tomb, only to discover that the body of the Lord Jesus was no longer there. In great haste, she and the others rushed back to tell the disconsolate disciples what had happened.

Thus, in verse 2, John records:

#### **John 20:2**

From this verse, it is evident that others accompanied Mary Magdalene when she first went to the tomb. Now, they report the situation to the apostles, Peter and John, provoking an immediate response. Thus, in verses 3-5, John continues:

#### **John 20:3-5**

Amazed at the news, the two apostles raced to the tomb. John arrived first. Looking inside, he saw only the linen burial strips lying there.

The apostle continues in verses 6-8:

#### **John 20:6-8**

Now, the two disciples realised that Mary Magdalene and the other women had been telling the truth. Jesus was no longer in the tomb. The guards had gone; the seal had been broken; the great stone had been rolled away, and the body was no longer there. However, what had become of Jesus' body? Who had removed it from the tomb? At this stage, the disciples did not realise that Jesus had risen from the dead—as verse 9 makes clear:

### **John 20:9**

The disciples were thoroughly perplexed over the disappearance of Jesus' body, but they saw no point in remaining at the empty tomb. If they did, perhaps the Roman guard would return and arrest them as accomplices of Jesus.

## **Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

### ***John 20:10-18***

Mary Magdalene, however, remained steadfastly beside her Master's grave. Thus, in verses 10-12, the Word of God says:

### **John 20:10-12**

Disappointed and deeply perplexed, the disciples had returned to their homes. They saw no further reason for believing that they would ever meet their Lord and Master again, or that any of his words could now be fulfilled. Unbelief led to despondency, and almost brought them to despair.

Mary, however, must have faithfully cherished—and believed—the words of her Master while he was alive. She could not understand what had happened to him, but she was determined not to leave the spot where she last saw her beloved Lord. Perhaps because of Mary's humility, faith, and undying love, the Lord God chose to send his angelic messengers to this dear follower of Jesus. (Cf. Mark 16:5-11; Luke 24:1-8) Now, she gazed in awe and amazement upon these two holy angels of God:

### **John 20:13-14**

Firstly, God greatly blesses Mary by sending to her one of his holy messengers or angels—those whom the Lord has sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. Then, God blesses Mary exceedingly by permitting her to be the first person to see the risen Lord Jesus. At this stage, however—perhaps because of her tears of grief—she fails to recognise her Lord. (Cf. Luke 24:15-16,30-31)

### **John 20:15**

Clearly, Mary believes she is addressing the gardener or caretaker. In her grief, it is probable that she would not be looking directly at him—and therefore she failed to recognise who was speaking to her.

### **John 20:16**

Now, Mary recognises the risen Son of God. Now, she sees her Lord in his resurrection body. Now, she knows that he is risen from the dead—just as he said he would.

What a great blessing it must have been for this dear saint of God to see her risen Lord. Such was the reward of her faith and love—to receive so great an honour and privilege to be the first to witness God's risen Son.

Surely Mary's faith, and faithfulness, encourages us to believe that the Lord will fulfil every promise that he has uttered—regardless of present circumstances, or of the apparent impossibility of such fulfilment. When all hope had gone, Mary continued to hope in God—and God duly rewarded her faith far beyond her expectations. Let us, then, remain faith-

ful—as Mary did—believing that the Lord will not fail to accomplish his plan or his purposes for us.

Returning to the joyous scene at the empty tomb, John writes in verse 17:

**John 20:17**

Thrilled beyond belief to see her beloved Master alive again, Mary wanted to hold on to him, and to remain in his holy presence. The risen Lord Jesus, however, had other work for Mary to do. There would be time enough to see him again, before he ascended to his Father in glory.

Meanwhile, however, Mary was to go to Jesus' disciples—his 'brothers'—with the joyful news that he had indeed risen from the dead. She was also to tell them that the Lord would be returning shortly to the glory of his Father—both to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God.

Faithful as ever, Mary obeyed her Master's instructions. As verse 18 tells us:

**John 20:18**

(Cf. Luke 24:22-23)

Overjoyed to have met the risen Saviour, Mary rushes back to find the disciples again. What a ministry, privilege and responsibility is afforded to this dear saint that she should be the one to announce to the apostles the fact that the Lord had risen! Then, when she had told them this wonderful news, she began to relate what the risen Lord Jesus had said to her.

But did these men act on Mary's astounding news, and rush out to meet the risen Redeemer? No, they did not. Rather—and because of their fear of the Jews—they remained securely ensconced behind their locked doors.

***Jesus Appears to His Disciples******John 20:19-23*****John 20:19-20**

As the day lengthened toward evening, the disciples were still considering what Mary Magdalene and the other women had said to them about seeing the risen Lord Jesus. Possibly, at this time too, the disciples would be discussing their plans for the future, assuming the women had been mistaken about seeing the Lord Jesus alive again.

Fearing imminent arrest by the Jewish religious authorities, the disciples had locked securely the door of the room in which they had assembled. However, as they continued to discuss and debate these matters, the Lord Jesus appeared among them—in bodily form. Clearly, however, Jesus' resurrection body had changed in some significant way. Now, it was quite capable of passing through solid objects, such as walls or locked doors.

Naturally, this sudden and unexpected appearance of the Lord in their midst must have astonished and alarmed these already frightened disciples. Thus, Jesus immediately says:

(19c)...*"Peace be with you."* (ESV)

'Be at peace. It is I. Do not be afraid, for I am truly with you.'

Jesus realised that his astonished disciples would think that they were seeing a spirit. Therefore, the Lord showed them his hands and his side—still bearing the marks of the nails and the spear. No spirit, of course, bore physical marks. Therefore, these disciples knew that this really was the risen Lord Jesus—and they “...*were glad when they saw the Lord.*” (v.20b) (Luke 24:36-49)

### John 20:21

Once again, the Lord Jesus bestows his eternal and heavenly peace upon his followers. (Cf. John 14:27-29) Then the Lord authorises his apostles to carry out the task of reaching mankind with the message of the Gospel:

(21b) “...*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*” (ESV)

The Father had sent his Son into the world to accomplish his work and to secure redemption for all his people. Now, the Son was sending his apostles into the world to accomplish his work, and to proclaim the message of redemption among all people. (Cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-16)

### John 20:22

For this great task, the disciples needed to be specially empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus, therefore, bestowed upon them the necessary power. (John 16:7-14) This recalls the time when God breathed into Adam the breath of life. In symbolic fashion, the Lord Jesus was imparting a special measure of the Holy Spirit to these apostles—the Spirit, of course, being the source and giver of new life in Christ Jesus.

This empowerment by the Holy Spirit would take place at Pentecost. Then, the apostle would be equipped fully to preach and teach in the name of the Lord Jesus, to bring the message of salvation and eternal life to the people, and to bear witness to the power and glory of God by performing many miraculous signs in the Lord’s name.

Included in the Gospel message, proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, was the assurance of forgiveness of sins to all who believed. Thus, in verse 23, Jesus adds:

### John 20:23

The risen Lord Jesus had just authorised and empowered his apostles to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. (Full Holy Spirit power was yet to be bestowed upon them at Pentecost.) Implicit in the preaching of the Gospel is the assurance of the forgiveness of sins to all who believe.

The apostles themselves did not possess any power or authority to forgive sins. Nor did any of the original apostles ever claim such a prerogative. However, like any duly appointed servant of God, these disciples were authorised to assure repentant individuals that their sins were forgiven—*by God.* (Acts 2:38-39; 3:19; 10:43; 16:31)

Likewise, the apostles were authorised to proclaim to unrepentant and unbelieving mankind that God had not forgiven their sins. This, of course, meant that all such wilfully impenitent sinners remained under God’s wrath and condemnation, and would one day face God in final judgment. (John 3:18,36; Acts 13:38-40; 17:30-31)

(We must remember, of course, that no written copies of the New Testament Scriptures existed at this time. Until these Scriptures became available, the believers were dependent on the OT Scriptures and on the verbal teaching of the Lord Jesus and his apostles. In any event, only a relatively small number of people were able to read. Those who could not read for themselves depended on the apostles and other servants of God to read or

preach the message to them, and then to explain the meaning of God's Word. This is one of the reasons why it fell to the apostles to pronounce the forgiveness of sins—or the non-forgiveness—to those who heard God's Word.)

## Jesus Seen by Thomas

### **John 20:24-31**

#### **John 20:24-25**

Not being present in the locked room when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples, Thomas failed to see the risen Lord, or to hear his comforting words to his perplexed and amazed disciples, *"Peace be with you!"*

Thomas was still greatly troubled to think that he would never see his Lord again, or share in all the things about which he had spoken so often, and which must have stirred his very soul. Now, however, Thomas had returned to the house where the disciples were staying only to be met with these amazing words from their lips:

*(25a)... "We have seen the Lord."... (ESV)*

Thomas, of course, would have none of this. He had seen where the Lord had died and where he had been buried. (As yet, he did not understand that Jesus had to rise again on the third day.) Thomas, therefore, believed sincerely that Jesus was dead and buried. Probably, he believed that the disciples had seen some kind of apparition, which they had mistaken for Jesus.

*'You may believe that you have seen the Lord Jesus, but I will not believe it unless I see in his body the physical marks of his crucifixion. Then, and then only, will I be convinced that you were not imagining things, or that you saw a spirit which you mistakenly believed to be the Lord Jesus.'*

In verses 26-27, John continues:

#### **John 20:26-27**

After eight days, the disciples were again in the house. This time, however, Thomas was present with them. Still fearing the wrath of the Jewish religious leaders, the disciples had locked the doors. While they were thus met together, the Lord Jesus appeared in their midst.

*"Peace be with you",* he declared—to reassure them with words they had heard so often from him in the past. Then, turning to the astonished apostle Thomas, Jesus invited him to examine the marks of the wounds on his resurrected physical body. Thomas may have gazed in amazement at the marks in his Lord's hands and side, but he did not touch them. Now that he saw, he believed. Therefore, in verse 28, John writes:

#### **John 20:28**

*(28) Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" (ESV)*

This profound expression reveals both Thomas' faith, and his belief in the deity of the Lord Jesus. Now, Thomas believed in Jesus with all his heart and soul. Now he believed that everything that the Lord Jesus had said was true, and was even now being fulfilled. Now, Thomas believed the truth that Jesus was not only the promised Messiah, the Son of God, but also that he was very God himself. The Son of God, equal in power, glory and eternity with the Father. (Cf. John 5:23; 9:38)

Had Thomas been mistaken in using the expression, “*My Lord and my God*”, the Lord Jesus would never have allowed the remark to pass unchallenged or uncorrected. The fact that Jesus accepted this expression of faith and divine worship from Thomas is proof positive that Thomas was absolutely correct in using this expression. (Cf. Isa. 9:6; Matt. 14:33; Rev. 5:12-14)

The argument sometimes advanced that Thomas was merely expressing surprise or amazement at seeing his resurrected Lord, or that he was using the Lord’s name profanely, is not worthy of formal refutation. Jesus accepted Thomas’ expression for what it was: a confession of faith in the resurrected Son of God, and a declaration of faith in his deity, coupled with an act of divine worship.

In verse 29, John continues:

### **John 20:29**

Thomas doubted the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. He doubted the testimony—and therefore the truthfulness—of the Lord’s disciples when they told him that they had seen the Lord. Thomas was not prepared to accept the testimony of competent, trustworthy and reliable witnesses. He had to see Jesus for himself before he would believe.

There is nothing wrong with being cautious about what we are prepared to believe. Indeed, it is essential that we examine the evidence. The Christian faith is not blind faith, nor is it based on unsubstantiated events. It is based on historical facts. It is based on the testimony of an unfailing and infallible God. (Heb. 11:1) Thomas, however, refused to believe the substantiated fact of Christ’s resurrection. This was wilful unbelief. Possibly, this was the reason Jesus said to him, “...*Do not disbelieve, but believe.*” (v.27c).

By failing to believe at first, Thomas missed the great blessing that the other disciples experienced when they met their risen Lord and Master. Thomas’ belief had been conditional: he had to see Jesus with his own eyes to be convinced of his resurrection. Jesus, however, makes it plain that those who believe unconditionally—on the basis of reliable evidence or testimony—are greatly blessed. So it is in everyday Christian experience. Those who live by faith experience far richer blessings than those who live by sight.

The apostle John concludes chapter 20 with the following remarks:

### **John 20:30-31**

John now discloses his purpose in writing this account of the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The evidence presented in these pages is presented with the purpose of bringing his readers to faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. All those who are convinced by the evidence of God’s Word, who embrace the truth, and who commit themselves wholeheartedly to the One of whom it speaks, receive life through his name (cf. John 21:25).

The next chapter of this Gospel—chapter 21—concludes the Gospel according to John. In this chapter, the apostle focuses once more on further compelling evidence to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He also speaks of Peter’s restoration to the service of his Lord and Master.

## John Chapter 21

### ***Jesus Appears at the Sea of Galilee***

#### ***John 21:1-14***

In verses 1 to 3 of chapter 21, John writes:

#### **John 21:1-3**

Peter and six other disciples had met together at the Sea of Tiberias (or Sea of Galilee). When Peter decided to launch out in a boat to fish on the lake, the six other disciples volunteered to go with him. Perhaps, after his involvement in the events leading up to Jesus' trial and crucifixion, and before the arrival of Pentecost, Peter needed a diversion. Yes, the apostle had rejoiced to see his Lord and Master risen again from the dead. However, Peter must still have been painfully aware that he had previously denied and disowned his Lord. What good now could he be to Jesus? Perhaps a night's fishing on the lake would help him to think things through.

The seven disciples laboured all night, trawling various parts of the lake for fish. By early dawn, however, they had caught nothing.

In verse 4, John continues:

#### **John 21:4-6**

Although Peter, James and John were very experienced fishermen, they had failed to catch anything all night. As he stood on the shore observing them, however, the Lord Jesus knew exactly where the disciples would find a shoal of fish. Thus, as the boat continued to head closer to shore, the Lord called out to them. He directed the disciples to cast their net to the right or starboard side of the vessel. This time, the catch of large fish was so great that the net could scarcely withstand the strain.

Where Jesus directs, is where we achieve greatest success.

Up to this point, the disciples had not realised that the person who spoke to them from the shore was the Lord Jesus. Their hearing may have been slightly impaired by the wind and by the distance from shore of about 100 yards or so. Possibly, also, Jesus was not immediately recognisable in the poor light of the early dawn.

However, in verse 7, John writes:

#### **John 21:7**

Realising that the stranger on the shore must have possessed some remarkable insight or remarkable powers, the disciples endeavoured to see just who was addressing them. At this point, John—one of the sons of Zebedee—recognised the Lord Jesus and cried out. Overhearing his cry, Peter immediately threw on his outer garment, jumped into the water, and made his way toward his Lord and Master.

It may seem strange that Peter threw on his outer clothes before jumping into the water, as this would have impaired his movements. Nevertheless, we must assume that the

apostle did not wish to appear in the Lord's presence without being appropriately clothed. Furthermore, being relatively close to the shore, it would have been possible for Peter to have waded ashore for some of the distance.

In verses 8 and 9, John records:

### **John 21:8-9**

When they had all arrived at the shore, the disciples discovered that the Lord had already prepared a charcoal fire, and was cooking some fish on it. Clearly, the Lord is able to obtain provisions without human intervention, and he could have provided more than enough for his hungry disciples by multiplying the bread and fish that he had with him. However, on this occasion, the Lord intended to make use of some of the fish just caught by the disciples.

Therefore, in verse 10, John writes:

### **John 21:10**

Here, the Lord is pleased to make use of that which his own people have harvested from the sea—by his providence. The Lord makes use of, and blesses abundantly, that for which we have laboured in obedience to his commands.

In verse 11, John continues:

### **John 21:11**

A further demonstration that when we are labouring in the place appointed for us by the Lord, the Lord will achieve unfailingly his intended results.

When, however, we strive by the arm of flesh alone (i.e., by our own efforts, without reference to the Lord's will or purposes) we cannot expect to experience the blessing or the abundance of the Lord. Peter and the other six disciples had discovered this truth earlier. Even although they were experienced fishermen, and although they had laboured tirelessly all night, they had failed to achieve their aim. Only when they responded to the command (or will) of the Lord Jesus did they achieve real success in their endeavours.

In verses 12 to 14, John writes:

### **John 21:12-14**

Once more, Jesus demonstrated the reality of his bodily resurrection. On this occasion, seven of the Lord's disciples witnessed the Son of God. They saw him standing on the shore. They heard him speaking to them. They shared with him in eating the breakfast meal that he had prepared on the charcoal fire.

Clearly, these events were no figment of the disciple's imagination, nor did they see a spirit when they looked upon the Lord Jesus. Only the Lord in resurrected bodily form could have performed these acts. Thus again, for the third time, the apostles of the Lord Jesus were presented with visible and incontrovertible evidence to his physical resurrection.



## ***Peter Restored***

### ***John 21:15-25***

The apostle John now comes to another of the main reasons that Jesus had met with these disciples at the Sea of Galilee: namely, to re-instate Peter to the service of his Lord and Master after the apostle's previous sin and denial of Christ.

Therefore, in verse 15, John writes:

#### **John 21:15**

Now, Jesus begins to deal with Peter on a personal level. Peter had rejoiced to see his Lord and Master risen again from the dead. However, the personal presence of the Lord Jesus must have reminded him very vividly and painfully of the time when—during the Lord's trial—this disciple had disowned Jesus vehemently and publicly. Jesus, however, is about to demonstrate to Peter that he is ready, able and willing to forgive and restore those who truly repent after stumbling into sin.

Jesus, of course, knew that—in his heart—Peter had indeed repented of his sin. Therefore, now, the Lord is about to restore Peter to his place of apostleship. Firstly, however, the Lord intends to challenge the depth of Peter's love for him and the extent of his commitment to him and to his cause. Therefore, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him more than these.

This question may be understood in different ways; namely, did Peter love his Lord and Master:

- a) more than he loved the other disciples; or,
- b) more than the other disciples loved the Lord Jesus; or,
- c) more than he loved his work on the sea and as a fisherman.

In whatever way the question should be understood, the Lord was testing Peter's heart to discover where his true love and loyalty lay. Again, in whatever way Peter understood the question, his reply shows that his first love was for his Lord and Master.

On receiving an affirmative reply, the Lord says to Peter,

*"Feed my lambs."*

'Take care of the flock of God. Feed them on the Word of God. Especially concern yourself with the lambs of the flock: those who are babes in Christ; those who are young in years; those in need of tender care and compassion—the weak, the sick, the needy, the afflicted.'

In the verses that follow, Jesus repeats these words to Peter in slightly different form. Thus, in verses 16 to 17, John records:

#### **John 21:16-17**

Clearly, this thrice-repeated question which Jesus put to Simon Peter reflects the three occasions when this disciple denied his Lord and Master in the high priest's courtyard. On these occasions, Peter had hurt Jesus deeply. Now, in order to challenge, restore and prepare him for future service, the Lord Jesus needed to probe Peter's heart—hurting him deeply in the process.

Yet, it was not the Lord's intention merely to wound Peter, but to wound him in order to cleanse him and heal him. Once before, Peter had denied all knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. Now, however, Jesus is giving Peter an express command to feed his sheep: i.e., to take care of the church of God. Taking care of God's church involves instructing the people of God in all the ways of the Lord, and in holiness of life; and it involves guarding the church of God against the inroads of false teaching and erroneous doctrine. (Cf. Acts 20:28-31)

To care for, and build up the church, and to defend it from error from within and without, would require great spiritual strength and wisdom—abilities that came as gifts of God. Peter, therefore, must learn to rely—not on himself—but on the strength and power that God would supply. (1 Pet. 4:11)

If Peter were to fail to feed God's church, or to preserve it from error, he would in effect be denying his Lord and Master. Therefore, the Lord needed to set Peter's feet on the solid Rock foundation—which is Christ himself. So long as Peter rested in, and depended on Christ as his rock-solid foundation, then the Lord would be able to use him mightily to feed and guard his church. (Eph. 2:20) The apostle Peter, however, would not do this alone. He would act only in conjunction with the other apostles—once they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In verses 18 and 19 Jesus continues his address to Peter:

### **John 21:18-19**

During his lifetime, Peter would serve God fearlessly and boldly. Ultimately, however, the faithful apostle would meet a violent death. The early church fathers believed that this passage referred to Peter's death by crucifixion; and ancient tradition says that the apostle was crucified upside down. According to Origen, Peter did not consider himself worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Master, and therefore requested that he be crucified head downward. These events, however, are not recorded in the pages of Holy Scripture. (Cf. 2 Pet. 1:14-15)

At the end of these remarks, Jesus said to Peter, *Follow me.* (v.19)

'No matter what you are called upon to endure for the sake of my name, follow me—i.e., keep on following me.'

The Lord Jesus had commanded Peter to take care of his church. Now, he is encouraging him to pursue that responsibility in the teeth of all opposition. Peter—and the other apostles—must keep on feeding and guarding the church of God, regardless of the ultimate cost to themselves.

As has been intimated earlier, these remarks to Peter do not in any way imply that he alone was the principal leader in the early church, or that the Lord Jesus was investing him with any office or authority above that of the other apostles. The New Testament itself refutes that view. For example, in Galatians, it is evident that the principal leaders in the early church included not only Peter, but also James and John. (Gal. 2:9) Unlike Peter, however, John had not denied Christ explicitly and publicly. In the passage before us, Peter required a special word of encouragement from the Lord Jesus. Jesus needed to deal with this apostle's former sin. He needed to challenge and restore him, so that he could be of use for his Master in the future.

Then, in verses 20 and 21, John writes:

**John 21:20-21**

The Lord Jesus had just commanded Peter to feed his sheep: i.e., take care of his church. In addition, the Lord had given Peter a brief insight into the nature of his God-glorifying death. Peter, however, was curious to know what Jesus had in store for his fellow-disciple, John. Therefore, Peter asks, "*Lord, what about this man?*" (v.21)

**John 21:22**

Jesus had hinted to Peter something of what lay ahead of him; i.e., at the end of his life. However, it was not for Peter to enquire into what would happen in the lives of his fellow disciples. Even if the Lord Jesus had intended John to remain alive until he returned in glory, this would have been of no concern to Peter. Peter's responsibility was to obey and follow his Master.

As can be seen from the verses that follow, the Lord's remarks to Peter led to a misunderstanding about the apostle John—a misunderstanding that John himself corrects:

**John 21:23**

The disciples misunderstood Jesus' words because they misinterpreted what he said. We, too, must be very careful to hear God's Word aright. If we take a single remark in isolation, we can arrive at an incorrect conclusion about something in God's Word.

John completes his Gospel account with these words:

**John 21:24-25**

(Cf. John 20:30-31)

What John has recorded in this Gospel is merely an abridgement or summary of all that Jesus did and taught. To contain everything that Jesus said and did would require numerous volumes. However, John has included in his Gospel everything necessary for setting forth the Lord Jesus in his glory, and everything essential to lead men and women to repentance and faith in him.

This Gospel reveals the eternal Word. It tells of the one who is the Word of life; and who alone provides abundant and eternal life. It is the word that sets forth Christ as the Light of the world and the Light of life. Let us, therefore, take this word of life, and teach it in all its power and glory to the church of God. Let us teach it also to all those who are seeking to know the one who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

Great beyond measure is the redemption that God has provided in Christ Jesus for repentant sinners. Let us proclaim this message of redemption in the full power and person of the Holy Spirit. He alone convicts of sin and draws men and women, boys and girls, to repentance and faith in the Son of God. He alone regenerates the soul, sanctifies every believer in Christ, and seals them unto God for all the ages of eternity.

Praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—both now, and throughout all the ages of eternity. Amen.



